How South Sound companies are creating effective work groups

By Heidi Smith
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What makes a great team? Are power-fully effective teams just born, or can com-panies intentionally create environments in which any team can flourish?

There were some of the questions that Google’s People Operations team was try-ing to answer in a research study called nam ed Project Aristotle. The results are outlined in a chapter of the recent best-seller “Smarter, Bolder, Faster. The Secrets of Being Productive in Life and Business.” Author Charles Duhigg explains the criti-cal importance of psychological safety as the number one factor that enables teams and the individuals within them to find comfortable taking risks, genuinely col-laborating, and sharing failures along with successes in a push for constant evolution.

At both Lacey’s SCJ Alliance, a civil engineering, transportation planning and design firm, and Brightwise Networks, an Olympic-based IT Management Services company, the leadership teams have con-siderably created systems and practices to encourage that level of security. Communication plays a key role.

“We work in the gray a lot of the time,” says SCJ co-founder and president Perry Shea. “There may not be a prescriptive solution. You can have an environment where one strong personality throws out an opinion and everyone feels threatened. But that’s not what we do here. Every level of our staff can contribute in a dialogue. When we allow everyone to con-tribute and brainstorm about future things, we want to do what we do with our clients; we end up with really effective remedies.”

Open communication is equally impor-tant at Brightwise. “We wouldn’t penalize anyone for sharing an opinion or giving feedback,” says co-founder Todd Whitley. “We have a lot of service performance metrics that are converted into ratios. We share those with our team and we want to hear ideas and opinions from everyone.

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Putting so much emphasis on internal systems has paid off, not only in an im-proved company culture but in client re-ten tion and attraction.

“Since March we’ve had seven clients renew contracts for longer periods and every one of them said we were doing a fantastic job,” says Whitley. “We’ve put an enormous amount of time into providing a deeper set of services than we had three years ago, and that’s led to a significant ser-vice improvements for new and existing clients. We just hired a business develop-ment manager. A lot of that is the result of the work we did building the team up and improving services. Although Shea is a self-confessed ana-lytics fan, SCJ doesn’t manage by the num-bers. “By managing people effectively and creating an environment where they feel like they’re contributing every day, we help clients. We just hired a business development manager. A lot of that is the result of the work we did building the team up and improving services. Although Shea is a self-confessed analytics fan, SCJ doesn’t manage by the numbers. “By managing people effectively and creating an environment where they feel like they’re contributing every day, we help us raise over half a million dollars.”

See page 12 for more information on upcoming events, including the annual dinner & auction with a cause that will take place on November 10th, 2016.

Lacey engineering firm SCJ Alliance has worked hard to cultivate a company culture where, according to co-founder and president Perry Shea, “every level of our staff can contribute and dialogue.”

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