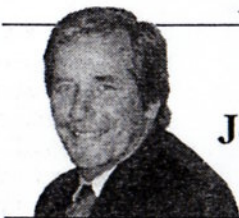


SAILING TOWARD BETTER BUSINESS TEAMS

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A frequent criticism of corporate team-building programs is that there is too much talk and not enough action.

Participants need challenging activities that explore and extend their capabilities, both as individuals and as members of a team. One of the best ways to do that is on-board a high performance racing yacht.

What are the parallels between sailing and business? They both have two main requirements for success: Coordinated efforts and action among all team members; and agreed-upon strategy undertaken with enthusiasm and the flexibility to change tactics, if necessary.

Typically, when co-workers are placed on a sailboat they are in a foreign environment, one that has an intimidating reputation. They don't have their usual tools and resources and are asked to navigate a compli-

cated piece of equipment without the weeks or years of experience a sailor would normally require to be successful.

Instead, they must rely on the collective wisdom of the team. They must trust each other to step up, execute and keep the emotional state of the team positive. They must tolerate mistakes with patience and celebrate successes with cheerleading.

From a vessel handling perspective, it is the quintessential team sport, having more to do with knowledge, dialogue, trust and mutual reliance than many other sports or team-building activities.

Sailing a boat requires split-second timing between all members of a crew as the sails must be handled in exact concert with the steering of the boat. Sails work only at precise angles and in precise shapes and must be constantly adjusted for changes in the direction of the boat and direction or strength of the wind.

Lastly, there is a strong parallel to the marketplace. The sailing environment is subtle, hard to visualize and constantly changing. Success requires operating several steps ahead. It also requires extraordinary flexibility.

The actions of other vessels and,

more importantly, the unexpected changes of Mother Nature require constant tactical adjustments. The wind over the water, upon which the boat relies for its forward speed, changes in velocity and direction minute by minute.

Sailors must look for tangential clues, or rely on metrics, to determine the environment in which they are operating. More importantly, they must look ahead to anticipate the wind and tidal currents to come.

If you ever have watched the America's Cup races on television, you will understand what I mean. Although things are fairly quiet, there is a constant, calm chatter among team members to keep the boat tuned and fast every possible second.

The most functional businesses operate with the same calm level of information transfer, discussion, brainstorming and coordinated effort to accomplish a goal.

Whether on land or water, a good team-building program meets several requirements:

- Desired behaviors must be understandable, compelling and actionable to gain acceptance. Furthermore, it must be clear to participants which desired behaviors are

missing or at least not being performed at the highest levels.

- The impact of the experience must be powerful. Team members enter the exercise as equals faced with a common goal. They must exhibit trustful behaviors, two-way dialogue and a willingness to subvert their own interests for those of the team.

- Most importantly, the momentum for behavior change must extend past the event. The greatest concern of managers is the transfer back to more productivity in the workplace. With impactful experiences, brief follow-ups and check-ins, the team receives the reiteration that all human beings need for real learning and behavior change.

Success on a sailboat requires a vision and strategy, honest dialogue, trust in each other's abilities and intentions, and encouragement among team members.

These lessons carry back directly to the workplace in leadership, productivity and communication.

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