Team Building - *The Code of Honor*

The more your organization wants to achieve, the more you need a code of honor.

What is a code of honor?

It is a set of simple, powerful rules that govern the internal behavior of any team, organization, family, or individual. The rules determine how team members behave toward one another. They are its heart and spirit. They are what people are willing to stand and defend – and be accountable to. A code of honor brings out the best in every person who subscribes to it.

But it goes beyond rules. It is the unwavering discipline of the team itself to enforce those rules; not to rely on bosses, leaders, administrators, coaches, regulators, or parents to enforce them. The team spontaneously supports each other in adhering to the code. It is practiced, repeated and drilled in so many instances that it becomes unconsciously embedded in the hearts of the players. The code builds trust, cohesion, and energy.

It is a statement of who you are and what you stand for. It is your values extended into your behavior.

My personal experience is that without a strong commitment, things move slow or don't get done well. Once you make a code, those who cannot or do not want to commit, will opt out of your team. But those who remain will be totally committed and accountable. It doesn't mean others can't advise or help in other ways, but you don't want them on the core team if they can't follow the code. You don't want to depend on them because by opting out they are more or less admitting they are not dependable to one degree or another.

The code of honor attracts those who aspire to those same standards. If you know how to build it, maintain it, and protect it, you will attract only the best players and you will experience the repeated magic of championship results.

In meetings in which you discuss the code, you may wish to talk about great teams that you have been on. What was it like? What were the rules? How did it feel? You can also discuss what you think the benefits of having a code would be.

A former Marine Corps Officer states, *"In my opinion, it was the code of honor that gave my men and me the courage to operate as a unified team, overcome our own fears, and perform tasks that seemed impossible. Today, in my own business, it is the same code of honor that is core to much of my business and financial success."* Robert Kiyasaki

In the absence of rules, people make up their own
Sometimes the easiest way to avoid upset, collisions and disharmony in any group is to take the time to make sure that everyone is playing by the same rules. The value of a code is that under pressure or during difficult times, when emotions rise, the code prevails, not emotional reactions.

Everyone on the team must know the rules, interpret them in the same way and commit themselves to the code. Otherwise the team can't win. Sometimes the easiest way to avoid upset, collisions and disharmony in any group is to take the time to make sure that everyone is playing by the same rules.

It is the cornerstone of the culture of any successful organization because it is the physical manifestation of its thoughts, ideals, and philosophies. The number one tool to establish culture is the code of honor.

Developing a code of honor creates accountability and a feeling of support and is a powerful statement of who you are and what your team stands for. It defines you and your goals.

You may wish to discuss instances in which a team had rules and didn't follow them or didn't have rules and what the results were.

One of the things a code does is create support and encouragement for one another. It creates an environment in which we push one another to be our best.

Don't just have people on your team to fill space. Make sure everyone has some unique talent that he or she brings to the position. Also, once you have your code, if prospective team members don't agree with it, you shouldn't allow them on your team.

Here are some qualities of a team player

1. Has energy
2. Has an unstoppable desire to win
3. Is willing to let someone else win (support others and not get recognition)
4. Takes personal responsibility – no blaming or justifying.
5. Willing to submit to the code
6. Unique ability or talent.

Results are always a function of behavior, attitude and conditioning. If you focus on results, you are too late.

Steps for creating a code.

1. Find a sane moment in which to create the code. Don't wait until the pressure is high, emotions are hot, or a deadline has to be met to do this. Don't expect to do it in one sitting.
2. Find recurring issues that repeatedly interfere with the performance of the team. This might also entail looking at past mistakes of other teams you've been on or anticipating potential problems.
3. Everyone on the team participates. If they create it, they own it.
4. Talk about various ways your team might interact (good and bad) and how everyone would feel about them.
5. As soon as you are able to decide on a rule, write it down and post them (in this case, every member should have a copy they can post at home).
6. Be specific. They must be rules that can be acted on. Don't be vague.

This is not a mission statement. It is not a list of values. Everyone has different ideas about what those values could mean. If you spell it out as a statement that someone can act on, you don't run the risk of different interpretations. For example, instead of using the word teamwork, you spell out what you mean. You might then say something like, "the goals of the team come before the goals of the individual."

The same goes for rules like "Be professional." How do you define professional? Well, you have to let everyone talk about what they mean by this. Otherwise, you may end up with many different definitions.

7. Don't try to legislate moods. You can't legislate that no one is in a bad mood, but what you can say is, "Don't take out your bad mood on other people."

8. Make sure the rules are somewhat of a stretch. The code should challenge everyone on the team to be better. This will create an environment in which everyone gives their best. It can be hard to follow the rules, but challenge makes the team rise to the occasion.
9. Don't get carried away making rules. Shoot for a dozen or less. If you make too many, look for common threads.
10. If someone breaches the code, call it. Just tell them they broke the code. The largest distinction between a good team and bad one is that bad ones don't say anything when the code is broken. You don't chastise, you just acknowledge or mention it.

It is not the job of the leader to enforce the code. The entire team enforces it.

Adapted by Mahatma Das from the book, ***The Code of Honor*** by Blair Singer.