



Dear Friend,

An Interesting Invitation

As I closed out my freshman year in high school, I got an interesting invitation from several of the guys on the football and basketball teams. Get your mind out of the gutter! They wanted me to try out for the cheerleading squad.

So, after I stopped rolling on the floor with laughter, and after searching for Allen Funt (because, surely, I was on *Candid Camera*), I decided to hear the rationale of these "friends" (and, by this point, believe me, I was using that term loosely).

If you can imagine it, though, these teenage boys actually had a couple of good arguments for why cheerleading should be my latest adventure. They reasoned that the squad could use some color (and, clearly I could supply that). It also needed someone who understood sports. (You see, we'd cringed in embarrassment more than once when hearing the strains of "Block that kick!" coming from the field...only we were doing the kicking!) Good points, I had to admit, but they'd neglected perhaps the biggest factor -- I lacked coordination (and, last time I'd checked, that was critical for a cheerleader).

Nonetheless, to keep the peace, I tried out. And, to my amazement (and that of my parents), I made it. So, now add "Miss Two Left Feet" to the mix, and just picture the motley crew that resulted.

But, apparently, someone had a grander scheme in mind. This "interesting" bunch got a few other new additions that filled key gaps. It also got a new coach -- one who understood sports, and people, and identifying strengths, and structure, and training. And, believe it or not, that squad that was pretty much the laughing stock of the county in the beginning actually placed third in a countywide cheerleading competition by my senior year...and, did so with "Miss Two Left Feet" as captain. Go figure....

I share that story because we have teams all around us -- at work, at church, in volunteer settings, you name it. I also share it because, quite honestly, I've got teams on my mind. You see, I've worked quite a bit lately with groups in team planning, and team building, and even team fixing. So, I wanted to offer some thoughts, in this month's *EA Insights*, on what's behind winning teams. I hope you find this information helpful as you support your own team -- whatever your role.

All the best,

June

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Winning Teams

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Everybody wants a winning team. After all, there aren't many people who will boast, "Yes, I'm a part of a dysfunctional, barely producing group!"

So, whether you're the convener, the leader, or a member, if a team that's effective and well-functioning is what you're after, how do you get it? Here are some thoughts.

Choose well.

Choosing well doesn't mean selecting your team the way most people chose up sides in sports as kids. It's not about picking all of the best players quickly, and

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"Quotes"

"Teamwork is no accident. It is the by-product of good leadership."

~John Adair

"Without teamwork, you're doomed to mediocre results."

~Jeffrey Benjamin

"There are plenty of teams in every sport that have great players and never win titles. Most of the time, those players aren't willing to sacrifice for the greater good of the team. The funny thing is, in the end, their unwillingness to sacrifice only makes individual goals more difficult to achieve. One thing I believe to the fullest is that, if you think and achieve as a team, the individual accolades will take care of themselves. Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships."

~Michael Jordan

then figuring out how to do as little damage as possible with the scrubs that remain. (Hey, I was a scrub for most of my childhood; so, I can say that.)

Rather, choosing well means getting a good grasp of the job that is to be done -- not just the outcome expected, but all of the pieces that go into pulling it off and the skills required to do so. It means getting a good handle on the potential team members, matching people's strengths with the functions to be performed, and seeking to find the right mesh of personalities and styles to work together.

Have and understand a common purpose.

Let's be honest. It's hard for a team to function effectively, when people are moving in different directions. If the task is X, but one team member thinks it's R, and another insists that it's Q, and a third wants it to be Z, what do you end up with? You get an RQZ mess!

It's up to the team convener and leader to create a clear message regarding the task, its purpose, its level of effort, its intended timeframe, and any other parameters. And, it's up to that duo to communicate that message, not just at the beginning of the team's work, but throughout the group's time together -- continually reinforcing what is to be accomplished, and why, and how, and when, and by whom so that it's all ingrained and second-nature.

Team members have roles regarding purpose as well. Each team member must venture to understand the message, actively seeking clarification when unclear. Team members also must choose to discard personal agendas, perhaps temporarily, and to embrace the common purpose to be accomplished at this time. The team won't function smoothly otherwise.



Know and value each other.

Have you ever been on a team that had some people who held others in utter disdain? So, how did that work out? You may have gotten the job done...maybe..., but it had to have been absolute torture -- whether you were one of the disdainers or one of the disdained.

Teams work best when the members understand, first, that they all were selected. (No, certain people didn't just come along with the furniture!) Second, individual team member value goes up when folks understand the expertise and strengths that each person contributes to the task. And, third, the team's ability to work together increases exponentially when people get to know each other -- breaking down preconceptions, understanding behaviors, becoming sensitive to needs, developing respect and trust. Team conveners, team leaders, and individual team members all contribute to the "knowing and valuing" piece, and often coaching and/or facilitated sessions are useful in enhancing this aspect of teamwork.

Commit to getting the job done together.

On winning teams, each member commits to doing what it takes to get the job done...together. Although they are aware of the particular strengths that were the basis for their individual selection, true team members are willing, when appropriate, to come "out of role" and to pitch in where needed in order to accomplish the purpose. They recognize that they can carry out together far more than any one of them can achieve alone.



As noted above, getting the job done may mean postponing your own agenda in order to accomplish the greater good. It may mean checking your ego at the door and pushing a broom or answering the phones after your chore is done because everyone else is tied up at the moment. It may mean sharing your resources (financial, human, or other) with a team member in order to achieve the goal, knowing that your team member has your back and will reciprocate if and when needed.

This type of commitment does not occur easily and requires trust. But, trust doesn't just appear on Day 1. It is developed over time as the group gets to know, to value, to comfortably rely on, and eventually to commit to one another as well as to the accomplishment of the underlying purpose.

Winning teams don't just happen. They take planning and effort. But, when they work, the results are the best return on investment that anyone could possibly want.

"Our teamwork, with each of us coming from different disciplines, is what made the creation of this product possible."

~Paul Meyer

"One of the main goals ... is teamwork. We really talk about this often during our practices. I always tell them to have fun and show everyone else how you all can shine in your very own way too."

~Shannon Miller

"The best teamwork comes from men who are working independently toward one goal in unison."

~James Cash (J.C.) Penney

"Unity is strength... when there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved."

~Mattie Stepanek

"Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision, the ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results."

~Unknown

About Executive Advantage

At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

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