Committees and Teams

Lesson Objective: Members should be able to explain the role committees play at every organizational level and explain the challenges/opportunities of working on national level teams.

Desired Learning Outcomes (DLO):

1. Clearly articulate why at the national level there is a lot of leadership by committee
2. What's the difference between a committee and a task force?
3. How to function as a committee or team member
4. How to avoid group think – thinking outside the box

Scheduled Lesson Time: 60 minutes

Introduction

At this level you have more than likely served on one or more committees at various echelons. This lesson is designed to dive into the higher-level committees. As we go up the organizational chain, the members we tend to work with become more geographically disbursed. Having a mastery of written and verbal communication is a must. Members must also be able to leverage technology to accomplish their assigned tasks. Additionally, at the national level there are many competing viewpoints on how to accomplish our missions. We must be able to work with through these differences of opinions in order to flush out the best possible course of action that the organization should take and where its resources should be allocated.

1. Clearly articulate why at the national level there is a lot of leadership by committee

At the highest level of the organization, the Board of Governors is essentially a committee that helps provide direction. They are the ones who review the performance of the National Commander, weigh in on adverse membership actions, and hold the organization to its governing documents. Another example of a high-level committee is the IT Steering Group. These individuals help provide direction to where the IT team is dedicating its time and resources. Since we depend heavily on technology to accomplish our missions a lot of pressure is put on this group when it comes to deciding what project gets prioritized over another. In short, at the national level the reason there is a lot of leadership by committee is because we need to ensure we not only capture the needs of the entire organization, we need to be able to come to a consensus for work prioritization. This is an effective way to gain buy-in from many members.

2. What's the difference between a committee and a task force?

The key difference between a task force and a committee is that the task force is temporary in nature. The members assigned to a task force have a singular purpose that is known to be temporary or a one-time thing. Committees are purposed for long term or reoccurring items. Like committees task forces are typically commander appointed groups. Task forces could also go by the name Working Groups. An example of this would be the Leadership Development Working Group that was formed to perform the re-write of the professional development program. It involves many members from various echelons across the country with the singular purpose of identifying the topics needed for each level, then writing the necessary material. Once these functions are complete the working group will no longer be necessary.

3. How to function as a committee or team member

The greatest challenge that seems to hit the larger working groups and committees is member involvement. They will state that they are eager and willing to assist, but when it comes time to contribute, they are nowhere to be found. Either a conflicting priority came up, or perhaps they just wanted to say they were a member of the group. Being an active and engaged member is vital to any committee or group function. Communication whether it be emails or phone calls should be followed up with in a timely manner. If you know a deadline is going to be breached, reach out to the chair or the person you report to in the group to let them know. That way they can work with you on an updated timeline or if needed reallocate resources to pick up the work. In short to be a welcomed contributor, be active, stay engaged, and communicate always.

4. How to avoid group think – thinking outside the box

Cognitive diversity may be a catchphrase you have heard tossed around. When it comes to participating in groups, no matter what the level within the organization we tend to associate with like-minded individuals. This can contribute to groupthink when ideas are being discussed. The leader may toss out an idea and immediately everyone agrees with it, let alone challenges it. The ability to challenge ideas or see if holes can be poked in it is very important to see how sound it truly is. Leaders and fellow committee members should encourage someone to play devil's advocate when ideas are being presented. The goal should be for the group to come up with robust ideas or sound decisions. When it comes to selecting members for a committee, leaders should heavily weight those, they know who can think creatively, critically, or both to help ensure they are forming a very solid committee. As an individual if you can hone your critical thinking skills and the ability to look at all the angles for an idea, even if it's your own, it will make you highly sought after for your input.

Lesson Summary and Closure

Through your reading and discussion, we just had you can see the important role committees and teams play in the success of our organization. Without them a lot of necessary work would go undone. Additionally, we discussed what can plague teams from being successful and how to avoid the common pitfalls. At the end of the day we need highly motivated and engaged members to serve on committees and teams across the entire organization.

ASSIGNMENT: Pick one of your last or current committee assignments. Evaluate if there is groupthink happening within it. Provide an analysis to your instructor and a solution on helping mitigate it during future meetings.