



Topics

On Side, Off Side 1

On Side, Off Side 2

Idle minds are the devil's playground

In Our Own Image

Overcoming Shyness

Traps for young (and old) players

Au contraire

Motivation. It's the name of the game.



On Side, Off Side 1

‘One of the greatest diseases is to be nobody to anybody’

Mother Theresa, Roman Catholic nun and humanitarian, *Reader's Digest*, December, 1987

Here is a simple enough concept to carry around in that concept overloaded brain of yours. In relationships with the people in your team, think about keeping them ‘on side’ or getting them ‘off side’. It helps to put your-self in the shoes of others. We know you are a great man or woman and that you have never done anything to upset another person, but how do people really see you?

What is it about you that gets people ‘on side’ or ‘off side’? We are still invoking the powerful adage here, “Know thyself”. Let’s focus on raising your awareness about ‘off side’ characteristics so you can begin to eliminate them or modify them. Make a list of your most unhelpful liabilities and ask somebody who knows you well to comment. Here are some ideas to help.

Ways to get people ‘off side’:

- ❑ Talk to them as if they have inferior knowledge to you.
- ❑ Ignore their opinions when decisions are made or action is taken.
- ❑ Speak as if you are always right.
- ❑ Speak over them when they are talking.
- ❑ Feign interest in what they are saying.
- ❑ Ridicule them in public.
- ❑ Show that you care only about your needs, wants and interests.
- ❑ Make promises to people without delivering.
- ❑ Say whatever you think that the other person wants to hear without any sincerity.
- ❑ Take the credit for their work.
- ❑ Act as though you can be trusted but discuss confidentialities with others.
- ❑ Dump your pent up emotions on them for no real reason connected to them.
- ❑ Exaggerate your own importance or achievements.
- ❑ Never back down or acknowledge it when you are wrong.
- ❑ Monopolise the conversation by talking incessantly without letting the other person speak with equal air time.
- ❑ Allow the other person to speak and then carry on as if they had said nothing.

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- ❑ Exaggerate facts about your life to appear to have lead a far more exciting or interesting life than you have.
- ❑ Be an habitual liar.
- ❑ Don't allow that other people's opinions could be better than your own.
- ❑ Show no awareness for the thoughts and feelings of others except where they agree with yours.
- ❑ Treat people with contempt if they appear to have less knowledge than you.
- ❑ Look to make humour from other people's imperfections.
- ❑ Show no interest in or contempt for the ideas of others.
- ❑ Foster relationships with people only when they can further your own interests.
- ❑ Act as if you are the font of all knowledge and wisdom.
- ❑ Talk incessantly about yourself.
- ❑ Judge other people and express those judgements.
- ❑ Let any bitterness, anger or frustration you have with your own unmet wants or desires show in your tone, facial expressions or ways you respond to other peoples' imperfections. The problem with getting people 'off side' is that many people will hide their true feelings. But these feelings will manifest in other ways which will not be helpful and will undermine team morale.



On Side, Off Side 2

‘Treat others as ends, never as means.’

Dag Hammarskjöld, 1905-1961, Secretary-General of the United Nations

Keeping people ‘on side’ means keeping people on your side – ‘for you’ as opposed to ‘against you’. Realistically, you won’t keep all your team members ‘on side’ all of the time. But your life as a manager will be less stressful if more of your people are for you than are against you.

Here are some ways leaders of high performance teams act to keep people ‘on side’:

- ❑ Acknowledge it when you are wrong.
- ❑ Apologise when you make a mistake.
- ❑ Ask people about things that are happening in their world.
- ❑ Let people know that you appreciate the little things.
- ❑ Acknowledge right efforts even when the results are not quite right.
- ❑ Talk to people as equal human beings.
- ❑ Acknowledge your own imperfections.
- ❑ Explain why something is important to you.
- ❑ Give people your undivided attention when they are talking to you.
- ❑ Look for and express the silver lining behind every cloud.
- ❑ Laugh at yourself.
- ❑ Display courtesy to all even those who don’t deserve it.
- ❑ Acknowledge it if you are angry or frustrated or feeling low.
- ❑ Welcome people into your presence with a smile, even the wankers – that will upset them more than a smart rebuke.
- ❑ Challenge bullies, manipulators, distorters, exaggerators, whingers, critics, sycophants, and stirrers, et al. (It won’t keep these types ‘on side’ but it will keep the rest of your people ‘on side’.)
- ❑ Show that problems are opportunities to make something better.
- ❑ Acknowledge the contribution that others make or the source of good ideas when they are not your own.
- ❑ Say that you don’t know when you don’t know.
- ❑ Practice responding not reacting to things people say with which you disagree.
- ❑ Show realistic humility.
- ❑ Avoid judging people. Just describe things factually as they happened without attaching labels or adjectives to the person.

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- ❑ Reason with people but stick to your convictions until you become better informed.
- ❑ Look for the best argument not to win the argument.
- ❑ Give them cash and expensive gifts (Huh? No. Not really. Just checking to see if you are still paying attention).
- ❑ Always demonstrate a 'can do' attitude.
- ❑ Explain your rationale behind unpopular decisions.
- ❑ Acknowledge the assets and liabilities of your personal style. (You will have them and they will experience them).
- ❑ Let other people have a win occasionally even when you are better informed.
- ❑ Show people that you have considered their needs, wants and interests.
- ❑ Respond to the themes of people's conversations to show that you were listening to them.
- ❑ Use 'please' and 'thank you' frequently and with sincerity.
- ❑ Never embarrass people. Allow people to 'save face' – it is very important.



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Idle minds are the devil's playground

(Referring to the office 'grapevine') With the rapidity of a burning powder train, information flows like magic out of the woodwork, past the water fountain, past the manager's door, past the janitor's mop closet. As elusive as a summer zephyr, it filters through steel walls, bulkheads, or construction glass partitions, from the sub-basement to the rafters, from office boy to executive....It carries good news and bad, fact as well as fancy, without discrimination. It cares nothing for reputation, nothing about civil rights; it will carve up and serve the big brass, the shop foreman, and the stenographer with fine impartiality.

Joseph K. Shephard, Journalist, *Leadership in the Office*, (AMACOM 1963)

We have written at length about the necessity of thoroughly briefing and de-briefing people who are taken off the job to participate in formal management training (see *Developing People*). What about those who aren't involved - the rest of the people who make up the team? In the absence of accurate information, any mischief makers will spread their destructive comments and do their best to foster suspicion. The 'grapevine' will be flourishing and spreading its counterproductive 'grapes' everywhere.

(In fact, one of the reasons why there is a problem with the transfer of learning from the training room into application in the workplace is because the participants 'fear' the reactions from other people).

I was working with a group of nine people with the aim of improving leadership. During one session, a few of the team leaders expressed their annoyance at the attitude of the people in their team who were not part of this learning process. They said that they had to put up with derisive remarks and ridicule from some of these people on returning to the workplace. They found this off-putting, counter-productive and unnecessary. This made it harder for them to put into practice the desired or required leadership actions agreed to as part of the process.

Even though the actions they were taking with their team were in the best interests of the team, they still experienced low cooperation and ridicule from some of their people.



Context / Information for those left behind

It will produce more positives than negatives to hold a session with the uninvolved people and discuss these sorts of issues:

- ☐ Why are we doing this?
- ☐ What is the purpose?
- ☐ What is the training connected to?
- ☐ What is the rationale?
- ☐ What is the background that has led to this process being undertaken?
- ☐ What are the areas of focus for this process - the content of the program?
- ☐ When and where and how often we will be doing this?
- ☐ How will we be attempting to apply the learnings from this process?
- ☐ How you will be involved.
- ☐ How could you benefit?
- ☐ The support we would like from you to help us improve the quality of work life for all of us.
- ☐ Any concerns or issues that the people who are not taking part in the training may want to raise.

They won't fully understand the process you are going through, but the fact you took the time to include them will make it worthwhile. You will still probably get a couple of mischief makers trying their best to sabotage the training, but their mischief making will fall on less fertile ground.



In Our Own Image

'We try to anticipate some of your questions so that I can respond "no comment" with some degree of knowledge.'

William Baker, Spokesman, CIA, Newsweek, May 2, 1988.

'A good name is like a precious ointment; it filleth all around about, and will not easily away; for the odors of ointments are more durable than those of flowers.'

Francis Bacon, 1561-1626, Lord Chancellor of England, *Of Praise*.

What is the image of your team in the broader organisation? Many teams rely heavily on the support of other teams to help them function effectively. The extent and usefulness of that support from others can be affected by your team's image within your organisation.

Other teams enjoy interacting with a high performance team. They know that they can be relied on to deliver products, services and information on time and to the required standard. High performance teams engender better cooperation and collaboration from others with whom they have a relationship.

Would you like to start working on improving the image of your team within the organisation? No? Then on your bike. Yes? Read on.

Convene a session with your team with the purpose of exploring perceptions of our image within the organisation. Use these issues to stimulate discussion around actions to put into place to improve our image, if required. (Not listed in any particular order).

- ☐ Agree the reasons why we need to improve our image.
- ☐ Explain the connection between the cooperation and support we get from others and our image.
- ☐ Explain the connection between reduced stress levels, increased job satisfaction and a good team image.
- ☐ Agree incidents and behaviours which give us a bad image.
- ☐ Agree the causes of these incidents or behaviours.
- ☐ Agree the actions and attitudes which promote a good image in the eyes of others.
- ☐ Agree the things we can do to improve our image.
- ☐ Identify ways to involve the people outside our team in ways to improve our image.
- ☐ Identify any policies, systems and procedures which have an adverse

Develop High-Performance Teams



- affect on our image which need to be improved.
- Seek opportunities to explain to client and supplier teams what we are trying to do and how we are trying to help them.
- Ask our internal clients and internal suppliers how we can improve our image.
- Develop skills in non-confrontational conflict resolution techniques when we have a conflict with another team.
- Participate in company social activities.
- Acknowledge and thank other areas when they have helped us.
- Train staff in ways to improve our image.
- Coach offending staff in better ways to deal with other teams or individuals.
- Practise responding not reacting to conflict situations.
- Discuss within the team the best ways to implement required changes to the way we do things that will improve our image.
- Check that the new changes now become a standard practice for relations with other areas.
- Acknowledge and support team members who actively promote our team in a positive way.
- Counsel/discipline staff who continue to create a bad image.
- Establish a formal communication liaison with other areas to monitor mutual cooperation and collaboration.
- Discuss and implement new, different and better ways to help us improve our image



Overcoming Shyness

Empty vessels make the most noise – Proverb.

In any group situation there are often a number of people who don't contribute much of value to the discussion. That may not be a problem if they are happy to commit to the proposal or decision. However, if their contribution is necessary to the quality of the decision or outcome and to the implementation of same, then we need to get their real thoughts and feelings.

High performance teams have an even contribution from all team members.

Why don't people speak out in a group discussion? Some of the reasons are:

- Fear of repercussions
- A desire to 'cruise' through the discussion
- Shyness or lack of confidence in public forums
- Peer pressure - concern about reactions from their work mates.

Let's deal here with two of them – 'cruisers' and shyness.

'Cruisers' are those people who know that there are always a couple of people in the group who will happily dominate the discussion. So they let these people take over the ship while they sit back and cruise. They know that if they wait long enough one of these people or more will jump in and contribute their opinion. Once there are enough other opinions on the table, it is easy for the cruisers to back a point of view without really giving it deep thought, without really engaging with the proposal or the decision, without really testing their true level of commitment to the outcome and the implementation of the outcome.

Shy people are possibly a little less secure in themselves. They find the public exposure of speaking out in a group too painful or embarrassing. In a group situation, shy people find it difficult to express themselves articulately and to their satisfaction because their mind is cluttered with other concerns. It helps if shy people have the time to reflect and you give them a little structure to follow. Doing this will cost you some time, but the benefits will far outweigh the costs.

Take 20 to 30 minutes out of your time set aside for discussion to improve the quality of the discussion. It is simple and it works.

- Issue a one or two page handout to each participant.
- Number and list the critical issues or questions to which you want people to respond.

Develop High-Performance Teams



- Provide lined space under each issue or question – up to 10 lines as a guide – to allow written responses.
- Allow 2-3 minutes reflection and writing time per issue or question.
- Randomly go around the group taking each person's response to each issue or question one at a time. That is, take the first person's response to the first question. Then take the second person's response to the first question. And so on. Then deal with each response to the second question selecting people in a different random order. And so on. (Selecting people at random keeps everybody focused).
- Nominate somebody, maybe yourself, to record the key points of each person's response on a whiteboard or use a data projector.

Now you will find that the shy people will be better able to contribute to the discussion and the cruisers will have to think about the questions and issues for themselves instead of jumping on to someone else's bandwagon.



Traps for young (and old) players

'I was never satisfied with a problem that I understood only partly. I wanted to understand it as completely as I could.'

David Sarnoff, 1891-1971, Founder and President, RCA, *Wisdom of Sarnoff and the World of RCA*

'There is no situation that cannot be made more difficult with just a little bit of effort.'

David Gerrold, Author, *The Galactic Whirlpool* (Bantam, 1980).

'How often have I said to you that when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, *however improbable*, must be the truth?'

Sherlock Holmes (Arthur Conan Doyle), 1859-1930, English physician, writer, and sportsman, *The Sign of Four*.

It is generally accepted these days that it is good practice to involve your team in solving problems. However, a team can still arrive at ineffectual solutions. Here is a simple problem solving process that you can use with your team.

The outcome – **the resolution to a problem** – is most likely to be effective if you use the following steps:

1. Make sure all team members are clear about the issue. Ask people to express their perceptions of the issue and the causes of the problem. Explore differences of perception in a non-judgemental, non-critical and non-threatening manner.
2. Agree what is the desired resolution. Who are all the stakeholders and their needs and what are all the conditions that need to be met?
3. Analyse before solving. The obvious solution may not be the best solution. In fact the best solutions are often not obvious which is why there is a problem in the first place.
4. Brainstorm action ideas. Anything goes. Go for quantity, not quality. Sort out irrelevant or impractical ideas later. Suspend judgement or criticism.



5. Select action ideas. Consider the consequences of each action on the underlying causes and on all stakeholders.
6. Plan a strategy for implementation. List the key activities that will need to happen in any order and then sort them into a logical sequence. Consider also contingency plans for undesirable events occurring. Ask the question, “What could go wrong with our plan?” Agree who will do what, with whom, by when.
7. Monitor implementation and adjust strategy as necessary. Identify the key performance indicators for each key activity and decide how to monitor them – remember that the plan changes as soon as the battle commences.

The traps

- Trap 1** - Getting hung up on words like issue, goal, problem. All goals reflect implicit problems, and all problems and issues reflect implicit goals. It doesn't matter a hell of a lot what terminology you use as long as all of you agree the meaning you are all applying.
- Trap 2** - Arguing about the issue or goal. Instead, inquire into each team member's understanding and then either:
1. Agree on a common issue, or
 2. If you cannot agree soon, split into subgroups.
- Trap 3** – The premature suggestion of solutions before a careful analysis. Careful analysis takes effort and time, hence avoid the desire to quickly jump into solutions. Note for later analysis.
- Trap 4** - Arguing during the information gathering stage. Wait until you have the full story and then argue your heads off (if you must).
- Trap 5** - Endlessly discussing or arguing about unsolvable items or opinions without accurate data.
- Trap 6** - Ranking (that is, first, second, third); instead, choose several forces that can be considered “most” important, several that can be considered “less” important, and several that can be considered “least” important.
- Trap 7** - Working on a task as if you can avoid the maintenance of the team and still expect a good outcome. Focus on resolving the problem and keeping everybody ‘on side’ at the same time.



Au contraire

'Try several solutions at once. Maybe none of them, alone, would solve the problem, but in combination, they do the job.'

Ray Joseph, president, Ray Joseph Associates Inc., Leadership in the Office (Amacom, 1963)

When it comes to the best way to resolve a problem, disagreement is inevitable. It is neither desirable nor undesirable. Disagreement is important to the health of high performance teams. Each of you is different. You will have different values, a different context, different knowledge and information, different perspectives, different interpretations, different needs and wants. You will be likely, therefore, to disagree.

However, a disagreement will be destructive if it is:

Avoided, or

Exclusively argumentative (as expressed in the attitude, 'I disagree and must convince you'). It will be constructive if it is done in an inquiry mode.

Inquiry mode

I disagree and want to find out:

1. Do I understand your viewpoint correctly?
2. What assumptions, opinions or facts do you have that cause you to take that point of view?
3. What information can be requested from available resources to help our inquiry?

In an inquiry mode:

- A. I can paraphrase (repeat to you the meaning-not the exact words-that I received) and ask you to correct my understanding.
- B. I can inquire about your assumptions, opinions or facts. I can invite you to do the same for me.



Restraining forces and supporting forces

Restraining forces are those things acting to create, drive or sustain the problem. Supporting forces are those things acting, or with the potential to act, to resolve the problem.

It is helpful to list restraining forces because these are frequently overlooked. Resolution or improvement will happen when the real restraining forces are reduced or eliminated. Remember that the forces you have listed are opinions and not necessarily facts. Keep asking, 'How can we know whether these forces are really operating?'

Do not assume that your forces are accurate. Check them out or acknowledge that they are private opinions, perhaps incorrect.

Consider a supporting force or forces pushing towards the goal you want. You may want to list such forces and suggest ways to use them to achieve your goal or resolve your issue successfully.

Ask each person in the group to list:

1. restraining forces
2. supporting forces.

Starting with restraining forces, write them on a whiteboard or use a data projector and ask the group to discuss what needs to happen to reduce or eliminate these restraining forces.

Then list supporting forces and get the group to discuss what needs to happen to optimise each supporting force.

Looking at process

The deeply personal and human feelings of being prized or ignored, whether they are influential or not, must be understood to increase the probability of success in a problem-solving situation.

If these feelings are not taken into account, creativity is stifled and problem solving is adversely affected.

Develop High-Performance Teams



You have a task to complete. You are working on the task in a certain way or with a certain process. The two questions you need to ask about the process are:

1. Are the contributions of individuals valued and seen to be valued?
2. Are we avoiding falling into common traps?

Warning: If you want action, do not leave the meeting until you know clearly who will do what, when, how and how you will know it has been done.



Motivation. It's the name of the game.

'Keeping people accurately informed about issues that affect them is essential to motivation.'

Daniel Kehoe

The purpose of this group exercise is to identify ways you can improve the motivation of your team. You can do this on individuals or you can do it on the team. Perhaps a good starting point is to do this on the team as a whole with the option of doing it later on individuals. You do it on the team. Team members do it in relation to themselves.

7 Basic Factors

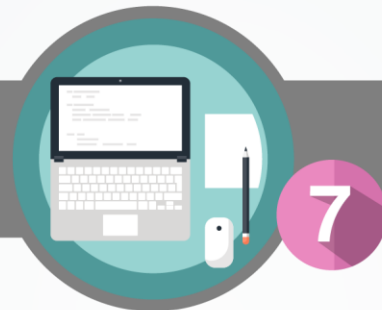
The following questions relate to some of the basic factors which contribute towards high performance teams and getting personal satisfaction from work. Think carefully about each question and circle the appropriate number

Rating scale: Definitely NO 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Definitely YES.

Do you (the team or the individual):

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 1. Understand and accept the purpose of the work you are doing? | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 2. Know the criteria which will be used to measure your performance? | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 3. Have an influence over the planning and organisation of your work? | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 4. Receive timely and accurate information about changes and developments in policy and operations and the rationale for those changes? | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 5. Have opportunities to feedback your thoughts and feelings regarding your work or relationships with others? | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 6. Receive effective feedback on your performance? | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |

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7. Receive encouragement in the form of acknowledgement, praise, recognition or tangible rewards for success?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

- ☐ Give a copy of the questionnaire to each member of your group explaining that you would like to get everybody's opinion on these 7 basic factors which can influence motivation. This will help you decide what needs to be done if people feel that any factors are deficient.
- ☐ You answer the questions from the perspective of the whole group.
- ☐ Your people answer the questions in relation to themselves.

Item	Individual Scores								Avg.

- ☐ Collect the completed questionnaires and record the scores including your score.
- ☐ Add the scores for each item, divide by the number of people to determine the average score and place the total in the 'AVERAGE' column.
- ☐ Convene a session with the group (one hour to start with – you can always hold more sessions if required. Where the average score for you and the group is less than 5, refer to the question for that item and ask the group to reflect on what we could do better in relation to this factor. Allow them 3 minutes to reflect and write responses. Ask for responses and compile an action plan reflecting things you and others will do. Repeat this process for other relevant items.