

Whose Team Are You On?

by

Russ Bredholt, Jr.

We keep getting mail from organizations where the word "team" is a prominent part of the masthead and logo. Offices that were once just offices are now "team headquarters." Much has been made over the past several years of the importance of teams and team building.

Like anything else that comes along, it's possible to miss the core concepts or take things too far.

With all the talk about "teams" we are reminded of something former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher once said about a different subject. Ms. Thatcher offered the opinion several years ago that if you had to say you were a "lady" too often, you probably weren't.

We are beginning to think the same thing about leaders who keep talking about getting their people "on the team." Or, when referring to someone's attitude and behavior, supervisors often say, so and so is not a "team player."

The question is: On whose team?

Is there still room for the individual in the age of teams?

A key lesson from the book, ***The Wisdom of Teams***, is that leaders foster team performance best by building a strong performance ethic rather than by establishing a "team promoting" environment alone.

"Biases toward individualism exist," says Jon Katzenbach, one of the authors, "but need not get in the way of team performance." He goes on to say that team and individual are two subjects on the opposite ends of a continuum. The key is knowing how to provide balance so that the situation is well served by either a person or a group.

Believe it or not, sometimes a single person is just what the circumstances call for.

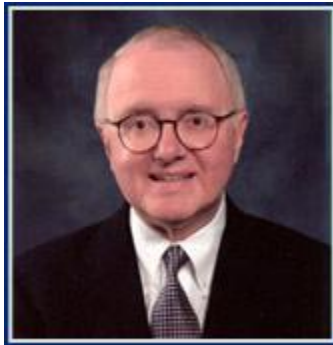
If you ever had the privilege of serving on a well-disciplined team, you already know that the better coaches use the word "team" carefully. They strive to develop the team by growing the individual. Before the age of celebrity, it was always a great experience to watch a well-coached team perform. It still is something to experience when you can find it in sports or work.

Our observation is that some, not all, are using “team” in a disciplinary fashion versus a discipline that is required to achieve a common purpose and set of goals.

Rather than a boss--worker arrangement, Katzenbach notes that teams really come into being when individuals hold themselves mutually accountable.

You might want to look at your communication to see just how much you are using the "t" word. Remember, the best teams know they are. If you have to say it too much, you probably aren't.

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