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WorkTeam Dynamics E-Tip #1

No "I" in TEAM? Ha! We should spell it TIIIIIM! Guidelines for promoting individual, differing viewpoints in teamwork.

We've all heard the saying, "there's no 'I' in team". What people mean is that teamwork is about cooperation - one for all and all for one; it's not about the individual. But that's a dangerous concept. Where would teamwork be without the voice of dissent, alternative ideas, healthy disagreement? That scary condition is called Group Think – when team members subvert critical thinking in favor of group unanimity and emotional cohesion. Group Think caused NASA to launch the Challenger which ended in disaster – all because the engineer who knew the o-rings were at risk caved in to peer pressure and he OK'd the launch. Group Think also caused President Bush to be officially confirmed in his belief that there were WMDs in Iraq – because the agencies felt strong peer pressure to support that preconception instead of researching objectively.

Research confirms that teams make better decisions than individuals every time for complex situations. But good team decision-making happens only if team members are informed and share their views honestly. Still, every day in organizations everywhere, team members feel too intimidated by peer pressure or by autocratic or rushed leadership to bring up their differing points of view - and team decisions suffer.

If you're a leader,

- Your mantra should be, "Push back if you think differently. Many brains are better than one." Your people will empower and your decisions will improve.
- If you think that you'll have to act on their ideas if you hear them, you don't. Research proves that members feel satisfied just to have their ideas heard, understood and considered.
- Paraphrase their idea back to them to ensure you understand and to make them feel understood.
- Open the idea for discussion by other team members. Get their input, too.
- Hold your ideas 'til last. When a leader speaks first, others think, "Why speak up? The leader's idea is what we'll end up doing."
- If their idea won't be implemented, be sure to tell them why and people will continue to bring up their ideas. It's when people feel that their ideas go into a black hole, never to be heard from again, that they shut down. Try this at home! The same principles apply!

If you're a team member, gird your courage and speak up about your distinct, individual point of view. Stay tuned for the next WorkTeam Dynamics E-Tip for Guidelines on "How to Speak Up when You're Swimming Upstream in a Team".

Good TIIIIIMs depend on it!

Kathy Reed helps you build people skills and dynamic teams through speaking, training, writing and coaching. Forward this E-Tip to a friend. Email us your people and team challenges so we can address those in future E-Tips!

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