

Having a Team Sponsor Makes a Difference

"Individual commitment to a group effort - that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work."

—Vince Lombardi, American coach

To be effective, all teams need a connection to management. It is simply not empowering to be turned loose without a clear, visible, active relationship with a member of management. To use a sports metaphor, I'll call this person the team's sponsor.

What is the sponsor's role?

The sponsor provides a link with the management of the organization. The sponsor provides clarification on direction, access to resources, and guidance on problems. An active sponsor would always know the following:

- What are the team's objectives?
- Is the team on target against upcoming milestones?
- What have the team members accomplished?
- What problems are they currently facing?

In what ways can the sponsor provide support?

- Be accessible and available with regular contact.
- Have high expectations and standards for the team.
- Let the team members know their work is appreciated.
- Have a positive, supportive response to problems.
- Manage the team's reputation in the rest of the organization.
- Gain broader management support for the team.
- Ask team members what they need for support.
- Get decisions made, related to the project, that are outside the authority of the team.

How is this relationship established?

Design the relationship and ways of interacting up front by addressing the questions listed below with the team members. What does each side want and expect from the other?

- How often and how long do we talk?
- What do we talk about?
- How do we handle problems?
- What other communication do we need?
- How else should the sponsor be involved?
- What are we going to track to measure team progress?

Once the relationship has been established, make sure there is permission for either side to reopen the conversation to address anything that is not working.

A weekly meeting is best.

The sponsor's role in these meetings is to listen—not provide advice or solve problems unless specifically asked. It is appropriate to ask if any support is needed or wanted. The sponsor should expect the team to be clear about what progress it is making and what the next milestones are.

The team's role is to be clear about what is going on with the project. Team members need to keep their sponsor informed so there are no surprises. They also need to be willing to share what they are concerned or worried about and ask for what they need. The unforgivable is defined as not being in communication about problems as soon as they occur.

The format of the meeting is up to you. Below are the formats used by two teams.

