
The Opposite Sector

Looking for a Few Good Team Members?

By Thomas R. Yeoman, director of curricula development, media production, and staff development in the Economic Development Division of the State Board for Technical and Comprehensive Education, 111 Executive Center Drive, Columbia, SC 29210; 803/737-9338.

The team of six had just sweated through a series of events. The facilitator gazed at the tired and dirty team members and led them to the site of their next team activity. He described the task, showed them the materials they were to work with, and explained the ground rules.

The team activity consisted of crossing a pond that was broken up by blocks that rose from the water. The only tools were several planks—none of which were long enough to span the distance between any two blocks—and some lengths of rope. The facilitator appointed no leader and gave no further directions.

The clock started. So did the team. The facilitator looked on silently while marking on his clipboard. When the team had successfully completed the task, the facilitator led its members on to the next team activity.

Not just another ropes course. Ho hum. It sounds like another adven-

ture-learning team-building program, of the kind so popular with corporate managers of the nineties.

But the time was August 1972—years before corporate America became accustomed to climbing, jumping, and rappelling its way through outdoor experiential programs. And the place was Quantico, Virginia—at the U.S. Marine Corps base.

The water-crossing activity was part of what's known as the Speed March Reaction Course. The team members taking part in it were mostly college juniors nearing completion of the curriculum at the Marine Corps Officer Candidate School.

I was one of the team members. We had just slogged through a timed double run of the obstacle course and a timed three-mile run—all in full gear, including a pack and a rifle. The team—whose members had been randomly selected—were to complete the each activity within a prescribed time limit. But the team had to finish the course as a unit. If even one team member failed to make it through, then none of the participants would pass.

And successful completion was a requirement for graduation.

Cornerstones of the Corps. Despite the Marine Corps's long-standing emphasis on team activities, many businesspeople—including many trainers and human resource developers—believe that military trainers and armed-forces veterans resist efforts at teamwork.

Recently I visited a team assessment center at which people work through practical, experimental, and written business problems to test how they will perform in a team-based organization.

I was amazed to hear an associate express surprise

Do military people blindly follow orders? Do they resist empowerment? Not at all! Here are some examples of teamwork and initiative in a setting where some people don't expect to find it: the U.S. Marine Corps.

“DON'T HIRE MILITARY VETERANS. ALL THEY KNOW HOW TO DO IS TAKE ORDERS”

What IS the Big Five?

The Big Five Is Not...

- A New Basketball Conference
- Foreign Steel Manufacturers
- A Dreaded Birthday

The Big Five Is...

- The Most Valid and Reliable Personality Measurement Tool Available
- Based on 40+ Years of Research
- Ready for Use in the Workplace

For Certification Program dates, a catalog of materials, or additional information, contact:

CentACS

Center for Applied Cognitive Studies

719 Romany Road
Charlotte, NC 28203-4849
800-BIG-5555
704-331-9408 Fax
centacs@cybernetics.net

Circle No. 135 on Reader Service Card

The Opposite Sector

that such a large number of those who were successful at the assessment center were former military personnel. As an officer in the Marine Corps Reserves, I took exception to my colleague's skepticism. I explained that I could not speak for the other services, but that teamwork and problem solving are cornerstones of the Marine Corps's culture.

After all, if a team in the Marine Corps fails while in combat, the cost can be quite a bit higher than the cost of failure in the business world.

Unfortunately, the incident at the assessment center was not an isolated case.

More than order-followers. At a recent training conference, I participated in a session that told trainers and con-

give and take orders."

I'm sure that the questioner was not intentionally feeding the prejudices of the uninformed. But the notion that Marines aren't team players is absolutely incorrect.

My response to the questioner: "It is just possible that the control-freak former military persons to whom you refer might not have been great performers in the military, either."

Small-unit leaders in the Marines have always been trained to take the initiative and to be innovative. One of the advantages we have had is that our small-unit leaders always understood the mission and objectives. If contact with higher-ups is lost, team leaders can continue problem solving—meeting the objectives and accomplishing the mission.

How different is that from what we expect of our teams in a nonmilitary environment?

Participatory problem solving in action. The air campaign in Kuwait during Desert Storm depended on the use of frontline Marines called forward air controllers. FACs are Marine

aviators, specially trained and assigned to the infantry. Their job is to ensure that the most efficient and effective use is made of the strike aircraft in the support of the ground forces.

FACs use a MULE (modular, universal laser emitter) to mark selected targets for the strike aircraft. Using a MULE increases the probability of a first-round hit to better than 90 percent.

The MULE is an effective piece of gear. But it is heavy, bulky, and difficult to carry. Once in the target area, it must be set up on a three-legged triangular mount and stabilized. This can be a time-consuming process—not very convenient during combat.

A Marine FAC, Captain Murtha, determined that a more effective method would mount and stabilize the MULE on a vehicle. No such mounting device existed. Captain Murtha took the problem to the machine shop. Together, he and a young metal fabricator who was a Marine corporal designed and built a mount and a receiving unit that could be used on top of a vehicle.

"THOSE CONTROL FREAKS MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN GREAT PERFORMERS IN THE MILITARY, EITHER"

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

INNOVATIVE

The George Washington University has offered leading graduate education programs in Human Resource Development (HRD) for over 35 years. Winner of ASTD's Program Quality and Excellence Award in 1993, the present curriculum focuses on increasing the learning capacity of individuals, teams, and organizations to optimize organizational growth and effectiveness.

EDUCATION

MASTER'S COHORT PROGRAM

(traditional evening program also available)

- Structured format tailored to meet the needs of working professionals.
- Integrates theory with applied research to solve organizational issues.
- Meets twice a month on Saturdays for 2 years.

MEETING

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP DOCTORAL PROGRAM:

(traditional evening program also available)

- Targeted for senior executives and HRD professionals from across the U.S. and world.
- Facilitated by distinguished GW Faculty and internationally noted guest speakers.
- Meets one weekend a month for 2 1/2 years of coursework.

TOMORROW'S

BUSINESS

CHALLENGES

FOR MORE INFORMATION on any of our programs, contact:
Human Resource Development Program
2134 G Street, N.W., Suite 219
(202) 994-3410 Fax (202) 994-4928

175 The George Washington University

175TH ANNIVERSARY 1821-1996

GW is an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution.

Circle No. 150 on Reader Service Card

sultants how to help managers understand, accept, and master the new requirements of managing in a total-quality organization.

The workshop was superb. But during the question-and-answer period, I was struck by a question from a well-meaning participant:

"My organization has some military officers in positions of authority," explained the questioner. "How can I overcome their resistance to teamwork and participative management, so that TQM can work?"

The implication was clear. The speaker was convinced that former military people just stand in the way of all team-based improvements. The stereotype is that military people will go along with change—but only as long as the ideas come from a top-down, hierarchy-type leader who dictates policy.

Even worse was the message to all trainers, training directors, and personnel types in attendance: "Don't hire military veterans; they won't be team players; they won't be innovative; all they know how to do is

The two had designed what the commandant of the Marine Corps would later call the universal spotting vehicle. Marines refer to this innovative device as the Murtha Mount.

Quality and the Corps. Another illustration of the Marine Corps's commitment to teamwork and leadership is its current move to total-quality leadership in installations all around the country. This improvement process is based on W. Edwards Deming's work and is similar to the more familiar total-quality management.

"The point of TQL is not to manage the conduct of war," said J. Daniel Howard, undersecretary of the Navy, in 1992. "It is to improve the way we prepare for it."

With all the downsizing and reorganizing of our military, many high-performing people from the armed services are becoming available to join the civilian workforce. Many of these people are accustomed to working in teams. They are creative problem solvers. They are success oriented. They have spent a lot of time in training, and they know its value.

The idea of "command and control" leadership from the top levels of the armed services is a stereotype. Former military personnel can share countless stories of teamwork, process improvement, and creative problem solving. And they can build teamwork and team leadership into their nonmilitary roles. ■

(Yeoman is a lieutenant colonel in the Marine Corps Reserve. He thanks Joe Conforti, a retired Marine Corps major, for the story about the Murtha Mount.)

"The Opposite Sector" is compiled and edited by **Catherine M. Petrini**. Send your short articles on training in the government or nonprofit sector to "The Opposite Sector," Training & Development, 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043.

Accelerated Master of Science Degree in

Career and Human Resource Development
Hospitality-Tourism Management
Instructional Technology
Packaging Science
Service Management

... with Only Eight Weeks' Residency
plus Distance Study

- Earn an MS from a fully accredited university
- Earn credit for professional experience by portfolio or examination
- Exchange ideas with colleagues who have considerable and varied professional experience.

Residency consists of four two-week sessions over two summers.

For more information call or write:

R·I·T

Rochester Institute of Technology

Ms. Kelly Outermand
Executive Leader Master's Program
72 Lomb Memorial Drive
Rochester, NY 14623-5604

Circle No. 149 on Reader Service Card

Phone: 716-475-6768 • Fax: 716-475-7164 • Internet: gradstu@rit.edu

BE A REAL CHAMPION!

Fulfill training requests *fast*
Assure excellent delivery
Control total expenses

For a FREE information kit that describes our "Corporate University" services, call (913) 432-7755.



National Seminars Group
Rockhurst College Continuing Education Center

Think of Us as Your Corporate University.

Circle No. 161 on Reader Service Card