EA Insights

EXECUTIVE ADVANTAGE LLC

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"Quotes"

"All companies of any size have to continue to push to make sure you get the right leaders, the right team, the right people to be fast acting, and fast moving in the marketplace."
~Steve Ballmer

"It really depends on the specific mission[.]"
~Joy Crisp

"I know that's really my job on this team, to practice hard and get everyone ready[.]"
~Brian Doellman

"Our ... goal is to work together well as a team and put those individual skills into the pot."
~Ellen Gerton

"If the right people do the right things..., we can have a future. But if people don't put time into it to make it run in a right way, I don't think your team will work."
~Tim Hardaway

"We expect major chaos[.] The plans were randomly assigned to people. No consideration was given in the assignment[.]"
~Robert Hayes

"What better way to promote collaboration than bring [everyone] together...so they can share information and work together to succeed[.]"
~Jane Hoffer

"Nothing is going to stop the department from doing its responsibility. We have adequate resources[.]"
~Mike Jarvis

Dear Friend,

There's No "I" in Team...*Really*?

People often say that there's no "I" in *team*.

I think I get what they mean. The message is that teams don't work well when people are out for themselves -- when personal recognition or desires or approaches take precedence over the charge given to the team as a whole.

But, when you really think about it, a team can't function without the *"I"s* that comprise it. It's an appreciation for, and cultivation of, the wonderful variety of skills, perspectives, temperaments, and styles of each member -- each "I" -- that propels a good team forward.

No, I think that sometimes we put a damper on the creativity and potential of teams by squashing a healthy bit of *I-ness*. (In case you didn't catch it, the operative word in that last sentence was "*healthy*".) When a hint of *I-ness* is allowed to gently season the team's base of *we-ness*, you get an unstoppable combination!

So, join me for this month's edition of ***EA Insights*** as we take a look at *Teams that Make a Difference*. Let's examine three "musts" for leaders as they seek to pull together unique individuals and form a group that is able to accomplish great things together.

All the best,

June

June Melvin Mickens
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Teams that Make a Difference
June Melvin Mickens
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As I sit to write today's article, I'm in the midst of preparing to facilitate a team retreat next week. You might say that I'm knee-deep in thinking about teams, and team gelling, and team functioning, and team effectiveness.

So, what distinguishes a group of people who simply work on the same project or in the same department from a real and effective team? I think you can point to three core factors -- three "musts", if you will.

1. Teams must understand the task at hand. Have you ever had a job to do, but you had no clue what was expected of you or why it mattered? I have, and it's frustrating as all get out. You see, it's difficult to function successfully -- alone or with others -- if you're unclear about the work that's to be done. Honestly, you end up with a mess.

Teams accomplish more, though, when there's clarity about:
the mission of the organization as a whole. (What is our organization, our company, our club here to do? What are we trying to accomplish?)
the team's part in advancing the overall direction. (What is our team's piece of the puzzle? How do we fit into the general plan?)
the functions necessary for the team's work to be

accomplished. (What is needed for our team to carry out the work that's expected of us? What's the approach we're going to take to get everything done?)

When people have a sense of direction, when they know where they're supposed to be going and how they're going to get there, they're better able to focus, and strategize, and prioritize, and prepare their work. And, that supports success.

2. Teams must be equipped to do the work. Some people are real fans of magic. They're fascinated by the performer's apparent ability to make something out of nothing. While that makes for a great show, it makes for a poor workplace. In order for teams to do their best work, they must be equipped.

- They need to be staffed properly. You often hear folks talking about having "the right people on the bus". Well, that's more than just a catchy saying. A strong team needs people with the skills, temperaments, experience, etc. to do the work the team has been charged with doing. If you're charged with performing the organization's accounting functions, for instance, but have nobody on the team who's proficient in math...well.

- They need to have the necessary resources. I was in an office once that ran out of paper. (Now, mind you, this was in the days before we'd moved to doing so much of our work electronically.) And, to make matters worse, no paper was to be ordered until the start of the next fiscal year. (I tell you no lie.) So, people hoarded, and they used the backs of previously printed paper to prepare drafts, and some bought their own when they could. Needless to say, the lack of resources impacted both the quality of the work and the tone of the environment. The take-away: To have a team effectively carry out a job, it must have the resources needed.

- They need clear a designation of assignments. If you've ever played the game *Twister*, this particular team need will resonate with you. In *Twister*, there's no end to the laughter as you get all tangled up with fellow players -- arms and legs converging, as you each reach for the mat's huge green, red, yellow, and blue circles. At work, though, confusion akin to what's experienced in a game of *Twister* is no fun at all. However, that's what often happens when team members' roles haven't been adequately thought out or communicated. People end up duplicating work, leaving necessary people out of critical conversations or decisions, moving in directions that are at odds with the plan, jumping into each other's lanes. In other words, they get all twisted up ... unnecessarily. But, effective teams keep *Twister* as an off-hours game. They assign responsibilities, and do so clearly, so that people understand their roles, the roles of others, and how appropriate collaboration and coordination furthers the work to be done.

3. Teams must work well together. I truly enjoy assisting teams to mesh. There's great pleasure in seeing faces as the light bulb goes off, and people get to know one another as individuals -- exploring areas of similarity and beginning to recognize the great value available to the team and to the organization because of their diversity. They discover the positive difference that occurs when you come to work with people you know, respect, and like.

Not all teams invest in cultivating relationships, though. And, that's a shame on so many levels. However, simply considering potential business results, my experience has been that teams, in which the members prioritize the development of connections with one another, tend to be more successful. These teams are able to parlay those interpersonal contacts into open communication and increased collaboration. They also are able to avoid much of the stress and the dysfunction that can have a negative impact on the environment as well as on the quality and quantity of the output. And so, striving to work well together makes good business sense.

An effective team doesn't just happen. It starts with a leader who recognizes the many business and personal reasons for investing in the health of the team. And, it requires intentionality and ongoing work to create and maintain a team-oriented culture. Yet, as people who are a part of successful teams will tell you, the effort most certainly is worth it.

Want help to build or sustain your own successful team environment? Let *Executive Advantage* partner with you. We're here to help you create a team that truly can make a difference. **Contact us today.**

About Executive Advantage

At *Executive Advantage*, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

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"To succeed in your mission, you must have single-minded devotion to your goal."
~Abdul Kalam

"Getting all the important pieces in place was something we wanted to do right away. We wanted to give our ... staff [time] to work together toward next year."
~Rob Katz

"If you just use what you have, that's usually a good thing. There's no reason to do a big project if the resources aren't there."
~Tim Knopps

"There has to be a plan in place along with adequate resources[.] None of this appears to have been done [there]."
~John Kyl

"Everybody wants difference makers and everybody wants great players. Sometimes, you get a great player that's not a team player and then you have a great player on your team and he might not help you win games."
~Mike Shanahan

"That was the turning point[.] The time was right, the right people were there..., we kind of clicked. That started it all rolling."
~Chris Sullivan

"Understand from top to bottom what the effort requires."
~Bill Toomey

"This group has a real nice bond. The guys are coming together truly as a team. It's showing in the way that they train and practice, the fun that they have together, and it's being reflected in our games."
~Bryan Winkler