



## The Ideal Team in the Workplace

### Significant Lessons in Teamwork



**Do you feel the staff, crew, team or office employees where you work are a cohesive, tight unit where there is a high level of productivity and respect among each other and is also a place you love to work on a daily basis?**

It is possible! The times I have worked with well-oiled teams and have inquired as to why everyone there seemed so upbeat and enjoyed their job and team, I found answer after answer that made so much sense.

#### Words from Satisfied Team Members

Consider a few responses where the teamwork was obviously strong:

- We get along so well; morale is excellent.
- We all pull our weight here, work hard and know our responsibilities.
- There is no drama here.
- When we have conflict, we go directly to the person and honestly tell them what's up.
- We all respect our leader; he is a straight shooter, but he is also open to our suggestions.
- There is a clear chain of command so we know exactly where to go with our concerns.
- Leadership follows up on problems when necessary.
- We have a very tight crew, no one stays offended because we talk things out quickly.
- It seems like experienced people are in the right positions.
- Our input as a staff and crew is solicited by management.

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What do you think? I see at least four common denominators in their statements:

1. The leadership is intricately tied into what the whole team is involved with.
2. The team addresses problems directly and quickly.
3. Each is clear on their role and responsibilities.
4. Their success is dependent on the team; not just a few.



## Teamwork Lessons and Principles from a Flock of Birds

The essential qualities that make the ideal team in the workplace are clearly seen from a flock of birds I recently observed over a popular lake in the Middle East called the “Sea of Galilee.” Whether it was a flock of cranes or other type of fowl, the imagery was stunning as a perfect ‘V’-formation flew overhead, much like we see here in the Northwest when honking geese begin their migration south. Wildlife scientists have compiled their research into six parallel lessons for building a more cohesive team.

### Lesson 1

Good Leadership

#### The Lead Bird Creates the Direction, Speed and Backdraft the Other Birds Need to Follow.

The Leader sets the pace for the whole flock. If he flies too fast it creates exhaustion, and if he flies too slow it creates less lift for all. There must be no doubt about following the lead bird of the flock. His/her leadership is as important as those who are willingly following as a team.

*Good leadership inspires loyalty that creates a backdraft of encouragement that literally pulls the team forward, making following the organizational plan less complicated and easier to understand. Take away competent and caring management and the team atmosphere is polarized and ineffective.*

### Lesson 2

We Must All See the Big Picture

#### The Flight is Much More Efficient and Enjoyable if We Follow the Formation.

Notice that the flocks who are migrating do not generally fly in a single line. The purpose of staying in the ‘V’-formation is to allow the flock to see where they are going and keep their focus on the leader’s overall direction.

*Resisting the organizational mission and goal of the team, and going it alone, ends up being exhausting, directionless, and has toxic implications for the rest of the team. Our responsibilities should all neatly fit within the lines of the organizational formation and mission. At times we may desire and envy other positions within the company, but our main objective is to do what we were hired to do and work where the organization needs us most.*

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## Lesson 3

Insist on Keeping the Unity

**Flying Away from the Flock on our Own Takes More Energy and Expends Useless Effort.**

I noticed when one of the cranes or geese fell out of line, or straggled too far behind, they quickly returned to the flock. Apparently, the drag and resistance increases because the draft created by the lead and group is gone. It became very obvious the independence that was so alluring to the individual bird expended so much energy and slowed their progress down that it was no longer worth it for them to be apart from the group. Additionally, if the bird continually waffles on their loyalty or commitment to the rest of the flock, there is a displacement that occurs and they can end up off course.

*A team is only as strong as the unbreakable tie they have on all matters of high importance. A story is told of an aged Greek grandfather who asked his grandson to snap one pencil, then two, then three. As the number of pencils increased, he couldn't break them and the grandpa said "That's Family." The more a staff is unified, the less possible it is to splinter apart.*

## Lesson 4

More is Accomplished Through the Team Effort

**When All the Flock Cooperate Following the Direction and Pace of Their Leader, They Travel Further and Faster to Their Destination.**

Each and every bird has a role to play for the betterment of the entire flock. Each has a critical role as they migrate together. The birds up front create a forward draft that pulls the others along easier and the ones in the middle and back create an upward draft for the ones in the front. It's speculated the flock goes 70% further with the same amount of energy than they would have used if each bird flew alone.

*A team in the workplace gets more done when they share a common goal than when individuals each do their own thing. Interestingly, the lead bird has an easier job if the flock is flying as an intact unit as they follow in a precise formation behind.*

## Lesson 5

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

**Honking is Helpful and Necessary for the Flight.**

Have you ever noticed that honking doesn't happen when a bird flies alone? The honking of the other birds, not to mention the lead, is to encourage the others to continue in the journey.

*In the workplace, it's like putting our arm around a discouraged co-worker or manager in flight, as if to say, "You've got this and all of us are with you in this, so keep going and don't give up." We should never underestimate the need for clear communication from the top down as well as our communication with each other. The teams that stay on top of their communication in every direction are the teams that soar higher and further than all of the rest. Whether it comes in the form of short morning huddles, monthly casual lunchtimes as a staff, or quarterly direction and updates for all, it is the draft that carries the team forward to their destination.*

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## Lesson 6

Don't Quit on Achieving Your Goals and Mission

### Keep Flying Tirelessly until the Destination is Reached.

Migrating birds can fly thousands of miles in order to reach their desired haven. Despite weather conditions, predators, and food shortages, nothing seems to get in the way of their flight pattern and goal. It doesn't appear possible or even optional for the flock heading south to do anything but keep going until they arrive. Never do we see migrating birds turn around to go back north with the sense of a failed mission. However, I assume that if they realize something is wrong or invasive about their flight pattern, they all land in a lake or field, rest, honk and recuperate (which is not a bad idea for a team that needs new direction or focus).

*Achieving workplace goals is rarely easy. It takes grit, unity, tireless work, and most importantly the backdraft and upward draft from the leader and entire team.*

So a stronger team is not only possible, but a necessity in the workplace if you want to reach and fulfill your intended purpose and mission as an organization and a team.

One last thought, leadership might want to use these concepts as discussion points with their team to assess their strength or weakness as a staff so they can improve their "flight pattern" in the near future.

Also, for further reading read my newsletter "The Ideal Team Player" or consider track #11 "Being a Team Player in the Workplace" for possible training at [teamworks-works.com](http://teamworks-works.com)

Safe Travels!

1532



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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.