

The “I” in Team!

We have all heard the saying there is no “I” in team. I think that really originated when it was recognized that sometimes an individual’s ego can get in the way of the success of the team. When one player’s goals or need to feel good about themselves seems to become more important than winning, the team loses. It makes some sense from that perspective that focusing on “me” or “I” can be detrimental to the team.

Recently Shelley MacDougall and I did a CMI program with the New England Chapter that focused on Extraordinary Leadership. We were talking about Extraordinary Vision, Communication, Standards and Teams. Near the end of the section on teams the room was broken into small groups and asked “What things get in the way of your team being Extraordinary?”

There was some great discussion and it resulted in a great list of obstacles that could be addressed to dramatically improve the effectiveness of a team. It was interesting that a few club managers said that the thing that gets in the way of my team being Extraordinary is “Me”.

Albert Einstein once said “To solve any significant problem we need to employ a different level of thinking than we used to create it.” Of course this is difficult for many people to imagine that they had any role in the creation of a problem. These particular managers got the concept. Instead of pointing the finger and identifying the various challenges they took ownership of many of the issues that might be keeping the team from winning.

When we ask managers who get this awareness how they get in the way of the team’s success they tell us some of the following things.

“I realize I haven’t done a great job at articulating the vision for the players on my team!” This is an incredible awareness. We notice that a lot of leaders don’t do a great job of this almost as if they expect that people should just know where the team is going and what is important. When a leader doesn’t do an effective job of painting the picture of where the team is going they don’t take advantage of the powerful energy that comes from a shared vision. Instead they spend a lot of their time trying to reel in the people who are going off in their own direction. Some managers realize they don’t have a vision. Others have one and realize they haven’t communicated it. Some mention that they have communicated the vision but now realize that communicating it once is not enough. They conclude it needs to be communicated constantly.

“I need to play a bigger role in drafting the team!” Many managers identified the quality of the team members as an issue that gets in the way. The realization that they could play a stronger role in selecting and orienting the players was seen as an idea that could make a significant difference. In a case where the manager inherited some questionable players they realized that they may need to do some serious coaching to get those players game ready.

“I need to make sure that each player is clear about their role and the part they play in the team’s success.” Making sure there is no uncertainty about what the player is supposed to do and defining what good behavior looks like is a simple way to help the individual player win along with the team. The leader’s job is to let the player know how they are accountable for the team’s success.

“In addition to not telling them what good performance looks like, I haven’t let them know what Extraordinary performance looks like.” Sometimes in the leaders role as coach they need to set the target a little higher than the player knows they can achieve. As the leader helps the player discover new levels of achievement the team changes.

“I have tolerated players that have their own agenda and don’t have the team’s interest in mind.” Some times we tolerate things because we are afraid of what might happen if we don’t. Some times we tolerate things because we think we might have a bigger problem if we don’t. Regardless of the reason why we tolerate things we pay a price when we do and often the team pays a big price as well.

“How can the players be confident to make decisions if they don’t know what our values are?” On teams where all the members of the team have shared values then individual players have license to make decisions to help the team win as long as they are in alignment with the values of team. Many of the teams we work with create these values together instead of just having them handed down.

“Sometimes I am not a great example of what I am asking my people to be.” This may be difficult for some leaders to see but modeling the kind of behaviors or attitudes you want to see from your people is critical. Everyone is watching. If living to a high standard is important to the leader it might be important to those following. If living to a high standard is not important to the leader there is little chance it will be important to the team.

Just wearing the same jerseys doesn’t make a team.

The saying “There is no “I” in team” really cautions against the ego of one person on the team thinking they are above the others. On the other hand if the leader takes accountability for thoughts, actions and beliefs that impact the team it can make a huge difference. Just think what would happen if every player on the team could do the same!