

# Business Accountability Teams

by Nick Hughes

How hard it is sometimes to stay focused—to put in that extra effort to achieve the business results we want. How easy it is to be wooed by the warm day to play a round of golf when we should be making sales calls. How easy it is to rationalize that taking the afternoon off will be made up for next week. This is especially true when there is no one to hold us accountable. Ah, the freedoms of business ownership!

But we must be accountable if we are to achieve business success. Business Accountability Teams (BATs)—each team comprised of six business owners—are an effective accountability tool. It is a known fact there is greater strength from people working together for a common purpose, than from one person working alone. It's called synergy. Teams of aligned people always generate more ideas, different ideas, simpler actions, and create motivated execution.

## Make-up of the team

As mentioned, the optimum size of a BAT is six business owners. Any more than six dilutes the time available to work on each other's business. In addition, it is more difficult to build a large group into an effective, cohesive management team supporting each member. BATs that have less than six members will have fewer ideas and more limited horizons.

BATs are for entrepreneurs who are growing their businesses. Ideally, a good cross-section of businesses should be represented on each BAT. For example, having a mix of business-to-business and business-to-consumer will bring different experiences and skills to the table. Service businesses working together with manufacturing businesses will challenge the status quo and uncover new and creative ideas.

Under no circumstances can you have competing businesses on the same team. This must be a supportive, non-competitive environment.

While the team is democratic (everyone is equal), it is probably wise to select a team leader to make sure the sessions run smoothly and stay on track. Rotate this role and the business owners have an opportunity to develop and/or improve their team management skills.



## Team members' responsibility

BATs are only as effective as the individual members. Each person must be open and willing to work as a team and to give whatever is required to help his colleagues achieve success with their businesses.

Specifically, each business owner must:

1. *Have a documented plan for their business.*
2. *Share their plan with the other team members.*
3. *Be committed to staying with the team for at least six months.*
4. *Keep everything discussed confidential.*
5. *Fulfil their obligations to the team.*

## The process of a BAT session

The BAT gets together once a month for three to four hours. The monthly sessions are held during regular business hours at a neutral location; that is, away from all the team members' places of business. We have found that when we break this location rule the sessions are open to interruption from the normal day-to-day business activities. You may agree not to answer your phone if it rings but you cannot stop yourself from wondering who called and why. This takes your mind away from the BAT work.

The dates for the sessions are pre-booked for six months. Now here comes the kicker: once the BAT has agreed on the dates, they are immovable. Our experience shows that when you start moving team dates, you are interfering with the business schedules of six busy people. That is disruptive and rarely effective, and in the worst-case scenario, the team drifts apart.

To make the BAT sessions productive, have an agenda and stick to it. Here is the framework for an agenda:

1. *Positive Focus*—what is the one most important positive thing that happened in your business in the last month?
2. *Accountability*—report back on the targets set at the last session. Praise the ones achieved but then focus on the ones that were not. What could have been done to meet these targets?
3. *Set the targets*—identify and clearly define the targets

that must be achieved in the next month. Describe why they are critical to your plans.

4. *Business issues*—present any business issues requiring help from the team.

This is a working session where each team member is questioning, probing, giving feedback, and providing ideas. The group is there to help each other achieve the targets and overcome hurdles. The single focus is on business success.

A word about targets: If it cannot be measured, it cannot be managed. The targets must be measurable, so make sure you have the tools and/or processes to measure the results. For example, if the target is to achieve a 10% growth in profitability, make sure your financial books are current and accurate so you can measure the growth rate. Targets must also be specific. Increasing sales is not a specific target—adding two new clients is!

Meeting once a month is not the only BAT activity. Team members should be encouraged to work together outside of the regular session. The Power of Synergy resulting from a dedicated team with a common focus is enormous. **E**

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