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LEADERS & SUCCESS

IBD'S 10 SECRETS TO SUCCESS

Investor's Business Daily has spent years analyzing leaders and successful people in all walks of life. Most have 10 traits that, when combined, can turn dreams into reality. Each day, we highlight one.

9 DEAL AND COMMUNICATE WITH PEOPLE EFFECTIVELY: No person is an island. Learn to understand and motivate others.

Assemble Your A-Team

9 The success of an ad hoc task force or committee depends on key variables, says leadership coach Richard Axelrod.

Leaders often assemble ad hoc groups from several departments. The people you pick and the way you energize them impact how effectively goals are reached and decisions are made, Axelrod said in a phone interview.

He's a co-author of "You Don't Have to Do It Alone: How to Involve Others to Get Things Done."

To ensure your one-time-only group delivers lasting results:

■ **Go for variety.** Get several perspectives. When forming the team, include

managers and workers who'll be directly affected by the group's decisions. "They'll bring a whole new way of thinking to the table," Axelrod said.

Aim for wide-ranging expertise. "Your focus may be IT, but ask whether you could benefit from having marketing and finance people on board," he said.

If possible, have a decision-maker in the group — someone who can implement the team's recommendations.

Also include contrarians, Axelrod advises. "They add some juice to the group, because they force it to look at different perspectives." The key: Look for contrarians, not malcontents.

■ **Ensure good decisions by defining what they are.**

If approval power lies with leaders who aren't in the group, have them help define ideal results before the team convenes. Examples: "A good decision's got to reduce costs by 15% or improve quality by 10%. A good decision results in X% improvement in customer service," Axelrod said. "By setting these boundaries, management's saying, 'Within this ballpark you can play. If you give us a decision that meets these criteria, we'll implement it.' That protects both groups."

The trick in setting parameters is to strike middle ground.

"If managers make the boundaries too tight, the group says, 'Why bother? You already know what you want.' If they make them too loose, the group can get lost. A good set of boundaries gives a group some freedom."

Another way to ensure good decisions: Encourage dissent among team members.

"In the case of the Challenger disaster, people had information and didn't

bring it up because they thought no one would listen, or they brought it up and it was dismissed.

"A technique we use with clients is, if someone brings up a contrary point of view we ask who else feels that way. You get a sense of how widely held that opinion is. It can also clue you in to the seriousness of a problem."

Take the team's pulse by randomly polling members on key issues, including proposals by the group's leader.

■ **Breathe life into the team.** One of the best ways? Reframe key goals. "A hospital committee we consulted had a goal of cutting X million dollars out of the budget. That was a negative," he said. "They redefined their purpose to provide a health care system that was efficient, streamlined and that worked well for both patients and doctors. By reframing the purpose, the leader infused the team with energy. They got their cost savings, but they also got a better overall result."

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