

○ Lead Individuals, Not the Group

Bruce Moravec delivers the same basic message to everyone on his team: “We’re all here to build airplanes. If the plane could talk, what would it tell us to do? And what can we do to make that happen?”

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Team leaders don’t lead teams. They lead a collection of individuals who together make up a team. It’s a small clarification with big implications. Each team member has different strengths and weaknesses, workstyle preferences, blind spots, and hot buttons. There’s no way a leader can get a team to work together, experts say, without first learning how to work with each person as an individual. Leadership is a one-on-one sport.

○ “The number-one skill a team leader needs is versatility,” argues psychologist and team guru Harvey Robbins, coauthor of “Why Teams Don’t Work” (Peterson’s Guides, 1995). “You have to deal with others based on how they want you to deal with them. That’s how to get people to follow you.”

With 300 people and a jet aircraft to build, it’s not easy for Boeing’s Bruce Moravec to practice one-on-one leadership. But he tries, and with good reason. “Ninety-five percent of my people get their paychecks from other departments,” he explains. “All I can do is influence them.”

How does he wield influence among hundreds of different people, few of whom work for him directly? “I work with them on an informal basis, walk around, ask how it’s going. It’s easy to criticize people if you don’t understand their roles and constraints. Most people want to do a good job. You have to let them know that you’re there to help, not just to give them orders.”

Moravec delivers the same basic message to everyone on his team. It is a message designed to reinforce unity: “We’re all here to build airplanes. If the plane could talk, what would it tell us to do? And what can we do to make that happen?”

○ But he also makes sure to recognize individuality within the group. Recently, when one engineer was slow to authorize a decision, Moravec offered him a dozen doughnuts if he’d deliver the signed form that day. At 4 p.m., the authorization was on his chair. Doughnuts followed the next morning. “It was neat to see the look in his eyes,” Moravec remembers, “like, ‘You really did that?’”

Kerry Shampine learned the hard way what happens when you fail to pay attention to individual needs. Two years after his team was launched, people started to quit, even though the group was registering superb results.

One person left over a workstyle issue. She was a “clean-desk” type who just couldn’t cope with the project’s perpetually unresolved issues. Shampine had failed to address this person’s concerns. Another person quit over a perceived pay discrepancy. “I put off the issue as something we couldn’t do anything about,” Shampine says, “but she finally decided it was unfair and left. I had lost sight of the personal needs of team members. The problems just festered. I should have done something sooner.”

“Never Do What You Can Delegate”

“Don’t Forget What Got You There”

“Nobody Likes a Know-It-All”

“Lead Individuals, Not the Group”

“Membership Has its Privileges - And Limits”

“If Nominated, You Don’t Have to Serve”