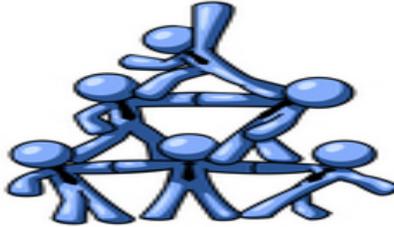


# What Does The Word Team Really Mean?<sup>1</sup>

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Nowadays, the word team is in used everywhere in our society. Politicians use it to describe their administrations—“the Obama team,” “the Bush team,” “the Clinton team.” Automobile dealers attach the word team to their own names—“Team Whipple, the Largest Ford Store in Southern California!”

We have debating teams, track teams, surgical teams, baseball teams—even fantasy football teams. Organizations talk about their leadership teams, management teams, work teams, marketing teams, sales teams.

From grammar school soccer games to the multibillion-dollar professional sports industry, the word *team* is emphasized over and over again.

But, what does the word *team* really mean?

First of all, it does *not* mean sacrificing your individuality and engaging in “groupthink.” The word *team* does *not* mean we are carbon copies or clones of one another, blandly doing things in the same way, chanting our team goals.

Quite the contrary.

An effective team is made up of unique individuals, each highly competent in what he or she is doing. Each contributing his or her own unique skills and talents toward accomplishing mutually agreed upon goals. An effective team *celebrates* individual differences.

Working together, a team is an all-competent, cooperative group of individuals, striving to reach goals and levels of excellence that are hard to accomplish with one person alone. There is a commonality of direction in the team. People “harmonize” with one another. They don’t waste energy.

They are focused like a laser beam, rather than the incoherent and scattered rays of a light bulb.



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<sup>1</sup> From: [http://www.arniedahlke.com/100630\\_What\\_Does\\_The\\_Word\\_Team\\_Really\\_Mean.pdf](http://www.arniedahlke.com/100630_What_Does_The_Word_Team_Really_Mean.pdf)  
—Please take a moment to look at Arnie’s site: [www.arniedahlke.com](http://www.arniedahlke.com)

When a group behaves like this, it is what I call **Team-Being**.

When a group is **Team-Being**, its dominant characteristic is an atmosphere of Trust. Trust is built upon a foundation of safety and confidence. People in a group feel safe when they know they won't be ridiculed, embarrassed, controlled, manipulated, exploited, or punished in any way by other group members.

When people in a group trust one another, and know they are doing their best and can depend on others in the group to do the same, the group is **Team-Being**, and we have what I call a **Team Culture**.

When teams are not **Team-Being**, they malfunction—they are made up of people who are defensive, looking out for themselves, and at cross-purposes with one another. I call this a **Survival Culture**.

To achieve **Team-Being** with your teams, cultivate a **Team Culture**, instead of a **Survival Culture**.

Use the following table as a set of guidelines. Do everything you can to discourage the attitudes and behaviors shown in the first column, while at the same time promoting the attitudes and behaviors shown in the second column. *Note the key role that managers play in this process!*

In A Survival Culture:	In A Team Culture:	What Managers Must Do:
People are unaware of how their jobs fit into the organization's mission	People know what each must do to achieve the organization's mission	Involve everyone in shaping and owning the organization's mission
People promote their own agenda, and are out for themselves, which sidetracks team discussions	People are aware of their interdependence in solving problems and reaching decisions	Model, demonstrate, and teach interdependence and team behavior
People do only what their job descriptions say they should do	People go beyond their job descriptions to help others	Focus people on outcomes rather than on rigid job descriptions
People self-protectively keep opinions and ideas to themselves, which weakens team member bonds	People, unafraid, openly express their opinions and ideas, which strengthens team member bonds	Support open discussions and never belittle those who disagree
People reject diverse opinions and ideas, which deters others from offering their own opinions and ideas.	People, are open to diverse opinions and ideas, which invites others to offer their own opinions and ideas	Encourage the sharing of differing viewpoints, which leads to innovative ideas
People are focused on finding fault, which impedes team accomplishments	People are focused on solving problems, which increases team accomplishments	Use mistakes as opportunities to learn and discourage finger-pointing and blaming
People obediently follow procedures, no matter how ineffective they are	People, together, continuously strive to improve work processes	Foster and reinforce a customer-driven, problem-solving mindset
People are critical and judgmental, which fosters defensiveness and sabotages teamwork	People are not critical or judgmental making it safe for taking risks, which strengthens teamwork	Model and cultivate objectivity and constructive decision-making
People don't respect and trust one another, which discourages greater team participation	People respect and trust one another, which encourages greater team participation	Gain the respect of team members and reinforce respectful behavior whenever it occurs

## Cultivate **TeamBeing!**