

## TEAM: There's No "We" in Team but There's a "Me"

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by Dave Piltz

"*There's No 'We' in Team but there's a 'Me'*" stuck with me after hearing it. The fact that teamwork is difficult for many is shown by all the writing and publishing on team development, team building, team dynamics, team conflict management, and team strategy. There are classic writings by Bruce Tuckman on stages of team development and a novel definition of teams from Beatrice Schultz in her book *Communicating in the Small Group: Theory and Practice*. We all have our favorite authors, and if I created the top ten list of "best" books on the subject, there would be little to no agreement.

So what does this mean for creating effective training programs for teams? I've learned to look at groups in different ways and the best way I have found is through the lens of "me". The "me" lens suggests that teams are made up of individuals, a bunch of "me's" all bringing their issues, egos, and personalities along. A model I tend to use both for coaching or working with groups is:

Safety <-----> Acceptance/Belonging <-----> Recognition

Of course, Maslow's Hierarchy is a basis for this model since every one of us deals with safety, acceptance/belonging, and recognition issues. Sometimes the issues are transparent, but most often they are subconscious and can influence our daily behaviors. In a team of 10 there are 10 people, each with issues in these areas, showing how complicated teams and groups really are. Using this model with many groups and individuals has provided insight on ways to create effective and lasting team building programs.

### *Safety*

Safety issues can surface at any time for reasons, such as:

- not being able to pay the mortgage
- the possibility of losing a job
- feeling threatened
- being attacked verbally, emotionally, or physically

As team members we tend to forget the impact we have on others and tend to focus on our own *me* issues. Training programs that create safe places - free of criticism, fear, and resistance - are programs that get team members communicating effectively. Instruments like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or models like Crucial Conversations are examples of useful tools for creating a safe environment for team members to learn about each other and begin to work respectfully through differences.

### *Acceptance/Belonging*

I can't say it any better than the American Express commercials: "*Membership has its*

*privileges!”* How accurate this statement is for groups? When individuals feel they are members, a team is a positive thing, but when they feel like outsiders, not part of the group, a team can be devastating. The issues we bring to groups around acceptance and belonging begin in our childhood. We try to feel accepted and belong - why should it be any different at work? Cliques form easily around those that accept each other and stereotype of others begins.

To build strong teams, it's not good enough to give a team one goal and praise their success. It doesn't happen that way at work – so why do it in a program? Choose activities to help the group explore who is accepted and why. The essence of effective teams is understanding how everyone belongs in the group. Trainers and facilitators need to be skilled at debriefing and gently helping team members to communicate their feelings and perspectives. Without this, it may feel like a great team-building day, but you may have only stronger cliques -- not a team where everyone is accepted.

### *Recognition*

The first two components above help show the “me” mentality of team members but this component brings it home. When we are driven by recognition - and we all are at some level - we do and say things that can be perceived as hurtful or intimidating. When recognition drives our actions, we tend to care only about ourselves and draw lines that create grudges, possibly for decades. Giving someone else recognition can be difficult; having someone take credit for your contribution can be devastating. Trainers and facilitators need to plan and deal with recognition issues as groups complete activities and share their experiences.

Safety, acceptance/belonging, and recognition can be a guide to creating meaningful team experiences and effective training programs. Using the model means taking into account how to provide for the group's safety, create opportunities to disband cliques, and facilitate conversations that provide recognition for everyone.