How to build a strong team spirit

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In facing the challenges ahead, the human element will remain important, indeed may even become more important. How do you strengthen team spirit and, thus, the inner strength of a business?
To do this, you need to pay special attention to the members of the team and to their leaders. It is a matter of responsibility and autonomy.

Before taking a closer look at the notion of responsibility as it relates to autonomy, here are a few thoughts and suggestions for strengthening team spirit.

Team spirit is the bond among members of a group, making them feel they belong together as one unit and inspiring them to act for the common good.

Throughout my career, whenever I ask the question, "In your experience, what makes a 'good team', and what do you expect from your colleagues?", the notion of team spirit is what is put forward. The words most frequently used are 'helping each other' and 'support'.
(Read also: High-performance team: What do you expect from your colleagues?)

When you are building a high-performance team, **each individual** is important. This is a cooperative venture, in which everyone must take responsibility. Here are a few concrete aspects for implementation in practice.

Belonging to the team
If each member is to feel they belong, it is important that there be a common project. This is best achieved by first having a team vision, developed with all the team members. This enables each person to make their contribution to the project as a whole. To strengthen the sense of belonging, as well as ensuring that everyone understands the project at all levels, you need to establish team "rituals" (greeting one another in the mornings, having a break together, light-hearted updates, sharing a quick game of darts during a break).

Buddy system
Encourage people to pair up with someone else. Ensure that each team member has a partner (a buddy).
There are several ways of creating such partnerships.
We need to take time for one another. Together we are complementary, stronger, and this boosts confidence.
The better we know one another, the easier it will be to cooperate and, above all, provide support freely and spontaneously.
(Read also: Gaining in confidence through feedback)

Transparency
Where both delegating and information and decision-making are concerned, dare to be transparent. This creates a basis of trust and reduces the risk of rumour-mongering and misunderstandings. At the same time, being transparent means you have to be precise where reasoning, explanations and tools are concerned.

Role model
Whether you are the "boss" or a co-worker, your behaviour must be exemplary. Behave towards others as you

would like them to behave towards you, keep your word and act with integrity.
(Read also: How to earn respect: Set a good example!)

Sensitive issues, conflicts
Tackle sensitive issues directly and don't let them fester. Nothing is more likely to poison relationships or heighten tensions within a team. Here again, you may well have misinterpreted a gesture or attitude. Ask questions to make sure that the behaviour or words you have noted do in fact accord with your interpretation. If you ask questions in this way, you will find that many conflicts can be avoided.

Rules and consequences
Any team must have clear rules and principles for working together. These rules apply to all, at all levels. Make sure that no one is above the law or has special privileges. Everyone must be treated the same.

Moreover, if rules are not adhered to, it is important that there are consequences and that sanctions are strictly applied. To quote the human resources manager of a major enterprise in the Lake Geneva area: be kind and show goodwill but don't be indulgent.

Give praise openly
Each member of the team is unique and essential for the smooth running of the enterprise. Whether you are the boss or simply a fellow-worker, praise the various members of your team (and do it publicly). Not only for what they do, but also for who they are! A person who always wears a smile, listens to you and pays attention to others is a real asset to any team. They play a special part in building team spirit. Tell them so!

Loyalty
Finally, be loyal, both to the company and to your colleagues. Loyalty does not come easily. Be frank and express your feelings without holding back. This will show your attachment to the team. It will weld the different members together and generate additional strength.

The practical aspects mentioned above are valid for both team members and team leader. Maybe you are thinking: "It's my boss who should be doing this or creating the framework within which this is possible." If so, you are partly right. Why only in part? Because you, too, have responsibilities and autonomy.

The notion of responsibility
It is interesting that ideas about leadership often revolve around the notion of "responsibility".

In terms of its etymology, the term responsibility can be analysed on two levels:

As deriving from the Latin verb *respondere*, meaning to respond, responsibility can be defined as "the obligation to account for one's actions before an authority".

A deeper analysis of the verb *respondere* takes us to its root, *spondere*, which also gives the terms *sponsio* (promise/engagement) and *sponsa* (fiancée). In *spondere*, we therefore encounter the ideas of promising, committing and acting as guarantor. A responsible person is a person you can rely on, because they are able to take command, ensure the good outcome of a situation. They are in control of their actions. And, thanks to this ability, they are able to be accountable to someone else.

So, applying this double etymology, we can conclude that responsibility flows from a commitment for which – where required – one can be called to account. Being responsible means making known, in words or in writing, what one has to say in reply to a question or comment. Being responsible for my actions, my decisions, therefore means answering questions, saying why and for what purpose I decided to do this or that. It boils down to recognizing them as my own, therefore taking them upon myself.

And this ties up with the notion of autonomy.

Autonomy
Autonomy (from the Greek *autos* = self and *nomos* = law/rule) is the capacity to meet one's own needs, to take responsibility for one's own decisions, while considering one's entourage and environment.

In moral philosophy, autonomy is the capacity to act on one's own, setting one's own rules of behaviour, one's own law. Autonomy is similar in meaning to freedom: the capacity to decide something for oneself, without being dominated by natural or collective tendencies, or being slavishly dominated by an external authority.

If there is to be team spirit, each member must assume responsibility, accept his or her obligations. Depending on a person's degree of autonomy, these obligations will be more or less burdensome. But everyone has to take them on! If there is to be team spirit, **each individual** must assume **responsibility**.

This leads to my final point and my conclusion.

When deciding on rules of behaviour for a team, I would strongly advise you to speak in terms of "**I**", rather than "we". "We" may foster a sense of belonging to the group but reduces the individual's sense of responsibility.

If you say: "We have taken this decision", who then is responsible for errors, mistakes and problems? Who will bear the consequences, and not shift the blame onto others?

In such circumstances, "**I**" is much more positive and appropriate.

Focus on team spirit, make your own contribution to it, and you will find that trust and solidarity blossom and flourish.

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