

Mission Ready

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Red Teams/Tiger Teams

Some friends of ours at Jet Propulsion Lab have introduced us to a business practice we thought would be of great interest to the readers of *Mission Ready*: the implementation of Red Teams and Tiger Teams.

A Red Team in the aerospace industry is an independent review board that is brought in to evaluate a major project, before it begins. The case in point was JPL's *Odyssey Orbiter*, which successfully entered the orbit of Mars last year. The Red Team was called in at the beginning of the project. Why? Because two out of the last three Mars missions ended in failure; and, in fact, 66% of all Mars missions, Russian and American, have been failures. That's how difficult it is to get to Mars.

The Red Team experts looked at the detailed plans of the JPL scientists and came up with one major objection: they recommended against the use of the "bulky" mechanical arm which would direct the space probe's antenna towards Mars, and then towards the Earth. The JPL scientists had two choices: 1) go along with the recommended alternatives suggested by the Red Team, or 2) call out a Tiger Team.

A Tiger Team is another group of experts, who have been called together to respond to the recommendations of the Red Team. True to its name, the Tiger

Team took an aggressive approach. They said the mechanical arm was the best solution and they were prepared to prove it.

So both teams went before upper management to make their case. This procedure reminded us of our legal system. Upper management was "the Judge;" the Red Team was the "District Attorney;" and the Tiger Team reminded us of the "Public Defender." In this case, senior management sided with the Tiger Team, and the *Odyssey Orbiter* took off into the heavens as planned, it's mechanical arm working flawlessly.

We think this is a sound business practice for any industry. All major projects would benefit from a Red Team—an independent review of experts, whose only concern is the success of the mission. Often the project team leaders will simply accept the advice of these experts—and accept it gratefully. But, if there is a difference of expert opinion, the project team should be allowed to call out a Tiger Team of their own, to make their case.

No business decisions are fool-proof; but one that is based upon the thoughtful evaluation of "both sides of the coin" will be the wisest way to go. So, on your next project, call in a Red Team. And, if appropriate, call in a Tiger Team. Your chances of success will be greatly increased.