

The Upside of Being Unique

Putting the “I” back into teamwork



BY CAROL L. BROOKS, SR/WA

“There’s no ‘I’ in team.” Haven’t we all heard that before?

Most of us have experienced the frustration and resentment when a colleague or manager blatantly begins promoting their own goals over the team’s shared vision and collective success. This “me, myself and I” viewpoint of “individualism” can quickly zap the team’s vitality.

But now think about a meeting you attended where the team’s vision and goals were presented in a collaborative manner. Can you recall that feeling of enthusiasm as your mind sifted through different ideas that could contribute to

those team goals? This is the result of your personal “individuality,” which begins to formulate ideas and solutions stemming from your unique past experiences and values.

Win-Win vs. Win-Lose

There is a major difference between individualism and individuality. *Individuality* is a good and necessary dimension of all high-performance teams where, if you win, I win. And if you lose, I lose. It embraces the diverse strengths and personality styles for what they bring to the team and its potential to positively impact the end result. In high-performance teams, individuality

is considered a crucial resource of differing perspectives to achieve collective goals. Teams that embrace this philosophy recognize that without it, there can be no dialogue and creativity is stifled.

On the other hand, *individualism* is a win-lose relationship that sacrifices the progress of the team for the benefit of one. In this scenario, diversity only serves to create disharmony and distrust. It is about being separate from—and in a competitive environment—superior to the pack. Individualism often leads to being disconnected and alienating those people who could help the team to thrive and succeed.

You are Unique

An important aspect of individuality is recognizing the unique value you bring to your team. You might be thinking that what you offer isn’t valuable, maybe because you feel that your ideas aren’t up to par with the great ideas coming from other members. Why do we have these kinds of thoughts? It’s because we often spend precious time and energy comparing ourselves with others.

Comparison is a trap because we always seem to want what we don’t have—and what others do. We mentally create a list of comparisons, focusing on who just got a promotion or who was acknowledged for a recent project success. But using up our energy on comparing ourselves to others only works to distract us from who we are. If we insist on measuring up to others, we’ll never fulfill our true potential.

Think For Yourself

If you want to succeed and become a valued member of your team, individuality is key. Sadly, too many

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people hold back from attempting something because of other people’s negativity or fear. They may have been told that they can’t do something, so now that plays over and over in their mind. But we have the power to think for ourselves. We should be the ones deciding whether to go for something or not. Ignore those who are judgmental and negative, and let them live a life of normality and safety. You know what makes you happy. Take pride in being your own person and learn to go for it! You will enjoy your life more than those who play it safe. And great ideas will flow once you let go and learn to appreciate your own unique skills and ideas.

Yes, there is a very important “I” in team: *individuality*. Steer yourself in that direction and keep a watchful eye so as not to fall into the trappings of individualism. Rely on your strengths and

give voice to your own individuality in a collaborative and supportive style. High performance teams thrive on individuality, but crumble under the weight of individualism. ✦



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