

Five Factors That Disconnect Your Team

And what to do about them.

"What's wrong with my team? Why don't they co-operate more? Where's their team spirit? Why do they seem surly so much of the time? Why don't they speak up at staff meetings? Why do we have such a high turnover of staff? Why do people seem to operate in their own little world and not care about the 'Big Picture'?"

Often we fail to get the best from our staff simply because we **haven't yet made ways** for each member of the team to actually live in a **healthy relational connection** with the rest of the team. In fact the word **team** is a misnomer for many workplaces which are staffing a **bunch of individuals** doing their own thing in ways that merely keep them employed.

Is your workplace a place **where people compete for resources** rather than collaborating toward outcomes? Where **self-protective behaviour** prevents innovation and synergy?

While your staff can **quote the mission statement**, do their daily activities actually seem to **work against it**?

If you've answered YES to any of these questions, perhaps some of the following disconnecting factors are affecting your team.

1. **Napoleonic wars**

There are some individuals who - while occupying "small" positions in context with the wider organisation - pursue their own grandiose dreams with a super-sized passion. Effectively they wage a **war of attrition** on your resources, your time, the morale of the team, even your relationship with your customers. At the very least, they annoy and distract some of your most talented and loyal people.

At the same time, there is an upside to this Napoleonic lust for conquest and expansion. You may have in your midst some true mover and shakers, pioneering go-getters. If treated correctly, these people can be an **asset** rather than a **pain in the assets** - a force for the up-turn rather than the stagnation of your business.

Rather than blocking and crushing them, negotiate with them to find the way in which their "vision" can serve your vision. Debrief and rebrief them regularly. Make them go through management to access resources so that they don't play people off against each other. Keep them on a tight (not necessarily *short*) leash through clear direction and consistent accountability. Empower them fully *to the limit that you set*. Remind them constantly of their place in the team.

2. **No relational space**

When there are no rhythms that place us across the lunch-table or pool-table from each other, then misunderstandings and offences can take root and fester far more easily. When there are no shared spaces where team-mates can laugh, debate and commiserate, workplace relations can be colourless and superficial. You don't need to program relationships; it's our default setting. We just need the opportunity.

Make a physical space which invites your team to chat, to spend time together without a productivity-focus. Create traditions where your team can "break bread". Give your staff the chance to do life together, to ask "What's up?" or "Have I done something to offend you?", to dig through their differences and find common ground.

3. **Faddish cycles of change**

Personality profiling tells us that up to 70% of the general population actually dislike and resist change. If that's true, then when you are initiating change in the workplace, you better make sure it's worth the hard work of helping these people adopt it.

If your workplace has a proven track-record of adopting the latest business or marketing idea, it's possible it also has a track-record of alienating over half its staffers in the process. While this might contribute to those staffers banding together to form passive-aggressive resistance movements, I think you'd agree that's not the kind of teamwork you're looking for. You now have a disconnect between management and staff.

Long-term team-members watch the fashionable initiatives come and go, slowly losing their passion and commitment, finding their own ruts to stay in, regardless of what the latest memo says. Change for change's sake can be easily justified with flashy charts and jingoistic phrases, but its nature is unhealthy and unhelpful.

When considering any major change to the organisation's environment, methodology or other systems, think long and hard about old adages like "If it ain't broke..." and "reinventing the wheel"!

4. **Fear**

Nothing causes people to hunker down and keep to themselves like *this "f"-word!*

Where staffers seem reticent to share their thoughts, where they avoid contact with management, where they lash out in completely irrational ways - these may be indications that these people are *scared*.

Spend some time discerning what could be causing the fear. Is there an air of uncertainty in the air? Are disciplinary issues dealt with harshly?

I love the story I heard about an Australian CEO and one of his new admin staff. When it turned out the young lady had made an enormous error in regards to printing promotional material - an error which would cost the organisation over \$16000 - she reported it to the senior manager.

She ended her confession with: "I suppose that's the end for me?" The CEO replied "Why would I sack you? I've just spent \$16000 training you." While she was left in no doubt as to the seriousness of her mistake, the grace that was shown this young woman resulted in her fast-paced professional development and deep loyalty toward her employer.

It also worked wonders for the morale of other team-members.

What can you do about anxiety and uncertainty in your company?

5. **The Talk Monopoly**

Who holds the floor in the staff meeting? Can you pick the small group of individuals who do most of the talking, who freeze out others' contributions opinions and ideas?

Try finding ways to acknowledge the monopolisers while giving other team members equal time. (*"Ralph, thanks for that perspective. I'm really interested in what Betty sees as the issue here."*)

Remember that some people won't speak without being asked, yet they could hold the very idea your group needs. Others need help focussing their thoughts so you will have to ask them a specific question to elicit a response (*"Graham, what would you do in my position?"* rather than *"Graham, what do you think?"*).

Share this article with a colleague and dialogue about where these factors may be at work in your team. The conversation may reveal that there are other factors in play. Dealing with some of these will improve synergy and stability within your company, freeing up your staff's energy to move the business ahead.

Author: Peter Aldin is founder of Great Circle Life Coaching. In a complex world, instinct and habit often drive us off course rather than steering us toward success and satisfaction. Great Circle is about re-learning and re-thinking our approach to family and business dynamics and relationships. Peter and his family live and work in Melbourne. For more information, visit www.greatcircle.com.au.