

FEATURES

Are You On This Team?

by Terry Little

One day, on an impulse, I asked the 80 or so folks working for me the following question in a staff meeting: "Say I was to line up everyone here by the degree to which each person was pulling his or her weight in supporting the overall team; where would you be in the line? First ten or so? Somewhere in the middle? At the end?"

After a short silence they began to pummel me with questions. The dominant one was, "Who measures the degree to which I'm pulling my weight?"

After thinking about this for a minute, I said, "Your peers decide."

Wow, did that reply generate a lot of angst. "My peers don't know what I do." "My peers don't think what I do is important." "My peers don't like me." "I work to please my boss, not my peers." "Others pull a lot more weight than I do because they are workaholics and I have other priorities." "I just arrived and it's unreasonable to expect that I know enough yet to carry my full weight." "I can't pull my full weight until I get more training."

My out-of-the-blue question had struck a very tender cord. Once I extricated myself from this cauldron, I reflected on what had happened and why. Clearly people were sensitive to how others perceived their job performance. I found it intriguing that folks seemed uneasy with the notion of having their peers judge their performance in the context of the team. Despite all the rhetoric and head nodding about the team's performance being more important than any one individual's performance, folks really hadn't bought into that. Most had not recognized that just believing in the concept of a team was not enough. Behaviors and attitudes had to change.

My people had not yet learned that individual endeavors are meaningless unless the team succeeds. They hadn't figured out that they cannot thrive if the team does not--that teams must have the allegiance of every member if they want to win championships.

Wow, I thought. This team stuff is a lot tougher to make happen than I had thought. Saying it's so doesn't make it so.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Terry Little is in the civil service with the Department of the Air Force, where he has been a program manager for five major defense acquisition efforts. He entered the Air Force in 1967 and served on active duty until 1975.

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