

Turn your boat around,  
be a courageous captain  
of your own mental ship  
and always row in a  
positive direction.  
Turn up your own  
volume in teamwork.



# Your Role in Teamwork

**T**he concept of teamwork is nothing new – from the ancient Spartan warriors, to late 1960s space exploration, to geese flying in carefully orchestrated formation, meeting goals in many facets of our universe often requires a group working together to achieve a common goal. A quick search on the success of rowing crew teams will give you a few basic truths such as collaboration and coordination being the real drivers of performance, not individual effort. In other words, no one rower is responsible for winning the race. It takes an entire team rowing together in harmony to cross the finish line first.

So, what's changed? For starters, none of these groups work in today's ecosystem of digital everything, in which professionals are managing remote teams and maneuvering complex global organizational structures. We've traded our boats and oars for


community workspaces and video conferences. The good news is that through our new digital environment, in some ways, we're more connected than ever. Leadership has changed as well. It's no longer hierarchical and top-down. Today's leaders must have an entrepreneurial mindset, even in the most corporate environment, and inspire and connect people and teams across organizations, not just manage a group of people that happen to report to them on an organizational chart.

It's been over 50 years since educational psychologist Bruce Tuckman identified a five-stage development process that most teams follow to become high performing. He called the stages: forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning. Since most of us belong to at least one or more teams in our lives, we have likely experienced the good, the bad and the ugly when working with these teams. The not-so-good

experiences could be a result of generational differences, time zones, geography, technology and a wide array of personality styles. No wonder we are still scratching our heads as to why there is chaos and confusion.

Forbes recently predicted that 50% of the U.S. workforce will soon be remote, and while the topic of managing remote teams could be a stand-alone article, here we'll focus on recommendations for taking personal responsibility that can improve your contribution and serve as a catalyst for effective change. After all, the only person you can truly control is you.

In 2002, Patrick Lencioni's book "Five Dysfunctions of a Team" appeared on the New York Times Best Seller list and continues to be a topic in management forums today. For the purposes of this article, I'll simply offer Lencioni's definition of a team: a relatively small number of people that share common goals as well as the rewards



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and responsibilities for achieving them. Despite the unlimited resources and countless coaching conversations around strategies for improving team performance, much of a company's success can be traced to what I call the four key cornerstones for effective teamwork: trust, commitment, communication and connection.

### Trust

Trust is a critical imperative to success in almost any situation, but it is a non-negotiable when building successful teams that are designed to go the distance. Stephen Covey emphasized the role of trust in his seminal work "7 Habits of Highly Effective People" and later in his follow-up book "The Speed of Trust." A lack of trust tends to feed an array of negative consequences, including an environment of turf-guarding and sidebar manipulation. Contrarily, when there is a deep trust among members, projects go more smoothly, team members enjoy the project more, have more fun and report more successful outcomes. If there is a gap between what you say and what you do, it undermines your integrity, making it harder for people to trust you. When it comes to selecting your team members, I'd almost bet trust is your first consideration.

### Commitment

Commitment is shown by being actively engaged and sticking with the project or person for the duration. I smile when I think about the example of the chicken and the pig. The chicken is involved and the pig is committed! We have all been impacted by the team member that has lost interest in a project or experienced a situation when he or she could not fulfill his or her obligation. Perhaps our own commitment has waned and we were counting the minutes until the project would

come to an end. As we consider our projects in the coming year, I urge you to carefully consider those projects that you are genuinely sold out for and tactfully say "no" to those projects that aren't aligned with your natural gifts and abilities. Before you roll your eyes and say, "What if your boss assigns you to a project that isn't a true match?" I can only encourage you to have a courageous conversation. Make your case for your highest and best use of your genius zone.

### Communication

The quality of any relationship rises and falls to the level of effective communication. When people know what is expected of them and understand the rules of the game or parameters of the project, they are more apt to meet the expectations. Weak communicators can stall the project or at the very least interrupt the success that creates impenetrable and unnecessary barriers. I'm often reminded of the wisdom of my doctoral professor at Georgia Tech. He said, "If you don't understand it yourself, it is nearly impossible to explain it to someone else." Bottom line: Take time to get clarity about the goal, articulate the mission and identify the action steps that lead to the desired result.

### Connection

Simon Sinek best describes this as your "why." Why are you even involved in the project to begin with? Have you every thought to yourself, "How did I get myself into this?" You are not alone. I've found that the more personal the project was to me or the more I cared about the people involved, the more energy, intellect and depth of my soul I poured into the team or the project. When you care about the people involved, you tend to operate at a different level. When some-

thing is important to you, you will often move heaven and earth to make success happen. When it's not as important, we tend to find excuses. I refer to this as having skin in the game. I think of it as your signature. It's like entrepreneurship and decision making. When you've had to make payroll, you tend to make decisions differently. The same holds true when it comes to the connection you have with the project or team. When you care about the people involved, you want the best for each other and the best possible outcome.

When it comes to teams and the effort required to make teamwork *work*, focus more on your individual contribution and less on what others are doing or not doing. It's easy to place blame or engage in fault finding. Shift from fault finding to value finding. When you genuinely look for the good in others, you can find it. At first you may find crusty layers of criticism, mockers, cynical attitudes, leftover residue from previous projects or overall malaise. Don't give into these emotions. Turn your boat around, be a courageous captain of your own mental ship and always row in a positive direction. Turn up your own volume in teamwork. 🚣



Debbie Phillips is an internationally recognized industry thought leader, educator, career coach, author and speaker who holds a doctorate degree. She has dedicated her life's work to educating and connecting high potential talent to opportunities in the real estate industry. Debbie can be reached at [debbie@thequadrillion.com](mailto:debbie@thequadrillion.com) or 404-787-4409.