

## WHY TEAM WORK - DOESN'T WORK

*A Lone Ranger attitude is what we believe gets us promoted and the Lone Ranger was never much good at team work. New research shows how this attitude is sabotaging productivity in teams.*

Team work - a hot topic in today's globally competitive environment. We know we have to work well with other people. The demand for specialists, international networking and rapid change doesn't even give us a choice anymore. We take seminars, hire consultants and cruise book aisles looking for the trick to what makes teams tick.

As a corporate consultant and executive coach, I've wondered why we have so much trouble cooperating with each other in the workplace. The answers I discovered in my research will surprise you and make you question some of your assumptions about what makes a business succeed.

The following four myths are the most common saboteurs to high team productivity. Check out how many of these myths are alive and rampant in your organization.

- 1) Myth: People who succeed in business are aggressive, tough and independent. The Marlboro man and the Lone Ranger are helpful role models. Effective business people speak forcefully, express themselves with certainty, and persuade others to agree with them.

Truth: People who succeed in business only do well with the above traits when they are working by themselves. Effective team work requires a personality who can admit uncertainty or mistakes, build on the ideas of others, and ask for help. Unfortunately, group cooperation is not a class taught in most business schools. Yet a blend of both independence and interdependence is necessary to generate productivity in an organization.

- 2) Myth: Communication is natural. People skills are genetic and part of being human. People who need help learning how to communicate or relate to others must be sick, crazy or abnormal.

Truth: Communication is taught in our original families. If you have children, you may remember promising yourself you would never act like your parents. Then your child drove you crazy and you found yourself channeling your parent like an alien entity. We do the same thing at work when despite our best intentions we are unable to confront our boss, ask for help or avoid blowing up. The ineffective communication lessons in our original family can include; withdraw when angry, blame others, and don't trust people. These communication habits will feel familiar ... but they won't make your team a success.

- 3) Myth: If team members have high self-esteem and believe in themselves then the team will perform well.

Truth: Having high self-esteem only means that you feel good about yourself. The people you work with may have a very different opinion of your contribution. High self-esteem does not translate into being a good team player. In fact, it may make it more difficult for you to listen to the ideas of others or accept help.

4) Myth: Working in a team is just like working alone... only it involves more people.

Truth: Working in a team requires a different set of skills than working alone. In a group, people need to know practical techniques to negotiate, resolve conflicts, listen, discuss hidden agendas, and be open to others' ideas. Without communication training, we might as well be putting group members in a plane and telling them to fly (after all they have two arms, two legs, one brain and they can figure the rest out).

When I present this information to clients they typically are relieved to find out that there wasn't a people skills class in school that everyone else took when they were asleep. The bottom line secret is that you are struggling with the same people problems as everyone else -- and that everyone else is also faking that they know what they are doing. That's part of the Lone Ranger attitude.

So how do you turn things around in your team? Start by recognizing that independence, high self-esteem and aggressiveness only help when people are working by themselves. Give people in your organization and yourself permission to learn the skills involved in working effectively with others. After seeing jumps in team productivity from better interpersonal skills, many of my clients now rate people skills and group skills when evaluating an employee's annual performance. The following ideas will get you started improving your team's effectiveness:

**USE "I" LANGUAGE:** Start your sentences out with "I" to make it clear you are talking about your own experience. Using "I" in the beginning of your sentences tends to reduce defensiveness and encourage openness in others.

Example: Rather than "You're irresponsible about getting that report to me." Try, "I want to make sure I get your report by Monday mornings. When I don't get the report on time, I end up being delayed the rest of the week."

**PARAPHRASE:** Repeat in your own words what is being said. You will clarify comments, increase rapport, build trust, and encourage the speaker to give you more information. This technique works great during a conflict.

**BE SPECIFIC:** When you talk to your team members, particularly if you have a disagreement, make sure you describe the behavior you want or the behavior you don't want. The rule here is you should be able to see your description on a video screen.

Example: Rather than saying "You don't respect my time," say "When I don't find out about the meetings ahead of time, I have a difficult time planning my schedule for the week. Please let me know about any meetings at the beginning of the week."

**GIVE UP LONE RANGER HABITS WHEN YOU WORK IN A TEAM:** Realize that our organizations groom employees to be autonomous, aggressive and independent thinkers. Next time you are in a group, practice asking for help, letting others know when you need more information, or building on another team members' idea.

As our work world gets more complex, the effectiveness of work relationships will be what distinguishes a successful business from a failure. After all, no matter what profession you are in, your competitors can probably offer your customers a similar service or product. What your competition can't offer is your service or product plus a staff of employees who are highly trained in communication. I've found that most business professionals are technically well trained and interpersonally undereducated. People skills are the most powerful competitive edge you can have to ensure you thrive and succeed no matter what future challenges you face in your job.

Daneen Skube, Ph.D., is Director of Interpersonal Edge; a firm specializing in helping people achieves peak performance through communication skills. She provides executive telephone coaching, speaking, and conducts management training. She's an internationally syndicated columnist for Tribune Media and author of, "Interpersonal Edge: Breakthrough Tools for Talking to Anyone, Anywhere, About Anything," published by Hay House. To receive her free newsletter or submit questions for her column go to: [www.interpersonaledge.com](http://www.interpersonaledge.com).