



## Quack

Ever watch a duck?

If you do, what you see usually is smooth, graceful, and intentional. Well, that's what you SEE.

What you don't see is the mad paddling going on below the water's surface.

My, how the obvious can be deceiving. Tony Evans often says that if what you see is all you see, then you're not seeing everything there is to see. Profound!

Our organizations and teams often are like that duck. Looks good...on the surface anyway. Yet, there's a whole different story if you dare to venture under the water line.

That's our topic for this month's edition of **EA Insights**. Don your diving mask. It's time to submerge!

All the best,

June

June Melvin Mickens  
Executive Advantage, LLC



## 3 Signs Your Team Needs a Reboot

June Melvin Mickens  
Executive Advantage, LLC

Tell me. If your team is meeting targets and producing reasonable results, is your work done? I mean, is this a signal that you can sit back and breathe easily because there is nothing to worry about?

I hope you answered "No". You see, before checking off the "well-functioning team" item on your to-do list, it would be wise to take a closer look. A team's ability to get things done doesn't automatically equate to a team's functioning well.

In many respects a team can be like a duck. All may look peaceful and calm above the water line, but below the surface a different picture often emerges.

So, what signs might exist that a team -- even one that generally is getting the job done -- may be in need of some attention? Here are some below-the-surface signals.

### Excessive Tension

Recognize that not all tension is created equally. Some tension in the workplace is normal. Consider the healthy levels of conflict that arise as problems are confronted, ideas are posed and tested, and solutions are discovered or

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### Quotes

*"Conflict resolution, all those things, are important. When you're in a group environment, you have to have those. If you don't, things fester. Have the conversation. Resolve it. Move forward."*  
~J. B. Bickerstaff

*"Life is like the monkey bars: you have to let go to move forward. Once you make the decision to leap..., be sure to loosen your grasp on old concepts so you can swing your way to new ones."*  
~Leah Busque

*"This old notion that work is drudgery is nonsense. Most days, even back when Xerox was under siege, I could not wait to get to the office."*  
~Ursula Burns

*"The culture of undermining sends signals of disrespect. This approach not only saps motivation and undermines teamwork[.]"*  
~John Dickerson

*"If you want to do something different, you're going to come up against a lot of naysayers."*  
~James Dyson

*"I've always had a duck personality. Calm above water, feet going crazy below."*  
~K. Flay

*"When people rely on surface appearances..., rather than in-depth knowledge of others at the level of the heart, mind and spirit, their ability to assess and understand people accurately is compromised."*  
~James A. Forbes

*"We can't ignore signals that...something is wrong."*  
~Camille Grammer

*"When there is tension, arguments..., it's tough to do your work. Some people thrive on that. I don't."*  
~Richard Jenkins

uneasiness is felt as people try out new approaches -  
- jittery over whether everything will work out.

Juxtapose those examples with powder-keg environments. One needn't even go inside at some locations; the tension is palpable upon approaching the door! The sniping, worry, distrust, strain, and pressure just permeate. What can be tricky, though, is that the team is producing. And, for that reason, it is possible to become oblivious to, or choose to overlook, the team's tone because results are positive. Well, they are for now....

### **Bypassed Leadership or Standards**

A second sign of brewing trouble is a growing tendency among team members to bypass leadership in areas of critical decision making, problem resolution, or accountability. When decisions that should be made by or, at least, shared with the leader are not brought to that person, something's off.

Although some level of issue-resolution empowerment is definite evidence of team maturity and trust, a team that *avoids* the involvement of its leader in problem solving has gone rogue, is signaling leader ineffectiveness, or both. The situation is similar for teams that regularly bypass the leader for accountability purposes as well as teams that skirt the rules, the chain of command, or the company's SOPs as a usual way of functioning. Even though the team may be achieving outcomes and meeting goals, the signs of trouble still exist.

### **Labored Labor**

That was not a typo. When labor becomes labored, when the work becomes a chore for people, it's time to take note. Yes, things may be getting done, but watch for slipping deadlines, the need for repeated reminders, sapped energy, and similar workplace characteristics. These are signs that something may be awry. And, they can't be excused away by the argument that...well, the people are producing.

So, the signs are there. What do you do?

**Honestly assess.** Step back and determine what's at the root of the situation. Be careful about just tackling symptoms. Also, be careful about adopting a defensive posture if you discover that you've played a part in where the team is now. The goal is to figure out what's happening and why.

**Adopt a turn-around plan.** How do you work with the team to rectify the area of challenge? Is it a behavior or performance issue, a process issue, a misalignment issue, a broader organizational issue, or some combination of the above? The way out will be different in each instance. However, development of a realistic plan forward is crucial.

**Don't give place to naysayers.** Because the situation involves a team that generally is producing, there may be those who deem your concern as an overreaction. Don't be surprised, and don't give in. Thinking back to the duck, what's happening underwater will affect -- immediately or eventually -- what is seen on the surface. So, take heed to the signs.

**Get to work!** It is unlikely that the current team environment arose overnight, and it won't be addressed overnight either. Champion and model the changes to be made at the person, team, and/or system levels. The turnaround will take ongoing communication, commitment, and coaching from (and possibly for) you so that you can work with the team over time to undo the habits that have become engrained.

So, are the signs there? Is your team's tendency for accomplishing outcomes obscuring the emerging trouble or the full-blow below-the-surface dysfunction?

Sometimes having an unbiased set of eyes and thought partner is invaluable and we, at **[Executive Advantage](#)**, are here and ready to assist. Let us help you assess, plan, communicate, and follow up so that your team not only produces well, but functions well also. **[Contact us today](#)**.

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*"[Y]ou're never going to please everybody. There's always going to be someone that's a naysayer."*

*~Anjelah Johnson*

*"Have you seen a duck gliding smoothly on water? Does it ever look like it is paddling furiously underneath the surface?"*

*~Salman Khan*

*"A dysfunctional team means a dysfunctional - and likely doomed - company."*

*~Sallie Krawcheck*

*"I've met many [leaders]..., who failed to foster organizational health. Their companies were riddled with politics, various forms of dysfunction, and general confusion about their direction and mission."*

*~Patrick Lencioni*

*"[T]he only way you can do better is to assess all the facts and truly know what you know and know what you don't know."*

*~Li Lu*

*"Your job, as a ... manager, is to listen and not bypass any opportunity to help your team improve."*

*~Josh McDaniels*

*"Leadership is about doing the right thing, even if it going against a vast number of naysayers and mediocre people."*

*~N. R. Narayana Murthy*

*"A lot of the dysfunction that exists underneath the surface of a lot of big business corporations is really profound."*

*~Adrian Pasda*

*"[Work] shouldn't be a chore or feel like any kind of burden."*

*~Jill Scott*

*"I listened very, very carefully to the world around me to pick up the signals of when trouble was coming. Not that I could stop it. But it made me observant."*

*~Sonia Sotomayor*

*"You can cut the tension with a cricket stump."*

*~Murray Walker*

## **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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