

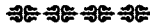
Team Traps

***Survival Stories and Lessons from
Team Disasters, Near-Misses, Mishaps,
and Other Near-Death Experiences***

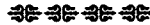


STEVEN R. RAYNER

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Survival Stories and Lessons
from Team Disasters, Near-Misses,
Mishaps, and Other
Near-Death Experiences



Steven R. Rayner

JOHN WILEY & SONS, INC.

New York • Chichester • Brisbane • Toronto • Singapore

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Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Rayner, Steven R.

Team traps : survival stories and lessons from team disasters, near-misses, mishaps, and other near-death experiences / Steven R. Rayner.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-471-13285-3 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. Work groups. I. Title.

HD66.R3923 1996

658.4'02—dc20

95-49752

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Team Traps

For Colleen

Preface



When I began my consulting work in the early 1980s, only a few organizations were experimenting with what we commonly called, in those days, “participative management.” Though few in number, the pioneers of that era were already demonstrating the superiority of team-based workplaces. Side-by-side comparisons in the manufacture of everything from pet food to computer chips pointed to the same conclusion: Participative, team-based organizations were more productive, more adaptive, and less costly; they produced better quality and developed employees who were more loyal and committed than their traditionally managed counterparts.

Today, virtually every major corporation has a team experiment underway. The same is true among government, nonprofit, and academic institutions. And no longer are these innovative work practices concentrated in manufacturing settings. Financial companies, dealerships, sales organizations, software houses, marketing groups, and engineering firms are all jumping on the team bandwagon with the zeal of revolutionaries. It is now universally accepted that the high-performing organizations of the coming century will be those that most effectively unleash the intellectual, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities of their only appreciable asset—their people.

Organizational Quicksand

To create a high-performing team, leaders must be prepared for a long and difficult journey. This is particularly true in our

current generation where virtually every corporation, agency, and institution remains dominated by traditional management. Leaders face the double challenge of overcoming systems, roles, and processes that work against team development and are deeply embedded in the work culture of the very organization they are trying to transform, and, simultaneously, attempting to address the interpersonal, conflict, and group dynamic complexities inherent in forming teams. The route is difficult—as every step is taken, there is the potential for the effort to disappear into a sinkhole or for the team to become trapped in organizational quicksand. For team leaders and team members alike, many hard lessons have to be learned.

The Hard Lessons the Easy Way

Some managers and consultants argue that hard lessons can only be learned the hard way; they say the pains of personal experience are the only teacher. This viewpoint is really more a rationalization than a philosophy. It is as silly as thinking that we can only become aware of the potential dangers of fire after we have been burned by an open flame. All it takes to learn the hard lessons the easy way is a willingness to study and learn from the experiences of others.

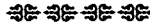
Team Traps has been written to help team leaders and team members learn hard lessons the easy way. The chapters are filled with examples of the common traps that hurt team effectiveness, as told by those who saw the traps firsthand. Although I have used pseudonyms to mask the identities of the people and companies involved, have changed physical locations, and, admittedly, have taken some literary license to help amplify key points, each case study that is presented in Chapters 3 through

It is based on an actual event that was experienced by members of a real team. By studying and learning from their experiences, clear strategies and tactics will emerge that can help us toward avoidance of the common pitfalls that have proved destructive to so many teams.

STEVEN R. RAYNER

Freeland, Washington

Acknowledgments



The concept for *Team Traps* came from Jim Childs, publisher for the professional and trade division of John Wiley & Sons, Inc. I owe Jim much thanks for coming up with such a great book idea and then entrusting it to me to create. It is fair to say that, without Jim, *Team Traps* would have never been written.

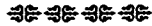
The many insights I have gained through my conversations with Geoff Peppiatt and Ronan Knox have undoubtedly found their way into this book. Geoff and Ronan are both friends and professional colleagues. I truly feel privileged to have had the opportunity to work closely with them over the past several years, and I look forward to many more.

To Joseph Whittinghill, I owe deep thanks. He kept our firm running during the many days I was madly typing away at my keyboard. His commitment to the vision we are pursuing at Rayner & Associates is an inspiration to us all.

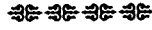
I would like to thank my parents, George and Ruby Rayner, whose stories from their work experiences were of much interest and whose warm words of encouragement were greatly appreciated.

The long hours required to write a book invariably begin to take their toll on personal obligations. To my wife, Colleen Keefe, I owe a great debt for supporting my efforts with understanding and patience. Colleen, to whom this book is dedicated, shared insights from her experiences as a manager and as a team member, took on doubled parenting for our three sons, Aidan, Dylan, and Riley, during the late nights and weekends when I was writing, and gave me encouragement when I needed it most.

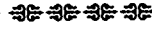
Contents



Part I: Warning Signs	1
1 The End of Camelot	3
2 Teaming with Traps	13
Part II: Trapped!	21
3 The Invisible Manager	23
4 Team Myopia	39
5 Politically Incorrect	49
6 Decision Paralysis	65
7 Brain Wars	81
8 Transition Blues	89
9 Hesitating the Team Away	101
10 A Box of Trouble	117
11 Tyrannosaurus Team	125
Part III: The Escape	139
12 The Team Puzzle	141
13 The Team Disciplines	147
Appendixes	165
A A Quick Reference Guide to the Team Traps	167
B Survey of the Thirteen Disciplines	177
About the Author	185
Index	187

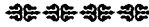


Part I



Warning Signs

Chapter 1



The End of Camelot

In the autumn of 1988, Tektronix held the first public conference ever sponsored by a major corporation on the topic of employee involvement. Of particular interest to the over 500 participants attending the three-day session was the extraordinary story of the Tektronix portable oscilloscope division. The division, after sustaining a brutal attack from overseas competition in the early 1980s, had fought back, regaining market share and profitability. In a two-year period, the division went from being the company's number-one loser (last among Tektronix's 29 divisions, with a \$23 million loss on \$170 million in sales) to a rating as its premier group. The secret to success, according to Fred Hanson, the division's vice president at that time, was remarkably simple: Get your people involved.

And people were involved. An operator on the manufacturing line in the portables division could stop production if he or she

discovered a quality problem. Line workers could redesign the entire process flow if it would lead to improved performance; they regularly took telephone calls directly from customers; and they provided performance feedback to peers. In new product development efforts, cross-functional teams—with representatives from engineering, manufacturing, marketing, finance, and human resources—were formed. The time frame for product development was immediately reduced from four years to two. With more “wild experimentation”—a strongly encouraged trait of the team-based work culture—design teams soon had new products rolling out in less than 18 months.

Many onlookers were astounded by the success the portables division had achieved and were anxious to replicate it. The Vancouver, Washington, facility became overrun with tours, serving as a source of inspiration for a number of senior managers from companies such as Martin Marietta, Allied Signal, Texas Instruments, TRW, and Fisher Controls.

The Decline and Downfall

Today, the portables division no longer exists due to a massive consolidation effort. Nearly all of the senior managers who were part of the turnaround have long since left Tektronix. Even the Vancouver facility is gone—operated, ironically, by a Tektronix competitor.

The experience of the portables division is by no means unique. Digital Equipment Corporation's (DEC) Enfield, Connecticut, plant, once referred to as the “Mecca of new organization design,” was shut down during a consolidation effort. The plant was one of the most publicized and well-documented examples of a team-based work system in action—a book and countless articles had described its innovative management

approach. When the shutdown was announced, DEC received over 1,000 letters, from people all over the United States who had either toured or read about the facility, requesting that the plant be kept open.

Martin Marietta's Space Launch Systems group, which, in a mere 18 months, documented a savings of more than \$10 million through its employee involvement efforts, saw its attempts to transform the organization begin to stumble when layoffs were announced.

The list could go on and on. There are any number of examples of highly effective organizations (with well-documented performance results that spanned years) that no longer exist. What happened? How could a large organization, once so effective, collapse so quickly and so completely?

The Team Advantage?

Critics are quick to cite these examples as illustrative of how team-based work systems simply don't work. Advocates of this perspective see the need for a return to the essential features of traditional management—direct management control over work processes, decision making, and problem solving; narrowly defined work roles; thick policy and procedure manuals to manage by; clear boundaries between departments; and a rigid chain of command. This dying perspective holds on to the view that if we control better, we manage better.

The problem with this argument is that it ignores what has been achieved by countless organizations that have embraced team-based work systems. Those close to the Tektronix effort agree that the emphasis on a team-based work culture was the key component in its extraordinary turnaround. Quality at DEC's Enfield plant was so good that no traditionally structured

organization has ever been able to replicate it. Martin Marietta's Space Launch Systems group documented cost savings far beyond what had ever been achieved using "old style" management. Procter & Gamble (P&G), Goodyear, Kodak, IBM, ABB, and Monsanto are but a few additional examples of companies that have seen the dramatic impact of the new management perspective. The conclusions of recent studies by the Department of Labor and the Center for Effective Organizations have empirically confirmed what organizations in both the public and private sectors have been claiming for over a decade—empowered work teams produce superior results.

The question is not whether teams can work—they can and usually do when systematically put in place with strong management support, adequate resources, clear focus, and sufficient training and development. Yet, a variety of factors can conspire to assassinate even the most carefully planned and effectively implemented team efforts.

Despite the many team failures that have occurred over the past decade, there have been few attempts to examine the details of what happened. How can a team that has demonstrated extraordinary performance for years suddenly dissolve? What are the common pitfalls and traps that can lead a team to extinction?

Camelot Revisited

The most interesting organizations to examine are those that have had some of the most spectacular successes and most dramatic crashes. Their stories touch us in much the same way as does the story of King Arthur. We marvel at the remarkable creation of Camelot, but its decline and downfall

ignite our fascination. By the story's end, we can clearly see how a few key events transformed Camelot from a utopian kingdom to a vacant wasteland.

The corporate Camelots—like Tektronix, DEC, and Martin Marietta—all have a number of common characteristics:

- There had been widespread effort to create high-performing teams throughout an entire division or an entire plant.
- Each company had invested a tremendous amount in employee training and development.
- Information, including data that had previously been considered “management confidential,” was openly shared with all employees.
- The teams were actively involved in redesigning work flow and processes to improve productivity, quality, and cost performance.
- Employee morale was very high.
- The teams that were in place had been highly successful, demonstrating levels of performance that had been unattainable—arguably, even unimaginable—under traditional management practices.
- Despite considerable long-term success and a strong team-based work culture, the team philosophy ended abruptly, in just a few months.

The Megatraps

Each of these organizations was the victim of a megatrap. A megatrap is a problem that ultimately swallows up teaming efforts in entire plants or divisions—or even entire companies. Once trapped, the struggling organization sees its effectiveness