



The Ideal Team Player in the Workplace



How would you define an Ideal Team Player at your workplace?

In my last newsletter called “Infectious Attitudes” I told a story about an NFL coach who terminated his most athletic player because of his negative attitude and lack of team spirit.

Up to that point in the season, the Houston Oilers had lost their first six games of the season. The coach assessed that it was in great part due to the poor attitude of that one player. Once the player was gone and out of the locker room, the team won the next six games in a row!

What are the qualities of an employee, manager or boss that pull the team together or keep the organization in a successful game?

The Back Story

In his book “The Ideal Team Player,” Patrick Lencioni writes of the time that he and his management team decided to identify the top three qualities they were looking for in every employee. Whether it meant challenging and re-training their current employees to develop these three qualities or implementing the three traits into the hiring process, the leadership all agreed that these were to be the new workplace traits for each team player.

Once the Leadership agreed on the “three virtues” they were looking for, they shared the plan and concepts with their staff. This new vision and stated expectation for what they wanted their team to look like would eventually recalibrate and change the entire culture of the organization for the better.

This simple but brilliant exercise makes a lot of sense. To make a clear statement of what the organization is looking for from each team member should identify exactly what type of team will emerge.

How many companies allow problematic employees to continue to work at a substandard pace month after month and year after year? How many organizations have unraveling morale issues that force hard working and loyal employees to look elsewhere for work and join a different team?

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How frequent in a division or office is there one worker or manager that is bringing the morale of the entire team down because of their sense of entitlement, negativity and attitude?

Whatever the case, it makes so much sense to identify and clarify the qualities wanted in every employee when putting a team together.

You might say, it's too late for our company because our staff is in place and we aren't hiring, or because we are with the union we are stuck with poor quality team members and our hands are tied.

Lencioni's answer for that was to challenge every employee to strive for the three qualities and give them a chance to change. If they didn't eventually embrace the new model, they were no longer a fit for the team and the employee would have to find new employment elsewhere, much like the above stated football player.

The Model: Ideal Team Player

In his book "Good to Great," Jim Collins talks about companies getting people "on the right bus"—a word picture for hiring and retaining employees that fit a company's culture. Most companies seem to hire for technical skills and competency. But the question is, do they fit the company's culture and environment?

According to Lencioni, the right people are the ones who have three common qualities or assets:

1. **Humility:** They emphasize the team over self.
2. **Hunger:** They are motivated to go above and beyond what is required for the team.
3. **Smart:** People Smarts—they have the ability to get along with the team players.

Let's focus on these three characteristics of a Team Player in more detail.

Humility: Humble people are quick to give credit for the other team member's accomplishments. They can applaud the success of their co-workers. They are not in competition with each other because they are on the same team. They are not territorial but are open to the ideas of others. Abraham Lincoln stated it best when he said "I have never met anyone from whom I didn't learn something."

Because these players are not insecure, they have nothing to prove or no one to impress. If someone is promoted over them they simply cheer that person on from the sidelines rather than sulk about the coach's choice.

People who lack humility make everything about themselves. They arrogantly have the tendency to soak up attention, and their egos drive them to be glory hogs. Frequently I have received complaints from employees that their creative ideas were taken by their manager and never gave credit to the staff member who had the ideas to begin with.

Eventually a lack of humility will diminish the team atmosphere, create resentment and divide people.

Hungry: These individuals are appropriately driven to work hard and strive for excellence. They almost never have to be pushed or reminded by management to work harder or finish their project because they are already self-motivated and diligent.

They are forever studying and improving their game plan, practicing their roles, and are open to correction for improvement.

However, there is also an unhealthy type of hunger that creates frustrations among the team. It's when one over works, lets everybody know about it then silently criticizes others for their laziness or "incompetence" if they are not there from morning until evening like they are.

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Smart: As soon as we hear “smart,” we think generally of intelligence, degrees, experience or IQ. However, the term in this sense is relationally or emotionally smart.

How well does the employee resolve conflict and get along with the other team members? If there is a misunderstanding do they intelligently and quickly resolve it in a professional way?

Smart people listen well and ask questions of others to show their interest. They understand the unique differences in each team player and approach them in ways that work. If they have a misunderstanding with a co-worker rarely do they get defensive but simply own what belongs to them. In short they have good common sense and don't create unnecessary drama and conflict when they work with the rest of the team.

Did you know, for example, that most team players in corporate America are promoted or demoted for attitude rather than hard skill performance?

Anyone can learn hard technical skills but it is the true team player that has the maturity and class to bring the best out of the rest of the team.

This is just one example of how an organization raised the bar for all the team players in their organization. Your company may use words other than hungry, humble and smart to describe what they are looking for in their team players. Whatever the case, it's not a bad idea to come up with something definitive to describe what your new team will look like, especially if leadership realizes that a culture change and a new team spirit is necessary.

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Listed below are other Team Player traits that could be expected for the entire staff going forward...

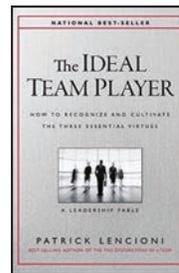
More Team Player Traits

- ▶ A working knowledge and confidence of their position and overall mission of the team.
- ▶ Loyalty to the team members, leadership and organization.
- ▶ Open to change the game plan when necessary rather than inflexibility.
- ▶ Keeping their game face despite mistakes and perceived failure.
- ▶ Positive and realistic attitudes in spite of setbacks.
- ▶ Having an encouraging voice to all the team members.
- ▶ Always striving for unity rather than talking smack about your team players.

Final Thoughts

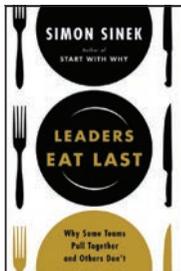
If the above thoughts resonate with you, I highly recommend reading “The Ideal Team Player” by Patrick Lencioni. He also adds excellent interview questions for managers in order to evaluate their teams to see if they meet the qualifications of the organization’s model of the Team Player. In addition, they suggest several ways of encouraging staff to raise their Team Player standards.

For more information on Teambuilding, see track #11 on the workshop tab at teamworks-works.com

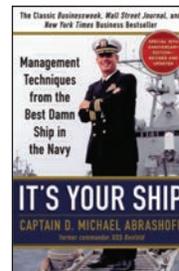


The Ideal Team Player
by Patrick Lencioni

A couple more good reads:



Leaders Eat Last
by Simon Sinek



It's Your Ship
by D. Michael Abrashoff.



Bill Gallagher has been counseling and working with professionals since 1980. His emphasis in the workplace is to help develop both relational skills and professional standards among administration and staff. He has worked in multiple organizational settings and of recent has spent most of his time addressing workplace issues in healthcare and city government.

Bill formed TeamWorks in 2001 to help organizations achieve their goals for establishing high morale and client satisfaction. TeamWorks currently specializes in offering one-on-one surveys and evaluations for management and staff to assess the current culture's needs and recommended trainings going forward.

In addition to conducting a variety of workshops and in-services on workplace issues, Bill mediates conflict among partnerships and staff relationships, speaks at conventions, facilitates management retreats, and offers personal consultation and counseling for staff.

Bill's strengths are in public speaking, mediation, and understanding the complexities of relational dynamics in the workplace. He lives in Medford, Oregon, with his wife Jenny, and enjoys spending time with their five children and five granddaughters.