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Team Players and Teamwork

**New Strategies for Developing
Successful Collaboration**

Second Edition

Glenn M. Parker



John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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Preface

When *Team Players and Teamwork* was first published in 1990, we had already begun to see the emergence of teamwork as an important business strategy. The success of Japan as a world economic power in the 1960s and 1970s led to a fascination with Japanese management strategies and, in turn, to the popularity of quality circles, a team-based process improvement effort. Despite great success in a number of companies, quality circles failed to gain substantial support outside of manufacturing. Even when successful, quality circles were rarely part of an overall corporate strategy.

In the 1980s we saw the outline of an emerging movement toward self-directed teams, as well as a total quality management process that was heavily team-based. These “solutions” were followed by another series of fads, the most prominent of which was reengineering. Later we witnessed a fascination with something called a *high performing organization*. These approaches—reengineering and high performing organizations—included teams as part of their core strategy.

Although many of these fads have faded away, the trend toward both more teams and the use of teams to address more organizational issues has increased dramatically. It seems clear now, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, that teams are not fading away like so many other management fads. Teams and teamwork are here to stay. Equally important, the central unit of the team—the team player—is now widely recognized. The challenge now is how to make teams and team players effective—and that’s what this book is all about.

Teams are everywhere. For example, teams are at the core of successful organizational efforts of

- Pharmaceutical companies to develop important new drugs and make them available quickly to patients who need them
- Consumer products companies to improve customer service and speed up the turnaround time on customer requests
- Computer companies to create new systems and software
- Global organizations to collaborate with business partners around the world
- Many old-line companies to redesign and modernize work processes
- Telecommunications companies to improve the quality of products and services
- Manufacturing organizations to reduce costs and eliminate waste
- Schools to coordinate curricula across disciplines
- Sales and marketing organizations to enhance the positioning of brands and coordinate product sales
- Human resources departments who provide consulting support on projects tasked with the design of organizational change efforts
- Some government agencies to reduce cross-functional competition and “turf” conflicts
- Health care systems to coordinate the delivery of quality patient care

Despite all the success, teams and teamwork have been the subject of some serious critical analysis (Robbins and Finley, 1995). Some cynics also joined the chorus of fault-finders, as in the following from an English trade publication:

Businesses are the grip of a team tyranny. Not simply because work is organized around teams, but because the ethos of *teamworking*—in itself one of those words you feel the English language is not necessarily enriched by—is pervasive. Guff such as ‘there is no “I” in team!’ surrounds us [Reeves, 2004, p. 29].

However, there is no need now to justify the value of teamwork. In addition, the notion of a team player and the importance of being a team player are accepted ideas in the organizational world. In the earlier edition of this book I described in detail what it means to be a team player. In the past, there had been a rather one-dimensional view of a team player as someone who went along and supported the company program without question—someone who was often described as a “good soldier.” A team player, it was said, lived by the credo that “to get along, you go along.”

I rejected that view and replaced it with a more complex concept of a team player. It is now clear that a team player cannot be described with a catch phrase, a simple profile, or even a job description. My view, supported by research we conducted at that time, was that there are four types of team players—Contributor, Collaborator, Communicator, and Challenger—each with its own strengths and potential weaknesses. Understanding the four team player styles helps team leaders and members better understand themselves and how they contribute to team success. At the same time I created a survey to help people identify their own styles and thereby gain insight into their individual strengths as well as a means to develop a plan to increase their effectiveness as team players.

The initial version of the instrument, called the *Team Player Survey*, was reprinted in the Resources section of the book. A revised edition was subsequently published in booklet form as the *Parker Team Player Survey* by Xicom in 1991.¹ At the time *Team Players and Teamwork* was first published, I did not anticipate how popular this view of team players would become. In the intervening years, it has been translated into a number of languages and used by organizations around the world, and it has sold more than one million copies. In addition, CRM Learning produced a best-selling video based on the four styles, called *Team Building II: What Makes a Good Team Player?*²

As seems clear now, successful organizations place great value on team players. With change the only constant, the successful employees will be the ones who can quickly adjust and work effectively with new and different people. One organizational model that provides some insight into this new world is the movie

production crew—a group of people who come together for a brief period of time, work in an intensely collaborative environment, and then deliver a product that is the result of their combined efforts. The successful crew members are able to quickly and easily focus on the goal, share their unique expertise, build relationships with diverse team members, deliver the product on schedule, and then move on. I describe such a person as an *effective team player*. I was witness to this type of teamwork when I was the on-screen narrator of the CRM Learning video that highlighted the four team player styles. The crew, including the various functions—director, cameraperson, sound engineer, teleprompter, make-up, wardrobe, and me—all showed up at 8 A.M. ready to work. Some knew each other from previous projects, but others were meeting their teammates for the first time. They were expected to and did begin work together after little more than a quick cup of coffee.

A key contribution of the first edition was a detailed description of the effective team. Building on the early work of McGregor, Likert, and others, I set forth a list of the twelve characteristics of an effective team. I also created an instrument that gave a team the opportunity to assess their effectiveness against the benchmark of the twelve factors and then the data to begin a team building effort. The initial version of the instrument was printed in the Resources section as the *Team Development Survey*. A revised version was published by Xicom in 1992.³

The basic elements of the effective team and team player that I described in 1990 remain the same. The four team player styles and twelve team characteristics still provide effective tools for the team or organization that wants to understand and increase the effectiveness of teamwork and team players. However, the environment in which teams now function has changed in some very important and often dramatic ways.

A team is no longer simply a group of people working in the same area, on the same equipment, with the same customers, and with everyone eating in the same cafeteria. Now our teammates may include people outside of the organization, many of whom

we see infrequently, such as customers and suppliers, people in other countries, people in other time zones, and people from other cultures. More specifically, the contextual factors that impact the ability of a team to be successful are numerous.

The changes having the most impact are as follows:

- Teams are cross-functional.
- Teams are cross-cultural.
- Teams are virtual.
- Teams are more dependent on communications technology.
- Team trust is now both more difficult to achieve and more critical to team success.
- Team meetings are more important.
- Teams require a support system.
- Team players serve on multiple teams.
- The level of expectations for teams is much higher.
- Team leadership is both more difficult and more important.

No matter the industry, effective teamwork is critical for success. And teamwork starts with team players—individuals working together to accomplish agreed-upon goals and objectives. Learn what it takes to become an effective team player in a successful team, and the rewards of better products, quality service, reasonable costs, and higher profits will follow.

Background and Purpose of the Book

Team Players and Teamwork provides specific and practical help for people who want to know how to get more team play into their organizations. It provides a clear answer to the question “What is a team player?” In fact, that very question was the genesis of the first edition of the book. It was asked by a manager of a client company in which I was working on ways to improve the performance appraisal system. I pointed out that, although management talked

about teamwork throughout the year, it was rarely mentioned during the annual performance appraisal discussions. Somewhat frustrated, one manager asked, “What do we look for? What does a team player really do?” With that question began the journey that culminated in the writing of this book.

The data that form the basis of this book come from a survey of fifty-one companies. Managers and human resource professionals in a variety of industries completed a preliminary open-ended questionnaire. The result of this effort was a structured survey instrument that was mailed to the chief executive officers and vice presidents of human resources of fifty-one companies.

The data indicate that there are many ways a person can be a team player, and positive team process is just one of them. I conceptualized these skills and behaviors into four team player styles that form the heart of *Team Players and Teamwork*. I have expanded the earlier work on teams done by others to create my own model of the effective team and show the many ways in which team players contribute to effective teamwork. And I have enlarged our understanding of leadership by outlining the specific approaches team players use to carry out key leadership functions. A team player can be both a leader and a member. In fact, during the course of a day, a person may occupy both roles as he or she moves from one team to another. But a person’s team player style will remain relatively constant even though the expectations placed on him or her will change as the role (leader or member) changes.

In the final analysis, this book is both inspirational and prescriptive. Above all, it should convince the reader of the value of team players and the many ways in which team players can benefit an organization. In addition, the book includes a guide for organizations that want to move toward a team player culture.

Audiences

I wrote *Team Players and Teamwork* with practitioners in mind—leaders in the private, public, and nonprofit sectors who are looking for answers. I see the book as a resource guide on teamwork for

people who are ready for something more than exhortation or a compilation of group exercises. *Team Players and Teamwork* is for people who see teamwork as a practical business strategy and want to know how to make it come alive in their organizations. I hope the book will convince readers that team players are critical to the success of the team.

This book is designed for a number of different audiences:

- It will be valuable to business and government leaders who want specific advice on how to change their organizations to increase the quality of teamwork and develop a culture that places a high value on team players. The book includes suggestions drawn from the experience of managers of successful corporations.
- Managers and supervisors who want more team players in their organizations and who want to know what to look for in recruiting, evaluating, and promoting employees will find this book valuable. *Team Players and Teamwork* describes the specific behaviors that characterize team players.
- Human resource and organizational development professionals who want to change their performance management process, reward systems, and organizational culture to emphasize teamwork and team players will find much useful advice here. My detailed descriptions of effective and ineffective team players and the *Parker Team Development Survey* provide the basis for designing successful team assessment and team development interventions.
- Leaders of business unit teams, project teams, task forces, committees, new product teams, sales teams, customer service teams, and other similar teams will find *Team Players and Teamwork* a practical handbook. Leaders will find especially helpful the discussion of the role of the team player as team leader and the methodology for analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of a specific team.
- Team members who want to become more effective team players and increase the effectiveness of their teams will find this book extremely useful. The many checklists, guidelines, and the

Parker Team Player Survey provide the basis for a personal development effort. In addition, the book offers clear advice on increasing team effectiveness at each stage of team development.

- Developers of training programs will find the book a valuable resource for designing workshops in team effectiveness. The book includes an in-depth analysis of the dimensions of an effective team and the role of the team player.
- Students of organizational behavior and human resource development will find *Team Players and Teamwork* a valuable reference. The book acknowledges past contributions to our understanding of teams and adds an important new dimension: the concept of team players. As the business world adopts a teamwork strategy, students and those who plan careers in management will find useful insights here. The first edition of the book was used by a number of team management courses as a textbook.

Overview of the Contents

Team Players and Teamwork begins with a description of the many ways in which team players and teamwork contribute to the success of organizations. Chapter One presents the practical, bottom-line results of teamwork across a variety of industries and occupations. I show how effective teamwork leads to increased productivity, more effective use of resources, cost reduction, improved quality, innovation, better customer service, and more rapid commercialization of products.

Chapter Two provides an in-depth description of the twelve characteristics of an effective team and the role of a team player in bringing each characteristic to life. I discuss the ineffective team and describe the signs of trouble that team leaders can use to detect problems within their teams. I have updated each characteristic to incorporate some of the new realities that have an impact on successful teamwork.

In Chapter Three I depict the four team player styles that form the heart of the book. Using examples from my consulting practice, the survey of fifty-one companies, and the literature, I explain how positive teamwork results from effective team players. Each style description is buttressed by checklists of behaviors and adjectives that will help both leaders and members quickly identify their team player styles. The description of each style is updated to reflect the new challenges faced by team players in the organizational world of the twenty-first century.

Chapter Four begins with an assessment of the organizational costs of ineffective team players. I describe and offer examples of the negative features of each of the four team player styles. The chapter concludes with guidelines for dealing with ineffective team players. Here too I have updated the story to reflect the significant changes in the environment in which teams and team players find themselves today.

Because team leadership is critical to team success, I devote Chapter Five to team players as team leaders. I detail how each of the four team player styles carries out five key leadership functions: planning, communicating, risk taking, problem solving, and decision making. In each case I describe the consequences of ineffective leadership. I also provide team leaders with guidelines for personal development and ten successful team-building strategies. Finally, I address the new issues that confront today's team leader, such as culture, technology, and team composition.

Chapter Six focuses on the four stages of team development—forming, storming, norming, and performing—and how team players successfully adapt to each stage. I describe each stage and pinpoint the key concerns of each team player style. For each stage and style I recommend actions that will help the team grow and develop into a mature, adaptable organization.

Chapter Seven provides team leaders with a methodology for analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of their teams. I discuss the consequences of having too many people with the same team player style. I also describe the dangers inherent in a team that is

missing one of the four styles. Several sample team profiles are presented as a self-study exercise in team assessment.

In Chapter Eight I offer a prescription to organizational leaders who want to create an environment that encourages teamwork and values team players. Drawing on examples provided by our survey respondents, I describe a variety of methods used by successful organizations. Job assignments, promotional policies, performance management, team awards, and team player recognition are among the many techniques outlined in this chapter.

The final chapter presents a series of challenges to leaders, managers, human resource professionals, and training specialists who see team players and teamwork as the centerpiece of their competitive business strategy.

A Resources section includes the *Parker Team-Development Survey* and the *Parker Team Player Survey*. The *Parker Team-Development Survey* helps a team assess its strengths and weaknesses in terms of the twelve characteristics of an effective team. The *Parker Team Player Survey* is an instrument that helps an individual identify his or her primary team player style. The section also includes a report that presents frequency data on the extent to which each team player style occurs in the business world.

Glenn M. Parker
Skillman, New Jersey
October 2007

Notes

1. Xicom is now a subsidiary of CPP, Inc. The survey is now available from www.cpp.com.
2. For more information, see www.crmlearning.com.
3. Now distributed by CPP, Inc. (www.cpp.com).

The Author

Author and consultant Glenn M. Parker works with organizations to create and sustain high performing teams, effective team players, and team-based systems. His first book, *Team Players and Teamwork* (Jossey-Bass, 1990), became a best-seller and was selected as one of the ten best business books of 1990. Key concepts from the book were brought to the screen in the best-selling video *Team Building II: What Makes a Good Team Player?* (CRM Films, 1995). His training and team building instrument, the *Parker Team Player Survey* (Xicom/CPP, 1991, 2003), has sold more than one million copies. Glenn is one of only seventy-five management experts recognized in *The Guru Guide* (Wiley, 1998).

A revised and updated edition of Glenn's major best-seller *Cross-Functional Teams: Working with Allies, Enemies, and Other Strangers* was published by Jossey-Bass/Wiley in 2003. He is coauthor of *50 Activities for Team Building*, Vol. 1 (HRD Press, 1991), which was selected by *Human Resource Executive* as one of 1992's Top Ten Training Tools. Glenn is also coauthor of *50 Activities for Self-Directed Teams* (HRD Press, 1994) and editor of the HRD Press *Best Practices for Teams*, Vol. 1 (1996) and Vol. 2 (1998). Other publications include *25 Instruments for Team Building* (HRD Press, 1998), *Teamwork: 20 Steps for Building Powerful Teams* (Successories, 1998), *Teamwork and Teamplay: Games and Activities for Training and Building Teams* (Pfeiffer, 1999), *Rewarding Teams: Lessons from the Trenches* (Jossey-Bass, 2000), *Team Depot: A Warehouse of 585 Tools*

to *Rejuvenate Your Team* (Pfeiffer, 2002), and *Meeting Excellence: 33 Tools to Lead Meetings That Get Results* (Jossey-Bass, 2006).

Glenn does not just talk or write about teamwork. He is a hands-on consultant and trainer who works with startup and ongoing teams of all types in a variety of industries. He facilitates team building, conducts training workshops, consults with management, and gives presentations for organizations across a wide variety of industries. His clients have included pharmaceutical companies such as Novartis, Merck and Company, Johnson & Johnson, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Hoffmann-La Roche, Aventis, Novo Nordisk, and contract research organizations; a variety of industrial organizations such as 3M, Kimberly-Clark, The Budd Company, Penntech Papers, Allied Signal, Pratt & Whitney, LEGO, BOC Gases, and Sun Microsystems; companies in telecommunications including AT&T, Pacific Bell, NYNEX, Lucent/Bell Labs, Telcordia Technologies (formerly Bellcore), and Siemens/ROLM Communications; service businesses such as Commerce Clearing House's Legal Information Service, Asea Brown Boveri (ABB) Environmental Services, American Express, Promus Hotel Corporation (Embassy Suites, Hampton Inns), CDI Corp., and the *New England Journal of Medicine*; the sales and marketing organizations of Roche Laboratories and the Pontiac Division of General Motors; health care providers such as Palomar-Pomeroado Health System, Pocono Medical Center, St. Rita's Medical Center, Monmouth Medical Center, and Riverside Health Care Center; retailers such as Ann Taylor and Phillips-Van Heusen; as well as teams from government agencies at the Environmental Protection Agency, National Institutes of Health, Department of the Navy, and the U.S. Coast Guard.

Glenn holds a bachelor of arts degree from City College of New York and a master of arts degree from the University of Illinois and has studied for the doctorate at Cornell University. He is much in demand as a speaker at corporate meetings and at international professional conferences in human resources, team development, and project management.

Glenn is the father of three grown children and lives with his wife, Judy, in central New Jersey. In his spare time, he roots for the Philadelphia 76ers, rides his bike, and plans his next vacation. As an active volunteer with the American Cancer Society, he helped create Run for Dad, an event to raise awareness about prostate cancer, which annually raises thousands of dollars and draws some 1,500 runners, walkers, and children on Father's Day.

1

TEAM PLAYERS AND TEAMWORK: THE NEW REALITY

In the 1980s many highly regarded books on business leadership highlighted the value of teamwork and team players (Kanter, 1983; Peters, 1987; Bradford and Cohen, 1984; Lawler, 1986). In the real world, however, team building was more promoted by behavioral scientists than it was accepted and practiced in American business. Teamwork was considered “nice” but not critical for the success of the corporation. Teamwork as a goal was linked with other corporate goals that were given more lip service than real backing—goals such as community responsibility, affirmative action, a clean environment, and employee development.

Then, at the end of that decade, teamwork gained in importance as public and private sector leaders saw the tangible benefits of effective programs. Global competition, workforce changes, the impact of technology, and other factors pushed organizations in the United States to experiment with team approaches to achieving cost-effective, quality products and services.

A few solid examples from that era are instructive:

Honeywell’s commercial flight division in Minneapolis, devoted largely to manufacturing our navigational systems, switched to team organization about six years ago. Virtually all plant functions, including production, conflict resolution, even allocation of funds, is done by teams . . . [As a result] Honeywell’s Minneapolis plant has 80 percent of the flight-navigational systems market, and 1988 profits were 200 percent above projections [Chance, 1989, p. 18].

GEMICO's [General Electric Mortgage Insurance Company] experience in its Seattle office dramatically illustrates the benefits realized by creating a teamwork mentality. During 1985, GEMICO's market share in Washington hit an all-time low and delinquencies and loan declinations skyrocketed due to deteriorating business quality. At the beginning of 1986, faced with the prospect of withdrawing from the state, GEMICO's branch manager and newly-hired experienced sales representatives began to work together to turn the situation around. First, everyone agreed that their goal would be to increase the volume of quality business received from Washington lenders. Second, everyone on the team demonstrated a willingness to "wear different hats" to see this task accomplished. Sales reps met with lenders to discuss underwriting problems, and supported (rather than second-guessed) underwriters when loans were declined. At the same time, branch office underwriters accompanied sales reps on customer calls, and loan processors served as unofficial customer service reps. The result: GEMICO market share in Washington has more than doubled, while loan declinations have been cut in half and delinquency rates have dropped from 3.05 percent to 2.52 percent, lower than the average for all mortgage insurers [Barmore, 1987, p. 94].

At Xerox headquarters in Rochester, New York, on a typical work day they [encoders] process about 6,000 customer payment checks worth about \$6 million. With that level of volume, operators were frequently so overwhelmed that checks were left undeposited until the next time, watering down the company's return on assets.

Xerox encourages team problem solving—even awarding those groups that find new ways to cut costs or improve quality—so that's what the encoders did. They formed a team and set to work analyzing the problem.

The encoders found that productivity, morale, and communication were better on Saturdays than any other of the six work days. The reason: work flow was managed through a coordinator Monday through Friday, leaving the encoders little control over