

HOW IN SYNC IS YOUR TEAM?

By Marilyn Thiet

The arrival of summer brings out the crew rowers in their sculls on the river outside of my office window. I observe in awe the beauty and grace of the powerful and yet coordinated movements of the rowers efficiently and effectively propelling their boats down the river. As I watch it is evident that each person on the team is giving it their all, and doing so in perfect coordination with one another. The more synchronized their movements, the faster they go.

What about your team? Are they giving it their all each and every day? And are they so well synchronized with one another that they are able to reach their goals, and yours, in the most expeditious way? What about your company as a whole? If each rower in the boat represents a department within your organization would we see each department so well coordinated with the others that the company easily glides toward reaching its goal, ahead of the competition?

Imagine the rowers, if each one was out of sync with another. We'd see oars hitting each other and water splashing as the boat steers off course and slows down. Even if only one rower was out of sync it would impact the entire crew, and the ability to win the race. As I travel and meet with clients, I see this analogy played out in too many companies. Departments do not communicate with one another, do not understand each other's goals or how the work they do impacts that department. Silos are in place, which like the off rhythm rowers, cause the company to drift off course and slow behind the competition. In crew, especially with a larger number of rowers, a coxswain is used to keep everyone coordinated and pulling together. They do so via constant communication with the rowers. In business we rely on our leaders to do this. And the key to success in getting all members of the team, or all departments rowing together comes down to basic communication. It is the leader's role to make sure everyone understands the goal and actions necessary to reach the goal, for an individual team as well as for the other teams and departments with which they interact. Leaders set the cadence for the company to move forward in a coordinated effort. As leaders there are many things you can do to help insure this well coordinated forward movement:

- Communicate routinely with your team regarding the actions and expectations of both the individuals and team as a whole.
- Allow your team the opportunity to meet with and talk to one another about their roles, goals, and how they can be helped and hindered by others on the team.
- Meet with the leaders of the other departments to understand each unique department, their goals and metrics and the impact of other departments on their progress.

- Provide opportunities for your team to meet routinely with other teams. Set up a quarterly brown bag lunch session with each department. Facilitate discussion between the teams on their latest projects, successes, issues, their processes and how the other departments can help or hinder the forward progress.

I can still remember the first time I participated in a session such as this many years ago. I was shocked to discover how my actions (or inactions) were impacting the metrics of another team. The course correction was easy for me to make and helped us move forward together, in sync, rather than oars hitting each other. I realize now that had our leaders not had the foresight to bring us together and allow for this opportunity we would have continued to be out of sync and impeding each other and the entire company. Yet I rarely see this type of interdepartmental communication happening in companies today.

Effective teamwork cannot happen without open, clear, and continual communication. Facilitating this communication is the role of the leader. Enable your team to mimic the rowers powering their scull through the water in one coordinated effort.

“Communication is the real work of leadership”

~ Nitin Norhia