



The Missing I

By Stephen Balzac

"There is no me. I had it surgically removed."

— Peter Sellers

At one high tech company I worked with, I watched an interesting scenario unfold: after completing a major milestone, the engineers were high-fiving and taking some time to brag about their accomplishments. Enthusiasm and excitement were running high when a member of senior management decided to interrupt the gathering with the reminder that, "There is no 'I' in team."

This utterance had an effect not dissimilar to that of a skunk wandering into a fancy dinner party. On the scale of wet blankets, this was one that had been left out in the rain for a week. Within a few seconds, all that enthusiasm was gone, vanished into the ether. Properly harnessed, that enthusiasm could have catapulted the team into its next milestone. Instead, the team approached its next milestone with a shocking lack of energy, especially given the successes they'd had to that point.

The problem is that while there may not be an "I" in team, a team is made up of individuals. There are three "I"'s in individual. What does a team do? Well, in most situations we hope the team will win. There's an "I" right there in the middle of win. Oddly enough, you can't win if you take out the "I."

While it's critical for a team to be able to work together and for members of the team not to be competing with one another, that's only a piece of the puzzle. It's equally important that each member of the team feel they are an integral part of the team's success. Without that personal connection, it's extremely difficult to get people excited about the work.

Unfortunately, I see companies far too often treating team members as interchangeable parts, not as unique individuals. Not only does this undermine the team, it is also a tremendous waste of resources: a major advantage of having a team is that you have access to multiple eyes, ears, hands, and brains. Each person brings

unique skills, knowledge, and perspective to the problems the team is facing. When a company fails to take advantage of those people, then they are spending a great deal of money for very little return.

In the Mann Gulch disaster, Wagner Dodge failed to appreciate the perspectives and opinions his team brought to the table. He relied solely on his own eyes, ears, and brains. Had he bothered to obtain information from the rest of his team, it is highly likely that most of them would not have perished under Dodge's command. When the team has no "I," the team cannot see.

On the flip side, some companies go too far in the other direction. One company, that shall remain nameless, spends so much time on "I" that there's no time left for "we." They have no team; there's only a group of people who happen to be wandering in something vaguely approximating the same direction. Meetings are characterized by constant jockeying for position and arguments over turf. Different groups in the company see themselves as competing with one another for the favor of the CEO and for the eventual rewards. Oddly enough, the level of excitement and commitment in this situation is about the same as the one in which there is no "I." When you have too much "I," no one can agree on what they are seeing. In other words, too much "I" or a missing "I" produce much the same degree of blindness. That's not good for the individuals, the team, or the company.

So how do you make sure you have the right "I?"

Start by creating something worth seeing. Paint a vivid picture of the company's future, and show each person how they, as individuals, matter. Remind employees of the skills, knowledge, perspectives, and abilities that led to them being part of the team.

Show each person how they fit into the overall picture, and how their colleagues fit in as well. Make sure each person has a clue about what the others are doing. Ignorance breeds contempt.

Strengthen individual autonomy: find opportunities to allow people to decide how they'll get their jobs done. Don't regulate anything that isn't absolutely necessary to getting the product out the door.

Always praise successes. Highlight significant contributions, remind people of their strengths.

Encourage and provide opportunities for team members to continuously develop their strengths. Improving individual skills dramatically improves team performance.

For a team to win, it needs to see where it's going. That requires the team to have "I"'s and something to look at. How can you provide both to your team?

Stephen Balzac is a consultant and professional speaker. He is president of 7 Steps Ahead (www.7stepsahead.com), an organizational development firm focused on helping businesses to increase revenue and build their client base. Steve is a contributing author to volume one of "Ethics and Game Design: Teaching Values Through Play." Steve's book, "The 36-Hour Course in Organizational Development," is due out from McGraw-Hill in Fall 2010. Contact him at 978-298-5189 or steve@7stepsahead.com.

NVTHS Culinary Arts students treat local veterans to lunch

Jessica Feddersen of Townsend, a sophomore in Nashoba Valley Technical High School's Culinary Arts program, serves veterans and their agents during a luncheon for local veterans held at the Westford technical school. The luncheon was sponsored by Roderick Urquhart and Custom Chemical Co., a disabled veteran-owned small business based in North Billerica.



Club Meetings/Notes

Ayer/Shirley Lions Club - General Meeting at the Nashoba Club Restaurant in Ayer on the 4th Monday each month. Social hour at 6pm/meeting 6:30pm. New members welcome.

Ayer/Shirley/Harvard/Devens Rotary Club meeting at the Bull Run Restaurant, Route 2A, Shirley, MA every Thursday at 6 p.m. For more info contact President Dave Swain at 978-425-4311.

Groton-Pepperell Rotary Club - The Groton-Pepperell Rotary Club meets on Thursdays at 12:15 at the Groton Country Club, Lovers Lane, Groton. Call Martha Campbell @ 978-448-1170.

Nashoba Valley Amateur Radio Club - meet on the third Thursday of each month, excepting July and August, at 7:30 PM at the Pepperell Community Center.

Pepperell VFW Ladies Auxiliary - 3rd Monday of the month at 6:30pm at the home post on Leighton St. Always looking for members, support and new ideas. email durno69@juno.com

Rotary Club of Lunenburg -Townsend - Mondays, except holidays, at the Bootlegger Restaurant, 50 Mass. Ave (route 2A) Lunenburg at 6:15pm. Call Jim Hays at 978-582-7235.

The Rebekah - Middlesex Lodge 176 - 1st and 3rd Tuesday each month at the Grange on Champney Street, Groton, Ma at 6:30 pm. We welcome everyone, you may contact: Natalie MacLeod @ 978-512-9738 or by email at sweetnatty58@hotmail.com

Townsend Lions Club - 1st Tues of the month at the Congregational Church meeting room 6:30p. Dinner meeting the 3rd Tuesday of the month at the Townsend House Restaurant at 6:30 pm. We welcome those interested in joining us.

Toastmasters Meeting Notice - Twin City Toastmasters meets every Tuesday evening at 7 p.m. in Leominster, MA. We meet at the Fidelity Bank Leominster Connector/Mechanic St. Bypass every 1st and 3rd Tuesday and we meet at the Leominster Public Library downtown Leominster every 2nd and 4th Tuesday. There is no fee for guests and you may attend as many times as you wish.

For more information please call our club president, Peter at (978) 227-0044 or reference our web site at www.twincitytoastmasters.com.

Since its founding in 1924, Toastmasters International has helped four million men and women develop their public speaking skills and become confident communicators at work, at home, and yes, even at parties. Toastmasters now has approximately 200,000 members and 10,000 clubs in 90 countries. Twin City Toastmasters is one of more than 120 clubs in Massachusetts.

www.twincitytoastmasters.com