Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. It’s the fuel that allows common people to obtain uncommon results.

~ Andrew Carnegie
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

A huge thanks to the five star team of
THE FOUR SEASONS RESTAURANT – NYC.
Without your encouragement, support, and example,
this book would never have been conceived.
May you enjoy peace and profitability
for another forty years.

DEDICATION

To our colleague and friend
STEPHANIE GLIDDEN
who has devoted her life's work to producing
products that help organizations create cultures
in which all may thrive and realize their
personal and professional potential.
It’s a commonly used term in the language of business. It’s essential for successfully competing in an ever-changing global marketplace. It’s necessary in order to combat the tide of shrinking resources and meet the need of doing more with less. It’s a strategy ... a tool ... a buzzword.

The “it” is TEAMWORK. And it also happens to be one of the most misunderstood concepts in business today.

Look around – the labels are everywhere. There are service teams, management teams, task forces, quality-assurance teams, self-directed work teams, product-development teams, launch teams, departmental teams, and even teamwork-enhancing teams. The list is seemingly endless.

So, with teams being that prevalent, how is it that “teamwork” is so misunderstood? Why is it that so many teams fail to reach their true potential? Primarily because of the all-too-common belief that forming a group – and giving them a title – equates to creating a team. But that’s a misconception. As the old song title says, It Ain’t Necessarily So!
The fact is that while all teams are groups, not all groups are teams. What separates the two is interdependence. A group becomes a true team only when its members support and enhance each other’s performance and contributions ... when they collaborate to achieve results that are bigger and better than those that could be realized individually. Simply put, it’s what people DO that makes them a team – not the mere fact that they’ve been assembled.

Effective teams understand that teamwork is a behavioral issue. Team members recognize that their success is inextricably linked with one another, and they act accordingly. And so must you!

But there are effective teams and then there are “FIVE STAR” teams – the best of the best. What separates them? The answer is

**commitment.**

More precisely, it's five commitments. And they are what this book is all about.

Whether you’re a team leader looking to improve your group’s performance or a team member wanting to enhance your contributions and personal success, pay attention to the pages that follow. You'll find a collection of ideas, strategies, tips, and techniques you can apply to help make your team the best it can be.

So read on. Learn how to practice

**FIVE STAR TEAMWORK**

and you will achieve success ... together!
1. Be Committed to ... EACH OTHER .......... 9

2. Be Committed to ... THE MISSION .......... 15

3. Be Committed to ... THE CUSTOMER .......... 21

4. Be Committed to ... RESOLVING CONFLICTS .......... 27

5. Be Committed to ... THE DETAILS .......... 33

WHAT KIND OF "TEAM PLAYER" AM I?
(A Self-Assessment) .......... 38

MY PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO ACTION .......... 40

CLOSING THOUGHTS .......... 41
In May of 1953, two men became the first in history to climb to the top of Mt. Everest – the world’s tallest mountain. The two were Edmund Hillary, a New Zealand beekeeper and explorer, and his Sherpa guide from Nepal, Tenzing Norgay. They reached the summit together and enjoyed instant international fame.

As they were ascending the 29,000-foot peak, Hillary slipped and started to fall – rapidly sliding downward on a broken chunk of ice. He would almost certainly have fallen to his death, but Tenzing Norgay immediately dug in his ice axe and braced the rope that linked them together, saving Hillary’s life.

As the story goes …

When the international press heard of the incident, they made a huge fuss over the Sherpa guide’s heroic action. Through it all, Norgay remained calm, professional, and unfazed by the attention that was coming his way.

To all the questions shouted by the press, he had one simple response:

“Mountain climbers always help each other.”

~ The Speaker’s Idea File
We are not put on this earth for ourselves, but are placed here for each other. If you are always there for others, then in time of need, someone will be there for you.

~ Jeff Warner
Take a moment to reflect on your vision of a successful team. Perhaps it’s a group you’ve been a part of yourself. It might be one you’ve seen or read about in the news – like a sports franchise, a specialized military unit, or a team of healthcare professionals performing a complex medical procedure. Or maybe it’s just your idea of what an “ideal” team would (and should) look like. Whatever it is, lock that image in your mind.

Now, look deeper at the image. How do the members of that team behave? How do they interact with each other? What kinds of things do they say? What do they believe? It’s a safe bet you’ve envisioned a group of people that cares about each other, helps each other, and covers for one another. There’s no “me first … we’re all in this alone … every man for himself” thinking in your vision, right? Of course not! The members of your role-model team are more likely to say (and believe) things like, “you can count on me,” “I’ve got your back,” and “we’re all in this, together.” And that’s no surprise. Undoubtedly, your group exhibits the first – and arguably most important – characteristic of five star teamwork: a commitment to EACH OTHER.

Respect, Interdependency, and Reciprocity

The mutual commitment of five star teams is driven by three primary factors – the first of which is respect. Team members value and appreciate the inherent worth of each person in the group. While all members may not contribute equally, each is considered equally important. And each is afforded the basic dignity that he or she deserves as a human being. In five star teams, understanding and acceptance is paramount – there’s no room for derogatory humor, insults, backstabbing, or other us vs. them behaviors which are not only disrespectful but also counterproductive.

The second factor that drives commitment to each other is interdependency. Members of five star teams grasp the reality that their personal success is linked to one another’s … that they achieve only when the entire team does. As a result, they are truly motivated to contribute to each other’s
success. They back up and support their teammates. They “pinch hit” for coworkers who are under the weather or otherwise unable to give one hundred percent. They build mutual trust through open and honest communication. They cooperate willingly. And they work hard at avoiding things like turf battles, rivalries, and favoritism – all of which do nothing but hamper their ability to get the job done. No one has to remind them that they need each other – they know it. More importantly, they show it!

Finally, the third factor driving mutual commitment has to do with the law of reciprocity. Members of five star teams are keenly aware that “what goes around, comes around.” They know that in order to get things like assistance, support, courtesy, caring, honesty, and the benefit of the doubt, they must be willing to give them as well. And give them they do!

**Self-reflection Time**

Look for the characteristics that differentiate five star teams from the “the rest of the pack,” and you’ll find committed to each other at the top of the list. But is it at the top of YOUR list?

Since self-reflection is good for the soul (not to mention the team), each of us periodically needs to think about, and answer, the following questions:

1. How committed am I to ALL of the other members of my team and/or work unit?

2. What specifically have I done recently to demonstrate that commitment and earn the trust of my teammates?

3. What can/will I do in the next several months to exhibit an even stronger commitment to my teammates?

Need help answering that third question? We’ve provided several ideas and suggestions on the pages that follow.
Make an effort to know your coworkers “as people.” Learn about their special skills, their professional experiences, their families, and their interests away from work. Set a goal to find something you have in common with each teammate – then use those commonalities to encourage communication and enhance your personal relationships.

And, if you’re a member of a “virtual team,” make a special effort to keep in contact. Schedule regular “touch point” phone calls and occasional face-to-face meetings to stay connected with teammates. Use technology (e-mail, voice mail, etc.) to keep relationships flourishing – regardless of any geographical separation.

Look for opportunities to contribute to others’ success. If you see a teammate who is struggling and falling behind, pitch in … lend a hand. Share your talents and your time to help others learn, grow, and get through tough situations.

Be considerate of others. Remember that the workplace is a shared environment. Build a reputation for being a thoughtful, considerate teammate by doing things like: cleaning up after yourself, sharing (rather than monopolizing) equipment and resources, and respecting others’ time by not interrupting them – and not expecting them to serve your every need “on the spot.”

Keep your promises and agreements. If you tell a coworker you’ll do something – whether “important” or seemingly insignificant – remember it … and DO IT! Making sure that your teammates can always count on you is one of the best ways to show that you’re committed to them and worthy of their trust.
Embrace diversity. Work on accepting and appreciating teammates who are “different” – especially those of other races, cultures, creeds, and national origins. Fact is, diversity is a significant business advantage. Teams that are true “melting pots” have a greater ability to meet the needs of a diverse marketplace. That increases their success potential ... and yours as well!

Provide recognition. How often do you reinforce the efforts and achievements of your teammates with a kind word? If not all that often, why not? Whenever one member of the team performs well or makes a contribution, everyone benefits in some way. So make an effort to catch people doing good work and say things like, “Great job ... way to go ... thank you.” Nothing enhances team cohesion more than mutual appreciation.

Carry your share of the load. Being committed to each other means that everyone can be counted on to meet his or her responsibilities. Fail to do your part and others have to pick up the slack. That’s unfair to them. And it’s an obstacle to the group’s collective success. Certainly, all team members will have days when they’re not at their best ... when fellow teammates must jump in for them. Just make sure that, for you, those days are the exception rather than the rule.

For managers and team leaders ...

Set the example. Model the behaviors you expect from the members of your team. Show people – through your actions – what it means to be committed to each other. And once you’ve set the example, encourage them to follow your lead. Show them, teach team, coach them, and hold them accountable for meeting your expectations.
mis • sion  n

1. A special assignment given to a person or group; work that you are obliged to perform for moral or legal reasons; “The duties of the job.”

2. Activity directed toward making or doing something.

3. An inner calling to pursue an activity or perform a service; someone’s chosen, designated, or assumed purpose in life or vocation.

★ For More “How To” Tips and Techniques on: Being Committed to Each Other, click here.
Cooperation gets teams pulling together. Staying focused on the organization’s mission ensures they pull in the right direction.

~ Eric Harvey~
Humans – and the organizations they comprise – have an inherent need for purpose, meaning, and direction. In order to achieve success, we all need targets to shoot at, roadmaps to follow, guidelines to keep us on track, and end states to pursue. That's why one of the things common to just about every organization/team is the existence of “a mission” – a business purpose that typically encapsulates what the group is there to do ... and for whom they do it. Everyone is expected to know, follow, and contribute to the mission. And most employees of most organizations do just that.

But for members of five star teams, the mission is more than something merely to abide by, it's the embodiment of their personal values – it's something to believe in ... something to live by. In the words of a very savvy team member: "If you don't believe in what you're doing, you need to be working someplace else. If you do believe in what you're doing, you ought to be giving it everything you've got!"

That said, there are two questions which must be answered by everyone wishing to achieve greater professional success: 1.) “How well do I know and understand the mission of my organization?” and 2) “How committed to our mission am I?”

---

**OUR MISSION**

Write your organization's/team's mission in the space below. Then, take a moment to honestly assess how important that mission is to you personally.
It Takes Teamwork

If you examine the mission you described on the previous page, one thing should be very apparent: no single person can accomplish it alone. Making an organizational mission “happen” is, by its very nature, a team activity – one requiring focus, dedication, and a high degree of collaboration. Different (yet supportive) functions must be performed, in unison, by team members who each bring something special “to the table.”

Perhaps the single best example of this occurred over thirty years ago. The month was April, 1970. The setting was Houston, Texas (and outer space). The team was NASA. The event: Apollo 13. If you’re familiar with the story, you know that had not the members of the ground crew worked together to overcome the many challenges that came their way, history would have recorded a much different ending. But these were people who were totally committed to the mission of returning three men safely to earth. Their commitment is embodied in the now famous words of flight director, Gene Krantz: “Failure is not an option.” And their results speak for themselves.

Everything Counts

When it comes to following through on your overall business purpose, there are no breaks … no rest periods … no time outs. Each action – by each team member, each day – either supports the mission or it doesn’t. And for five star teams, not supporting the mission is unacceptable; failure is not an option.

Here’s a final mission-related question to ponder: “Could someone who knows nothing about my organization correctly guess what our mission is merely by observing MY daily actions and behaviors?”

If you’re looking to be a five star team member, your answer must be YES!

~ 17 ~
**Start each day with the mission.** Write your organization's (and/or team's) mission on a small, pocket-sized index card. Pull out the card and read it at the beginning of each workday to remind yourself of why you're there and what your activities need to be geared toward.

**Pursue “in a way that” solutions.** When determining how you will approach tasks and decisions, ask yourself: “How can I do this in a way that supports our mission and my teammates?” Make that caveat a regularly used component of your action-planning vocabulary.

**Know your job – inside and out.** Take the initiative for learning everything you can about your organization, the products and services you provide, and your specific function within the business. Keep up with the laws and regulations that pertain to what you do. Stay familiar with all of the brochures, announcements, advertisements, etc., that your business issues. The more you know about your job, the more you'll be able to contribute to the organization's goals.

**When you see something that needs to be done, DO IT – even if it doesn't fall within your direct responsibility.** Fact is, making sure the mission “happens” is everyone's responsibility!

**If you see a teammate doing something that is out of sync with organizational expectations, have the courage to speak up.** Tactfully challenge him or her, and offer your assistance in finding (and implementing) an alternate approach. Most importantly, make sure your coworkers know that you expect them to do the same thing with you!
Learn from one of the best. Think of someone you believe is truly in sync with your team’s mission. What makes you think that? What is it that he or she does that leads you to that conclusion? Make a list of those specific behaviors – and do your best to replicate them.

Celebrate success. Recognize teammates who help bring your mission to life. Suggest occasional social gatherings for the sole purpose of basking in the glory of your combined achievements. And don’t forget to pat yourself on the back as well. Contributing to goal attainment is something that everyone should feel good about … something that’s always worth celebrating.

For managers and team leaders …

Build employee awareness. Make sure that each member of the team not only knows what the mission is, but also how his or her job specifically links with it … and contributes to it.

Keep the mission “in front of folks.” By doing things like posting it on walls, discussing it at team meetings and training sessions, and including it in internal correspondence, you’ll ensure that your business purpose continues to be your main focal point.

Make your mission a core component of all decision-making and work-planning processes. Before taking any significant action, examine its probable impact on your organization’s purpose and goals. If what you’re planning to do doesn’t support the mission – either directly or indirectly – DO SOMETHING ELSE!
A guest checking out of the Polynesian Village Resort at Walt Disney World was asked how she enjoyed her visit. She told the front desk clerk that she had a wonderful vacation, but was heartbroken about losing several rolls of exposed film. She was particularly upset over the loss of the pictures she had taken at Disney’s Polynesian Luau – as this was a memory she especially treasured.

Now understand, The Walt Disney Company has no service standards covering lost Luau snapshots. But the hostess at the front desk understood and embraced Disney’s philosophy of caring for their guests. So, she asked the woman to leave her a couple of rolls of fresh film – promising that she would take care of the rest.

Two weeks later the guest received a package at her home. In it were photographs of the entire cast of the Luau show, personally autographed by each performer. There were also shots of the Magic Kingdom parade and fireworks – all taken by the hostess on her own time, after work.

Writing Disney management, the guest stated: “Never in my life have I received such compassionate service from any business establishment.”

The lesson here is clear: Magic service moments don’t come from rule books or policy manuals. They come from team members who care and are totally committed to their customers.

⭐ For More “How To” Tips and Techniques on: Being Committed to the Mission, click here.

~ 20 ~
There is only one boss – the customer. And he can fire everybody in the company, from the chairman on down, simply by spending his money somewhere else.

~ Sam Walton
In the previous chapter, we focused on the importance of being committed to your organization’s (and team’s) mission. We asked you to describe – in writing – what that mission is. Look back at what you wrote. Examine the words. In all likelihood, your mission entails providing high-quality goods or services to other people. The “other people” are, of course, your customers. And your mission undoubtedly reflects a truism that applies to employees of all businesses – regardless of the organization’s type, size, location, or industry: *Serving customers is the reason your business exists.*

From our perspective, that’s pretty much a “no-brainer.” For members of five star teams, it’s a mantra! They understand that their entire professional world revolves around customers ... that being committed to their jobs and being committed to customers are one and the same. And they never allow themselves to forget these important workplace realities:

- **Everyone, and every team, has customers.**
  Those customers are either “external” (the ones who pay the bills) or “internal” (other departments and coworkers who help “make it all happen”).

- **If you don’t serve your customers well, they’ll eventually take their business elsewhere.**

- **If your customers go away, eventually so will your job!**

### The Customer is King

For five star teams, satisfying their customers is *everything!* It’s why they exist. They live it ... they breathe it. They’re grateful for the opportunity to serve – realizing that their customers *choose* to do business with them. They believe that each customer deserves the very best in exchange for his or her hard-earned money. And they know that in order to deliver the very best, they must work together.
For five star teams, serving is a never-ending process. "That's good enough" is not an accepted phrase. There's always one more thing they can do to heighten customer satisfaction. That's why, with very few exceptions, the response to every customer’s request is a resounding YES! And should a customer utter a complaint, or merely appear to be less than satisfied, team members quickly swing into action – doing whatever it takes to remedy the situation and put a smile on that person’s face.

There's an old saying in the service business: “The customer is always right!” For five star teams, that's not just a timeworn phrase – it's a guiding principle. No matter the situation, regardless of the issue, the team's job is to make sure the customer always FEELS that he or she is right. Certainly, there will be occasions when a patron's request (or demand) is either unreasonable or just plain impossible to satisfy. But even in those cases, there's always something that can be done to ensure the customer comes out a winner. As one top-notch server put it, “Customers have an absolute right to be right. It's their money!”

A Collective Effort

Demonstrating a true commitment to customers is a collective effort – involving individual actions which are supported and enhanced by the other members of the team. Obviously, it is imperative that each employee adopts and displays superior service behaviors. But rarely can one person ensure customer satisfaction without help. To deliver five star service, your need five star teamwork! Regardless of whether team members are on “the front line” or behind the scenes, all must work together to give each customer the best service experience possible.

Toward that end, we’ve provided a collection of proven service tips and techniques on the next two pages. Read and use them, yourself. Encourage your coworkers to follow them as well. And support each other in bringing your commitment to customers to life.

~ 23 ~
Be Committed to THE CUSTOMER
“How To” Tips and Techniques

★ Give one hundred percent of your attention to the customer you’re serving at any given moment. Do paperwork, organizing, and other job duties on your time rather than the customer’s. Never, ever make anyone wait for anything without offering an explanation, an apology, and an alternative to waiting.

★ Never tell a customer that you can’t do something unless you immediately follow with a description of what you CAN do for them! Customer service is about DOING – not explaining or rationalizing what you’re not doing.

★ Use the customer’s name and encourage him or her to use yours. That makes the service interaction more personal and relationship oriented. Most people prefer doing business with people they “know” rather than with those they perceive as strangers.

★ Think “happiness plus one.” Whenever you get to the point where you really feel a customer is happy, look for one more thing to do for him or her. It can be something you give, something you send, something you say, or whatever. It doesn’t have to be big. Even little extras can turn a happy customer into a delighted one.

★ If you make a mistake when dealing with a customer, admit it, apologize for it, fix it, and learn from it. Customers really don’t expect you to be perfect. They do, however, expect you to be honest and make a great recovery. And once that recovery is made, it’s important to take a moment to think about what the experience taught you ... and how you’ll apply that lesson in the future.
Use your experience. Think about the very best experience you've had as a customer. What made it so good? Now, think about your worst experience. What made it so bad? Try to replicate those positive characteristics and eliminate the negative ones in your dealings with customers.

LEAP into handling customer complaints:

LISTEN – focus on understanding their concerns.

EMPATHIZE – imagine yourself in their shoes.

ACKNOWLEDGE – tell them you understand.

PAMPER – go the extra mile to make it right.

Find out how you're doing. For a quick yet informative customer service survey, ask these three questions:

1. “What are we doing well that we should keep on doing?”
2. “What are we not doing well that we should stop doing?”
3. “What should we start doing that we aren't doing now?”

For managers and team leaders …

Make sure that all of your customer-contact employees know how much discretion they have (ability to discount or “comp” services, goods, etc.) when addressing customer complaints and problems. Encourage them to do whatever it takes – within reasonable limits – to make the customer happy … without having to come to you for permission first.

Adopt the mindset that coworkers are your customers, too. Give them the same respect and attention that you want them to give to their customers. Remember that satisfied employees tend to produce satisfied customers.
A “CRASH COURSE” IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The 10 most important words:
“I have a concern I need to share with you.”

The 9 most important words:
“Let’s not look for blame ... let’s look for resolution.”

The 8 most important words:
“Please tell me what you’re feeling right now.”

The 7 most important words:
“How can we resolve this issue together?”

The 6 most important words:
“What can I do to help?”

The 5 most important words:
“Help me understand your concerns.”

The 4 most important words:
“What do you think?”

The 3 most important words:
“I hear you.”

The 2 most important words:
“Thank you.”

The MOST important word:
“We.”

⭐ For More “How To” Tips and Techniques on: Being Committed to the Customer, click here.

~ 26 ~
Be Committed to ...

RESOLVING CONFLICTS

*It takes two to quarrel, but only one to end it.*

~ Spanish Proverb~
Take any group of employees, put them in a high-pressure environment requiring constant interaction, and there are bound to be problems. After all, employees are human ... they're emotional by nature. They get tired. They get cranky. They have ideas (not to mention personalities) that sometimes clash. So, it's inevitable that they will occasionally do things that rub each other the wrong way.

Think five star teams are exempt from this phenomenon? Well, they aren't. Actually, they're more susceptible to it than most! Why? Primarily because of their high standards and unwavering commitment. You see, the higher “the bar” – and more intense the zeal – the greater the potential for friction.

Passionate, action-oriented people are more likely to step on proverbial toes. As a result, five star team members experience their share of tension. Ironically, however, the same combination of passion and commitment that produces occasional spats is also what provides the motivation to address issues quickly and collaboratively.

Obstacles, Results, and Relationships

Conflicts between coworkers are counterproductive to effective teamwork. They are self-inflicted obstacles that hamper a group's ability to achieve maximum results and enjoy satisfying workplace relationships.

Knowing that, members of five star teams make a special effort to confront and resolve any interpersonal conflicts that arise. Their work is too important to let petty squabbles get in the way for very long. On top of that, they spend a great deal of time together – often more than they spend with their families and friends. Making that time as productive and enjoyable as possible truly is in everyone’s best interest.
What Sets Them Apart

Are five star team members always successful at quickly resolving conflict? Of course not! They're human like everyone else. Occasionally problems fester ... sometimes people need to blow off steam. Top-notch teams, however, just seem to work harder at working together ... at doing their very best to remember and live by these key guiding principles:

✔ Everyone is responsible for minimizing obstacles to overall team performance – especially those involving interpersonal conflicts.

✔ Respect, honesty, and trust must be the cornerstones of our daily interactions.

✔ Everyone must feel safe expressing his or her opinions, concerns, and suggestions to others on the team.

✔ Constructive, two-way communication is critical to our success. Listening and understanding are VITAL.

✔ Each team member must understand his or her own role – and the roles of the other team members. Expectations and priorities must be clearly communicated and supported by everyone.

✔ Apologies must be offered and accepted without hesitation.

Any group wishing to improve their overall effectiveness would do well to operate by these same guidelines. You see, when it comes to interpersonal issues, the hallmark of a five star team is not the absence of conflict. Rather, it's the genuine effort to minimize the potential for problems – and effectively resolve those issues that do arise.
Go to the source. People can’t fix problems they don’t know about. So, whenever you have an issue with someone on the team, talk to him or her about it. Avoid whining or complaining to others. The issue is between the two of you – so keep it that way. Talking about others behind their backs is a petty and negative behavior that degrades them and you … and accomplishes nothing beyond that!

If you have an issue with a teammate, attack the problem, not the person. Focus on the specific behaviors that are disturbing, not the personality or attitude of the “offender.” When addressing the problem, summarize what happened and then describe how it affected you. Close by asking for the person’s help and in resolving the issue.

Don’t get caught up in the “blame game.” Arguing over who is at fault is typically a losing battle and gigantic waste of time. Conflicts are not debates to win; they’re problems that must be solved together. Keep your focus on what’s right rather than who’s right!

Be open to others’ concerns. If a teammate has a problem with something you’ve done, give him or her your full attention. Listen attentively. Focus on understanding his or her position rather than defending your own. Appreciate the fact that it took a certain amount of courage to approach you. Apologize for any discomfort you caused. Commit to doing your best to avoid similar problems in the future. And finally, thank the person for bringing the issue to your attention. Isn’t that how you want people to respond when you approach them?
Don’t take it personally. Expect tension during high-stress periods. Make a special effort to cut teammates some slack when “the heat is on.” There’s a good chance that negative behaviors that seem to be directed at you are merely emotional reactions to pressure.

Deal with issues early. Address conflicts as soon as you become aware of them. Don’t wait for “a better time.” In all probability, there won’t be a better time. Unresolved issues rarely fix themselves. There’s a greater chance they’ll snowball and produce resentment. When that happens, everyone loses!

Unless they have proven otherwise, believe that your teammates are committed to your organization’s mission and therefore are motivated by good intentions. Don’t assume the worst of them. You don’t wake up in the morning asking, “How can I make life miserable for someone today?” – and neither do your coworkers!

For managers and team leaders ...

Be a stress-relieving sounding board for team members who need to unload. Let them come to you and vent. Often times, just having “a shoulder to cry on” is all that’s needed to relieve pressure and get people back on track. Just make sure it doesn’t become an everyday occurrence.

If someone complains to you about a teammate, encourage him or her to talk with the other person first. Offer suggestions on how to conduct the conversation. Schedule a follow-up meeting to see how things went. If the other person failed to cooperate, intervene. Bring both team members together and work with them to get the issue resolved.

~ 31 ~
Michelangelo was putting what appeared to be the finishing touches on a beautiful sculpture when a friend came in to pay him a visit.

Days later, the friend came by again and was surprised to find the artist still working on the same piece.

The statue looked the same to the friend as it had days earlier. Nothing appeared different ... no progress was apparent. The friend was confused by this, so he inquired: “You haven’t been working on this statue all this time, have you?”

“I have,” Michelangelo replied. “I've been busy retouching this part and polishing that one there; I've softened this feature and brought out that muscle; I've given more expression to the lips, and more strength and energy to that arm.”

“But all those things are so insignificant,” said the friend in a critical tone. “They're nothing more than trifles.”

“That may be so,” said Michelangelo, “but trifles are what make perfection ... and perfection is no trifle.”

~ The Speaker's Idea File

For More “How To” Tips and Techniques on:
Being Committed to Resolving Conflicts, click here.
Management Leadership, click here.

~ 32 ~
Be Committed to ...

THE DETAILS

Show me a person who cannot bother to do little things, and I'll show you someone who cannot be trusted to do big things.

~ Lawrence D. Bell
(adaptation)
Truth be told, most jobs have some repetitive and mundane aspects – for individuals and for the teams they comprise. While some teams are created for special, short-term purposes (new product launches, new system installations, etc.), most exist to handle the daily, routine tasks necessary to accomplish the organization's mission. And missions don't change all that often. What we do is what we do. We did it yesterday, we do it today, and we'll do it tomorrow. Sure, we try to make improvements ... we strive to do our jobs better and faster, but the nature of our work tends to remain the same. For average teams, that can pose a significant motivation challenge over time. Repetitive tasks can be boring – if you allow them to be. But five star teams rarely make such allowances. They have different mindsets. For them, routine work is not a problem – it's their mission ... their opportunity to shine.

The Devil's in the Details

Five star team members take great pride in what they do. These are people for whom excellence is required down to the smallest detail. They understand that everything is important – nothing is too insignificant. They know, for example, that ...

... an exquisitely prepared and served meal can be ruined by something as small as a dirty piece of silverware or a miscalculated bill; or ...

... a perfectly built product that's exactly what a customer wants can lose its value if the salesperson is rude or the installer misses the appointment; or ...

... a beautifully designed and printed brochure can be made worthless by a simple misspelling or a logo color that's just one shade off.

As a result, five star teams focus on details. They revel in details. Their motto is simple: DO SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF!
That motto stems from the underlying belief that each customer deserves the very best the team has to offer – no matter if he or she is the first patron of the day or the two hundredth. In order to behave that belief, every member of the team must “be there” (physically and mentally) – every day, every hour, every minute. No one can let up for a second. If just one customer leaves unhappy about even the smallest detail, the entire team loses. And five star teams hate to lose!

The Leadership Imperative

Here’s one you can take to the bank: To a large degree, five star teamwork is the product of five star leadership. Study teams that consistently approach routine tasks with a commitment to excellence, and you’ll undoubtedly find they have leaders who shape positive, supportive working environments. These leaders understand that their pieces of the teamwork puzzle include making sure that:

- everyone feels like an important, appreciated member of the team.
- team members have the tools, resources, and support they need in order to do their very best work.
- everyone understands how he or she specifically contributes to the mission.
- everyone is encouraged to focus on “the details” – and is recognized for doing so.

The Final Analysis

When all is said and done, it’s really how teams deal with daily, routine tasks that determines the success they enjoy and the reputation they create. Demonstrating an unwavering commitment to details is unquestionably one of the very best ways for any group to earn the title FIVE STAR TEAM.

~ 35 ~
Find the unique in the routine. No two situations are ever exactly the same – and neither are activities which are “repetitive” in nature. There’s always some element of uniqueness in everything you do. Different customers come with different needs. Each interaction provides a new opportunity to exceed expectations. So, find those differences and stay focused on them. You’ll minimize the potential for boredom and avoid the temptation to view routine tasks as unpleasant chores.

Adopt “The Concert Approach” to service. When you pay good money for concert tickets, you expect a good show. You don’t care that this may be one of several hundred times the artist is giving the same performance – you expect his or her best work. Keep that in mind for customers who “buy tickets to your concert.”

Speaking of concerts and artists ...

Remember that you’re only as good as your last “gig.” A positive reputation built on scores of great “performances” can be wiped out (or at least struck a serious blow) by one bad performance. Word of mouth travels fast. So, put your best effort into everything you do.

Don’t confuse “cutting corners” with efficiency. Efficiency involves finding ways to provide high-quality goods and services while using less energy, time, or resources. Cutting corners is different – it’s skipping steps, letting details slide, and sacrificing quality and value for the sake of ease (i.e., laziness) … and it typically leads to sloppy work, unsafe habits, and unsatisfactory results over the long haul. Know the difference, and strive for efficiency.
Do postmortems on completed activities. Periodically reflect on routine tasks that you have completed. Ask yourself: “How can I do an even better job next time?” Approaching repetitive tasks with new goals and personal standards can help you take the ol’ out of same ol’!

For managers and team leaders ...

Do right by those who do right. Recognize and reward team members who display commitment to details and provide good, solid performance consistently over time. Avoid the all-too-common trap of only giving recognition to those who go far above the call of duty.

Lend a hand when team members get behind. Seeing “the boss” get involved in routine tasks sends the message that everything the team does is important.

Whenever possible (and practical), cross-train and rotate assignments. Cross-training enhances team member growth and development, provides job-enriching variety, and builds greater awareness of – and appreciation for – each other’s duties and responsibilities.

Share customer feedback. Let the team know what customers think about the service they receive. Make a special point to pass along positive comments. When team members know that what they do matters, they feel better about their work – and they’re more motivated to do even better jobs in the future.

For More “How To” Tips and Techniques on:
Being Committed to the Details, click here.
Leadership Management, click here.
WHAT KIND OF “TEAM PLAYER” AM I?

Respond as honestly as possible to each of the statements below:

YES  NO  
1. I respect and appreciate EVERY member of my team ... and I consistently demonstrate that respect and appreciation through my behaviors.

2. I willingly pitch in – without having to be asked – whenever any of my teammates need assistance.

3. I avoid “slacking off” and can always be counted on to carry my share of the load.

4. I am thoroughly familiar with my organization's/team's mission. I clearly understand how my job links with, and supports, that mission.

5. Our mission aligns perfectly with my personal values and beliefs.

6. I make a habit of ensuring that my actions and decisions are in line with our mission before I implement them.

7. I know who my customers are ... and I sincerely appreciate their business. I'm keenly aware that without customers, I wouldn't have a job.

8. I truly believe that “the customer is always right” ... and I consistently behave that belief.
YES NO

9. I consistently make a special effort to exceed customer expectations and make sure that the people I serve are thoroughly satisfied.

10. When I have problems with my teammates, I express my concerns quickly and tactfully – rather than let them fester.

11. I always respond openly and non-defensively when approached by teammates who have a problem with me. I listen to, and accept, their concerns.

12. I’m always quick to sincerely apologize when I do things that hurt or disturb any of my coworkers.

13. I continually give my best effort to whatever I’m doing – regardless of how routine the activity may be.

14. I consistently pay attention to details and avoid cutting corners just to make things easier. I “sweat the small stuff.”

15. I’m always looking for ways to “do it even better the next time” … and help my teammates do the same.

Once you’ve completed this self-assessment, go back and review all of your responses several times. As you do, think about what you need to start, continue, and stop doing in order to improve your personal effectiveness and enhance the contributions you make to your team and its mission. Then, take a few minutes to complete MY PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO ACTION found on the next page.

~ 39 ~
MY PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO ACTION

Three things I will **START** doing in order to foster five star teamwork and enhance the contributions I make to my team:

1. 
2. 
3. 

Three things I currently do to foster five star teamwork and contribute to my team that I will **CONTINUE** doing (and encourage others to do):

1. 
2. 
3. 

Three things I occasionally do which may be counterproductive to five star teamwork that I will **STOP** doing:

1. 
2. 
3. 

~ 40 ~
If you could miniaturize a five star team and put it under a microscope, there’s a good chance you’d be surprised at what the eyepiece revealed:

ordinary people!

You would see individuals who – just like the rest of us – have hopes and dreams, disappointments and frustrations, joys and sorrows, family and friends, good days and bad, and lives away from the job. But if you increased the magnification and adjusted the focus a little, you’d also see that these “specimens” behave differently than most – they interact with each other in ways that are far from commonplace ... ways that make it possible for ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things and enjoy extraordinary success.

Throughout this handbook, we’ve focused on the importance of being committed – to each other, to the mission, to the customer, to resolving conflicts, and to the details. But when you think about it, it’s really the behaviors resulting from those commitments that are the true essence of five star teamwork – behaviors which can be adopted and replicated by any group or individual. All it takes is focus, effort, and (you guessed it) commitment. And it all begins with YOU!
By this point, you should have completed MY PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO ACTION on page 40. (If not, take the time to do it now.) Flag that page. Visit it often to remind yourself of the behaviors you pinpointed to work on. And most importantly, do whatever it takes to follow through on your action plans. After all …

You owe it to your organization – the one that has entrusted you with its mission and its future. It deserves the best you have to offer.

You owe it to your teammates – the ones who depend on you, and whose success is inextricably linked with yours. They deserve the best you have to offer.

You owe it to your customers – those who have chosen to give you their business. They, too, deserve the best you have to offer.

You owe it to yourself – the one who enjoys the pride, satisfaction, and success that comes from contributing to your team. YOU deserve the best you have to offer.

Finally, remember this: In order to feel like a vital member of the team, you must BE a vital member of the team. Do your part to make five star teamwork a reality and you’ll experience, firsthand, that

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The Authors

Steve Ventura is a recognized and respected author, book producer, and award-winning training program designer. His work reflects over 25 years of human resource development experience as both a practitioner and a consultant. His prior books include Start Right … Stay Right; Walk Awhile in MY Shoes; Forget for Success; and Who Are They, Anyway?

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