

Team Players and Lone Rangers

This chapter is not about how to lead a team. Every person who aspires to be a team leader first needs to learn how to succeed as a team member. We will not even be using the term Team Player because this is not something we can afford to “play.” We need to participate in a much more meaningful way.

What Can I Do to Support Others on the Team?

Hopefully within your Mission there is a place for teams. There is no way “lone rangers” can make it in ministry (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10). Even Jesus had a team. Teams give support. Proverbs 15:22 connects success with working with others. The effort of developing a good team is a way of preserving unity in the workplace. Not only can a team promote the preservation of unity, but also unity is the foundation for good functioning of the team. Unity of purpose means that each person knows and agrees on the overall purpose. An identified common goal allows the team to move forward. If an individual has a goal of “I want to be a VIP,” he does not belong in the ministry.

A great advantage of having teams is that the individuals making up the team have a variety of gifts and skills. A huge problem in building teams is that the individuals making up the team have a variety of opinions and levels of maturity!

Teams require a good level of communication, and often communication improves out of the necessity of functioning as a team. Not only is the giving of information to those who “need to know” most important, good communication means I am on a two-way street and I am listening to others, seeking input from them.

Good teams mean there is delegation of responsibility and authority. Everyone knows who is responsible for what. When mission staff are left in the dark, misunderstood, or confused, the ministry and the staff suffer.

Logistically, every team needs an agreed-upon leader and a willing, capable note-taker. These may change from time to time in the team, but should never be eliminated or ignored. After every team meeting, clarify and repeat decisions made together.

Scripture Says It All

What does it take to be a team member? The characteristics of a good team member are identical with the characteristics of a mature Christian.

Taking ownership of responsibility is crucial. Blame-shifting has no place. When failure occurs because of someone else, there is no benefit in being the team police officer.

Humility is the desired characteristic. Bragging will not work. Everyone knows who is responsible for success. When people do not recognize your contribution, you can take great comfort, since God tends

to reward those who do not shop for accolades from fellow humans. (See the principle stated in Matthew 6:1-4).

Turf-guarding is poison in a ministry. Look at the way the Trinity functions (John 17:21). God sets the example for us earthlings. Jealousy and competition within the workplace are destructive. Self-promotion is not necessary if you know God is in control and the One to receive the glory.

It is quite easy to read this material and be thinking of others in the organization. Please stop. The only way the ministry improves is as each one looks at himself or herself, and is willing to do some personal evaluation. How do I improve as a team member? Since the Holy Spirit dwells in believers and you are a believer, check out these Scriptures for a spiritual growth challenge:

Philippians 2:14 "Do all things without grumbling or disputing."

Proverbs 15:1 "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

Proverbs 16:28 "A perverse man spreads strife, and a slanderer separates intimate friends."

Proverbs 17:14 "The beginning of strife is *like* letting out water, so abandon the quarrel before it breaks out."

Proverbs 20:3 "Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, but any fool will quarrel."

Proverbs 18:9(NIV) "Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys."

Hypocrisy, pride, self-promotion, laziness, and strife, may work for Lone Rangers or Superstar Wannabees but they do not work as characteristics of ministry team members. Team members help each other. When a need is observed, they step up to the plate to help.



- No place here for attack-dog mentality. Excuses aren't necessary. If you are the new kid on the block, you do not need to use your novice status to lower expectations of your input. Paul had some strong words for his mentee Timothy: "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12).

"Eliminate criticizing, complaining, condemning from your speech, your thinking, and your actions." - Dale Carnegie

Unity in the Workplace

Who said that working in Christian ministry ensures that everyone is perfect in interactions with each other? No way. The advantage we have over secular organizations and businesses is that each of the staff we interact with has an Authority in his or her life, and that Authority sets standards for His children's interactions with each other. It is that higher standard that becomes the guideline for our interaction. Of even greater advantage is the Holy Spirit living within us, directing us toward unity. He is the author of unity. Ephesians. 4:3 does not instruct us to invent or create unity. We are to "Keep," "Maintain," and "Preserve" the unity of the Spirit. He manufactures it and we keep it.

Perhaps it is easiest to define unity in the workplace by defining what it is not. Unity has never meant agreement at all cost. Sometimes I have to come to a point of acceptance of something I disagree with, but never does a variety of opinions have to translate into automatic disunity. It is normal and healthy in an organization or ministry that ideas are presented and discussed before decisions are made. The key to this being a working practice in Rescue Missions is the initial agreement of the beliefs and values of the Mission. When I am employed in the ministry, I must be certain the goals and purpose of the organization are scriptural and godly and ones that I agree with.

Does this mean that I must never offer counter suggestions to practices with which I come to disagree? When do I actively negotiate or appeal for change to practices that I begin to object to? I do not become a staff person in order to change an organization. It is important to be part of the ministry for a year before I fixate on changes that I want to see. You may be quite surprised to see how your views change over the year. You also may discover that such changes were tried already unsuccessfully.

Change comes slowly in a large organization for good reasons. Major changes need to be blanketed in prayer for wisdom. What does not change is the purpose God has given to the organization.

Think through what is the meaning when the Scripture talks about being in "one accord." Philippians 2:2 indicates that it is being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit, and of one mind. Apparently, this verse also shows that we can affect each other's joy when we participate in unity with others.

Scripture also states what causes disunity and conflict. James 4:1 links fights and quarrels with selfish desires, our human practice of one-upmanship, our need to have our own way all the time at all cost. A very important lesson I learned early on was there was no room for offense in the ministry. I personally believe that I am never to see myself as offended.

Proverbs 19:11 (ESV)

**"Good sense makes one slow to anger,
and it is his glory to overlook an offense."**

If I take on the "right" to be offended by others, I will also be presented with the temptation to engage in murmuring, disputing, and gossiping. I will have a challenge to continue to love unconditionally. This

victim mentality does not fit who we are in Christ. When I am tempted to feel offended by one of my brothers or sisters in ministry, I go back and review Hebrews 12, where I am exhorted to consider Jesus who put up with much more than I ever will encounter.

Another huge attack on unity in the ministry workplace is when I find myself with a critical spirit, seeing my brother or sister in the worst possible light. I learned the pain and destruction that comes from that practice. According to Revelation 12:10, the enemy is the daily accuser of the brethren, and I must not be on his side. I follow Jesus, and His position is clearly stated. In the daily heavenly warfare, let me never be on the side of the enemy.

Romans 8:34 (NIV)

“Who then is the one who condemns? No one.

**Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—
is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”**

Thankfully, Scripture includes the good, the bad and the ugly for our edification. Unity was not an easy life-style for many. Consider what happened to Paul and Silas when they experienced disagreement over John Mark. “They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company” (Acts 15:39 (NIV)). (Please also note that this disagreement did not have lasting effect when you see that Paul had wonderful statements to make about John Mark in Colossians, where he refers to Mark as a “fellow laborer,” and in 2 Timothy 4:11 where he says that Mark is “useful to me for service.”

Where disunity starts to fester and grow, we have the ministry of reconciliation, 2 Corinthians 5:18. I have the responsibility in the workplace to be a peacemaker. When given the opportunity, I can help others to resolve conflict. I learn not to take sides but to work as a truth-teller and a mediator.

Be careful to guard against misunderstandings. Many a conflict begins with a simple lack of communication or miscommunication. Rather than making assumptions, ask questions.

Hebrews 12:14-15 (ESV) “Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.”

Romans 12:17-19 (ESV) “Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’”

***Lord, help me to take every opportunity
to preserve the unity in the mission community
to honor You.***

Establishing Respect in the Workplace

Everyone wants respect. We have spent time in this book talking about showing respect to the client. Let's talk about your contribution to a culture of respect in your own workplace. Respect is one of those things that connects a person with another. Respect, as discussed in the Scripture, is in the context of agape love. Many people believe that they give respect to those who give them respect. No, in ministry, respect is not a reciprocal action. I respect you because you are made by the Creator God whom I serve, and because He paid a huge price for you. It has nothing to do with what you did or said. God has earned my respect and He expects me to share it with others.

Our definition of respect has often been clouded with other characteristics like admiration, fear, or envy. Putting others on a pedestal is not the scriptural definition of respect. We are even told to not give special attention to the man wearing fine clothes (James 2:3-4).

Fortunately, the chapter on respecting the client came before this chapter. If you are more concerned with being respected than being respectful, you have a problem. The golden rule (Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31) of doing unto others what you want yourself is a God-directed mandate for success. Once you struggle through the responsibility of respecting others, you are much less demanding of respect for yourself. I have come to the place after years of such struggle to understand that I only seek God's respect, and that is more than sufficient.

You see, respect in the workplace begins with me. Think about it. If the staff around you are dependent on getting their respect- bucket filled each day with responses from the clients, how filled do you suppose they will be? Respect is a great gift to give to fellow staff. Remember, it is a gift, and a true gift is not something that is earned.

There are several basic ways to promote a culture of respect in your workplace. One key practice is to refrain completely from gossip. Gossip is best defined as speaking evil of a person, whether that evil is true or not. Gossip comes from the desire to put someone else in a negative light, defame their reputation, or cause ridicule. One minute of gossip in the workplace can destroy weeks of respect. Of course, there is no such thing as one minute of gossip, since it never stops there.

Be willing to be vulnerable. When you are having a difficult day, rather than barking at other staff, simply tell them that you are standing in the need of prayer to make it through. And sometimes when you see other staff doing the barking, just be willing to pray silently for them instead of being critical.

People tend to feel respected in different ways. As you build teammanship, you begin to get to know the other staff. Some will respond best when you are willing to listen to them without an instantly negative response. Others will seem to wait for you to be interested enough to ask them for their opinion. I have known staff who felt disrespected if I did not acknowledge them when I walked into their presence. That is a matter of courtesy. But if you are not raised to practice such a habit, you will want to put it on your to-do list!

The culture of respect in the ministry workplace is best developed when each of us has the same desire as Jesus, who seemed to always want others to succeed. Are we willing to be like Paul when he modeled his admonition in Philippians 2:3(NIV)? “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.” If we busy ourselves with trying to help others succeed and look good, we will be amazed at the joy and real success we ourselves experience.

Let’s talk about self-respect. Sometimes we spend time putting ourselves down in our thoughts, speech, and actions, which must bring sadness to our Maker. Unfortunately, our lack of respect for others can come because we have developed a storage bin of self-disrespect. The opposite is also true. If we think too highly of ourselves, we become critical of others.

Perhaps the most important part of this discussion is, how do you resist building walls, or maintaining offense, when you have experienced disrespect? This is most important, not only for your own outlook and joy, but also for the impact you will have on others. Have you heard the expression, “Give them the benefit of the doubt?” It was an idiom in the mid-1800’s and needs to be revived today! Regard someone as innocent until proven otherwise; lean toward a favorable view of someone; believe something good about someone rather than something bad, when you have the possibility of doing either.

Complaining and murmuring were both ways the Israelites showed their lack of respect for God and for the leader He gave them. We best learn from their mistakes.

So much wrong happens when we make assumptions. Research the issue. Ask the perpetrator what they meant when they said or did something. In a loving way, give them a chance to see how it affected you. I have been greatly blessed when someone has come to me and asked me what I meant when I said something that seemed offensive to them, giving me the chance to make the situation right.

Love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:7). Leon Morris defines the phrase, “Believes all things” as, “To see the best in others...This does not mean that love is gullible, but that it does not think the worst (as is the way of the world). It retains its faith. Love is not deceived...but it is always ready to give the benefit of the doubt.” - *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*.

Finally, I recommend you look for ways to verbally show respect to other staff. Have they done something that blessed you? Did you tell them? Have you ever told one of them that you were glad they worked here? You can do this even with those with whom you have difficulty relating. I once honestly told a person I was glad I worked with him, but did not finish the sentence to say that I knew God was using him in my life to teach me some tough stuff! Look for ways to respect others. You will be amazed when you look at their good qualities. God gives different gifts and abilities to different folks. Can I appreciate the variety and respect the contribution? The best answer I know to conflict is each one exercising respect.

The culture of respect in the workplace...will you be part of the solution?

1 Peter 3:8 (NIV) “Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.”