

# Developing a team spirit culture

# Developing a culture where team spirit thrives at work

Most people would agree that Richard Branson is a pretty confident guy. Not surprising really when you consider his incredible track record of business success. Branson is one of those leaders who seems to have found a consistent formula for stacking the deck heavily in his favour every time he takes on a new venture. So, what's his secret?

Richard Branson builds winning teams.

Founder of the Virgin Group and one of the world's most charismatic business leaders, Branson knows the most important thing he can do as the head of an organisation is to surround himself with the right people. "People are the lifeblood of any company; they need to be looked after and celebrated every now and then," he said. Having a staff made up of heavy hitters can certainly increase your odds of success, but it's not a guarantee. You still need to make sure that all of those skills and abilities are applied in a way that benefits the enterprise.

This is where Branson adds the magic ingredient -- purpose. "You have got to unite your staff around you, to really believe in the battle that you are going through." Branson understands that, as a leader, you need to be committed to the individual and their prosperity. But just as importantly, he understands the need to provide the rallying cry that pulls individuals together into a team with a shared purpose. People united by a common purpose have the ability to make amazing things happen. And that is certainly part of the reason the Virgin Group has had such global success across a variety of business segments for many many years.

Richard Branson is a cheerleader.

That may sound strange and perhaps a little dismissive. But the bottom line is that Branson is a master at creating team spirit in his organisations. The term 'team spirit' quite possibly makes you think of a list of generic platitudes about cooperation or even, the 'pep' talk delivered at school before taking part in a sporting event. But it's really a way of instilling a sense of purpose among a group of people. Purpose leads to action. Action delivers results. Delivering great results leads to pride. According to Branson, "A true sense of pride in the business makes all the difference." As a leader, you can use team spirit to create that sense of purpose and pride among your employees to drive real, measurable business results.



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This Blue Paper examines the different components of team spirit, how making it a part of your corporate culture makes for a more positive and prideful work environment, and uses case study research to demonstrate how happy and invested employees can become more productive and improve bottom line results.

## More than Oh-Ra-Ra

We mentioned pep talks a moment ago. Sorry to mention them again, but they're such a useful analogy for what we're talking about. The typical school pep talk is a carefully orchestrated opportunity to unite students in a shared sense of school pride, gradually working them into a complete team-spirit-fueled frenzy. By the time they leave, they can't even imagine their team losing the game. They're all on side.

Well, that's the idea here too. Most organisations would love their employees to feel a sense of pride and purpose like that. The reality is that teams within an organisation can be affected by an array of problems, which can demotivate and disconnect them. They may feel a lack of optimism, or exhibit a basic lack of respect for one another. The ability to trust and collaborate may be missing, or maybe there's a lack of common goals. If any of these symptoms sound all-too-familiar, it might be time for an old school, team-spirit-building pep talk. It's time to issue the rallying cry.



It's likely that you've invested a lot of time and energy into finding the right people for your team. You know they have what you need on an individual level. The next step is to remove any obstacles that might keep people from sharing resources and working collectively to reach shared goals. We're talking about adding Branson's magic ingredient: purpose. Your team is the key to your success, and they need to be excited about working together to achieve their common purpose. That's going to be your greatest competitive advantage, and team spirit can help to set the stage for that.

According to Oxford University Dictionaries, team spirit is 'a feeling of camaraderie among members of a group, enabling them to cooperate and work well together.'<sup>1</sup> In addition to camaraderie, there are some other attributes of team spirit:

<sup>1</sup> "Team Spirit" Definition of Team Spirit - Feeling (British and World English). Oxford Dictionaries. Web 17.12.13. <<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/team%2Bspirit>>.

- Respect
- Optimism
- Collaboration
- Trust
- Drive towards shared goals

As you implement the process of building team spirit within your organisation, these attributes can provide the basic metrics for measuring your success. A simple way to start is to use them to identify what needs the most work. Does your team lack optimism? Do team members trust each other? Are there clearly defined shared goals for the team? Asking these questions can help you to identify the best opportunities for improvement. Once you have some benchmarks to measure against, you're ready to start rallying the team. Remember, the goal is to inspire at an individual AND a team level.

## Step 1. Get together. Ask the tough questions. Repeat ... a lot.

Implementing team spirit is not easy, particularly if you're in a large organisation with many departments or divisions. Seeking buy-in from other managers and administrators is critical, since most friction points in an organisation are usually between departments that may not share the same goals. Discuss the hard questions right away, like whether team spirit is the right fit for your workplace and whether your 'teams' are ready for it. Then, set up regular meeting times with managers to stay abreast of their progress as they try to make team spirit a more integral part of their game plan. Don't skimp on this part, especially at the beginning. Regularly communicating the purpose of the initiative is critical.

Here are some additional key questions to consider together:

- **What is your all-encompassing goal?**  
What do you want this initiative to change within your organisation? Why is it needed? What do you expect to see at the end of it?
- **How long will it take to make team spirit happen?**  
Based on your team's initial thoughts, how long do you think it will take to get the idea to take root? The intensity of team spirit training depends on how ready or reticent employees are to accept it as a valid concept and decide that they want to participate.



- **How many people are in your organisation?**  
The bigger the group, the longer it will take to create a sense of team spirit.
- **How much are you prepared to invest?**  
Time and money are directly related to one another in that the longer it takes, the more resources you'll have to invest.

Don't forget about team spirit's attributes. They'll help you determine where to begin. Respect, optimism, collaboration, trust and drive towards shared goals are probably already present in your office, but perhaps not as tangibly as they could be. To what extent do you see them play out between individual employees and working groups already? Which, among the five attributes, are already manifested within your team? Conversely, which ones need to be developed and embraced? Focus on those as subsets within the broader team spirit programme to direct it and give it momentum.

Use the most-needed attributes as the basis for your organisational goals. You may want to split the programme into segments and begin with the most prevalent attribute (the low-hanging fruit) and then move to progressively less developed team spirit attributes. Each segment could be a month or two or vary in length depending on the corresponding intensity needed to address each area.

## Step 2. Grow your people. They'll return the favour.

When employees feel appropriately challenged and engaged at work, they are more likely to be happy. A July 2012 study by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) revealed that highly engaged employees 'have great team spirit.'<sup>2</sup> It makes complete sense if you think about it. If an employee is highly engaged, it means that they've bought into the purpose of the organisation. They're being challenged, but more importantly they feel that what they do matters. When employees feel like their work matters, and therefore the work of the organisation is important, they'll be more likely to rally around a shared goal with their work colleagues.



Two examples of successful companies that know all about individual

<sup>2</sup> "Highly Engaged Employees Have Great Team Spirit." Institute for Employment Studies. Web. 17.12.13.  
<[http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/press/13\\_12.php](http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/press/13_12.php)>.

engagement as a core component of team spirit are Facebook and Google. In Google's case, employees are allowed to spend 30% of their time on projects that are of interest to them personally, though not necessarily to Google. Why? Because it allows employees to remain engaged and fulfilled on an individual level. Google enjoys a boost in employee morale and buy-in as a result. Ideally, projects tie back to, and ultimately benefit, the company one way or another, but there's still a lot of freedom to pursue personal growth. And at Facebook, 'hackathons'<sup>3</sup> are still the norm. The idea behind them is to get a team together to expand skills for work by doing work. Again, something that's not really sustainable unless there's buy-in to the company's purpose.

What are you doing to encourage individual engagement? Or, what else could you do to encourage engagement and thus team spirit at work? One way to do so is with the help of goal setting. Ask employees to develop individual goals. Make time to sit down and discuss their goals with them and incorporate one, or a handful, of the team spirit attributes into their individual goals. Find out:

- How they perceive themselves in relation to respect, optimism, collaboration, trust and drive towards shared goals.
- Which of those do they already embody?
- Which of those need more work?

For a more precise look at what kind of team spirit strengths they may have, carryout a Clifton StengthsFinder<sup>4</sup> test for your employees. The aim of StrengthsFinder is to identify a person's natural abilities. It gives you insight into how individual staff members think and operate. It also helps you leverage them to contribute to the team spirit initiative more effectively. With their ideas, yours, and some Gallup-inspired insight, develop a detailed set of goals together. You'll engage employees and they will in turn impact your bottom line.

### Step 3. Be William Wallace. (Blue face paint optional.)

You may remember the scene from the film Braveheart. The one where William Wallace sits on his horse, covered in blue war paint, staring down at an English army more than twice the size of his own. He turns to his men and delivers a classic rallying cry at the Battle of Falkirk. Even though defeat was certain, they ride into battle. (Okay, this example is a bit extreme, but it illustrates the power of the rallying cry.) People will attempt the



<sup>3</sup> "Hackathon." Wikipedia. Web 17.12.13. <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hackathon/>>

<sup>4</sup> Clifton StengthsFinder. Web 17.12.13. <<http://strengths.gallup.com/110242/About-Book.aspx/>>

impossible if they really believe in what they're doing.

If you're going to successfully implement team spirit within your organisation, you have to remember the rallying cry. In an organisation, it's your mission statement and it should effectively communicate the organisation's purpose. You need to revisit it with your teams, and you need to do it often, to keep it inspiring, relevant and worth working for.

Patagonia is a US clothing company specialising in high-end outdoor clothing, is an example of a company with a strong mission statement that effectively spells out the company's reason for being. It's clear, concise and motivates employees: 'Build the best product, cause no unnecessary harm, use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis.'<sup>5</sup>



Does your organisation have a rallying cry like that? Does it have something that drives people to want to do their job and do it well? If you're anything less than inspired, go back and make some changes. But this time, do it as a team. That first mission statement session sets a precedent for the meetings and training sessions that follow. For organisation-wide team spirit events, require everyone to attend. (That means you, too.) It's vital for you to be there alongside your team, even if only to rally them.

The rallying cry (your mission statement) is all about reminding people about the purpose of the organisation. And like anything else, living the purpose is an even stronger way to rally people than just talking about it. Putting the organisation's purpose into practice every day is a key element that's missing from most organisations. Why? One reason is a lot of organisations write their core values as nouns. How do you put a noun into action? Core values should be verbs, by definition an action. They're the daily application of your mission.

Another great example of an organisation with a simple and straightforward mission statement is innocent, the healthy drinks firm. Established in 1999 by Richard Reed, Adam Balon and John Wright (or Rich, Adam and Jon as they prefer to be known) they built a business founded on a growing demand for healthy drinks and smoothies. Everything about innocent screams 'team spirit' and that team encompasses their customers as well as employees.

With a truly inspirational mission statement of: 'make natural, delicious food and drink that helps people live well and die old', innocent also have 5 clear, concise

<sup>5</sup> "Our Reason for Being." Patagonia Company Information: Our Reason for Being - Values, Mission Statement. Patagonia. Web 17.12.13. <<http://www.patagonia.com/lus/patagonia.go?assetid=2047/>>.

and very definitely 'action-orientated' core values<sup>6</sup>:

- be natural
- be entrepreneurial
- be responsible
- be commercial
- be generous

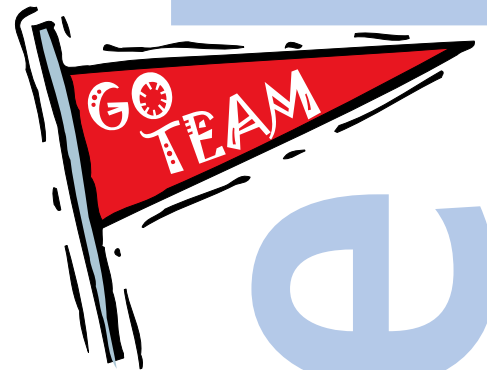
innocent don't have an off-the-shelf HR department instead they have talent and learning managers who are tasked with developing the People team.

It may come as a surprise that innocent is now no longer run by three young graduates on a mission to provide the world with drinks that 'help people live well and die old.' Back in 2009 the drinks giant Coca Cola bought an 18% stake in the firm and earlier this year (2013) Coke took total control with a stake-holding of over 90%.<sup>7</sup> Just by looking at the innocent website it's hard to believe this company is no longer the independent, free-spirited, entrepreneurial organisation that many customers grew to love. Except that it is, as Richard Reed denied they were selling out. "Our aim was to make innocent a global brand and take its ethical values to the world's consumers. We decided that we would be able to do a better job of that with Coke." Reed also assured customers that Coke was committed to innocent's ethical ideals, and its promise to give 10% of profits to charity.<sup>8</sup>

## Step 4. Step back. Evaluate.

Once you reach a point three to six months into the programme, revisit the initial attributes of team spirit - now your indicators and benchmarks for success. Use them to help you determine whether you're on the right track to growing a culture of team spirit at your workplace.

- **Respect.** A prerequisite to respect between team members is understanding and appreciation. One way to increase both qualities among employees is by means of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI).<sup>9</sup> In its 50-year history, the Myers-Briggs has become a trusted resource for more than 10,000 companies (McKinsey & Co.)<sup>10</sup> The MBTI



<sup>6</sup> "Life at innocent." Company information: Web 17.12.13. <[www.innocentdrinks.co.uk/us/careers](http://www.innocentdrinks.co.uk/us/careers)>.

<sup>7</sup> Coca-Cola takes full control of Innocent." The Guardian. Web 17.12.13. <<http://www.theguardian.com/business/2013/feb/22/coca-cola-full-control-innocent/>>.

<sup>8</sup> "Coca-Cola takes full control of Innocent." The Guardian. Web 17.12.13. <<http://www.theguardian.com/business/2013/feb/22/coca-cola-full-control-innocent/>>.

<sup>9</sup> CCP. Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Web 17.12.13. <<https://www.cpp.com/products/mbtilindex.aspx/>>.

<sup>10</sup> Lillian Cunningham. "Does It Pay to Know Your Type?" The Washington Post. Web 17.12.13. <[http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-12-14/national/35847528\\_1\\_personality-types-myers-briggs-type-indicator-financial-success](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-12-14/national/35847528_1_personality-types-myers-briggs-type-indicator-financial-success)>.



helps these entities get to know their employees in terms of 'what' they are: thinking versus feeling or actor versus analyst. Bring in an executive coach or outside consultant to talk about what it means to be one or the other. The experience will give everyone a new appreciation for all the 'Types' in the office, how different types express themselves and how best to communicate respectfully with one another.

- **Optimism.** Employ the Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R)<sup>11</sup> or something similar to see how optimism is growing (or diminishing) within your ranks. Administer it at the beginning to benchmark your team and then repeat as the programme progresses. The great thing about this particular assessment is its brevity and simplicity.
- **Trust.** As trust grows, relationships grow both inside and outside the office. The Great Place to Work Institute, a global research, consulting and training firm that helps organisations identify, create and sustain great workplaces through the development of high-trust workplace cultures.<sup>12</sup> Their Trust Index Employee Assessment and Survey<sup>13</sup> will evaluate trust in your workplace and then relates results back to your business' Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Instead of using traditional indicators, or in addition to them, you could include some of the other team spirit attributes for an even greater level of understanding when it comes to growing a culture of team spirit.
- **Collaboration.** Team spirit should usher in a new way of working together. If your staff rarely worked together or always came to you with questions before turning to each other, an ongoing team spirit programme will help them learn to use one another as resources as opposed to just you. To encourage that transition, engineer project plans so that they can't be completed by one or two people alone. Then, observe the changing methods of collaboration your group employs from afar. Start with a guide like the Galileo Educational Network's Guide to Assessing Teamwork and Collaboration,<sup>14</sup> or use it as a model to create a collaboration rubric of your own. Then, track your team's progression over time.



11 Revised Life Orientation Test. Psychology Department - Carnegie Mellon University. Web 17.12.13. <[http://www.psy.cmu.edu/faculty/scheier/scales/LOTR\\_Scale.pdf](http://www.psy.cmu.edu/faculty/scheier/scales/LOTR_Scale.pdf)>

12 "About Us" Great Place to Work. Web 17.12.13. <<http://www.greatplacetowork.net/about-us/>>

13 "Trust Index Assessment & Employee Survey" Great Place to Work. Web 17.12.13. <[www.greatplacetowork.net/our-services/assess-your-organization/trust-index-assessment/](http://www.greatplacetowork.net/our-services/assess-your-organization/trust-index-assessment/)>

14 "Guide to Assessing Teamwork and Collaboration." Galileo Educational Network. Web 17.12.13. <[http://www.galileo.org/tips/rubrics/t-c\\_rubric.pdf](http://www.galileo.org/tips/rubrics/t-c_rubric.pdf)>

- **Drive toward shared goals.** Finally, the conviction and motivation with which your team members meet their professional role each day should have grown since the team spirit project began. There should be a noticeable difference in your team, one that compels a mission-centric culture. Each of the attributes previously listed will contribute to a greater shared sense of purpose and the belief that they're completing mission critical work as individuals and as a team.

You now have all the numbers and test results at your fingertips. Do they support the kind of spirit you're seeing? (Hopefully, the answer is a resounding Yes!) Don't forget to make time to sit down with team members to gather more personal feedback from them. Are they more engaged? Do they feel more committed to the team? Their personal insights should provide a valuable means of fleshing out what the numbers are telling you.

## Slip ups and other team spirit snags

Getting authentic team spirit to take hold within your organisation, if it wasn't there from the start, is not an easy thing to do; nothing that deals with people's behaviour and change ever is. There are just as many examples of companies that have experienced success as failure in trying to realise team spirit. A Harvard Business Review (HBR) article 'The Case of the Team-Spirit Tailspin'<sup>15</sup> illustrates the ordeal of an airline as it tried to usher in an era of team spirit. It's an example of a company that tried to tackle team spirit before the employees were in a position to sustain it. It's meant to make you think about whether or not your team is prepared to take on the task of team spirit, whether you're ready to take on team spirit, because the likelihood of a successful team spirit programme hinges on the parameters you set and the gusto with which you introduce and manage it.



*The CEO of an airline introduced a flagship programme in an internal letter to all employees. It explained his goal to foster 'a positive work environment in which teamwork, creativity, and change could flourish [with] four mechanisms: cross-functional task forces, open communication, recognition committees, and individual initiative.' He wrote that the effectiveness of each and the overall success of the programme depended on everyone.*

*For a while, it went swimmingly and people seemed to embrace the*

<sup>15</sup> "The Case of the Team-Spirit Tailspin." Harvard Business Review. Web 17.12.13. <<http://hbr.org/1991/01/the-case-of-the-team-spirit-tailspin/ar/1>>

*new atmosphere. There were task forces and employee trainings, rewards for good performance and even a fortnightly internal newspaper. However, as enthused as employees were, external factors soon began to impact the morale of the collective and the company newspaper became a breeding ground for complaints and negative sentiments.*

*Over time, circumstances worsened and the pessimism grew. In an effort to manage the downward spiral of it all, the CEO got rid of the newspaper, which only served to incense employees and fuel disapproval among the whole organisation. Shortly after the newspaper was canceled, the airline's flagship team spirit programme faded and company morale was worse than when it began.*

This is a classic example of a good idea that struggled in the face of challenges. The programme lacked a leader willing to talk about the difficult stuff. Without support, it failed. Team spirit programmes face the same challenges. It's important to make sure that you and your fellow managers are ready and willing to put in the time and energy needed to get team spirit off the ground. The benefits to the organisation can be substantial, but this seldom happens overnight. After all, it took 15 years for the innocent founders to 'benefit' financially from the bumper payout from Coco Cola, yet without an award winningly strong team spirit the company could have been worth only a fraction of the large undisclosed sum.



Think about your departments, managers and individual employees. Measure where you think they stand in terms of perseverance and helping each other. Are they positive enough to support one another when they need to? Are you prepared to fully support them and talk candidly about the tough stuff? If not, team building needs to happen before team spirit can be addressed.

Team spirit thrives on positivity and respect for others. When those fundamental elements are lacking, team spirit mentality fades with them. Here are some office personalities that drain both positivity and respect for others from the workplace:

- **Complainer Clive.** This person always finds something to complain about. The project deadline is too close, someone else isn't pulling

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their weight, the boss is asking too much too often. When Complainer Clives make their sentiments known in conversations with others in a large group or on the Internet, that's the worst-case scenario.

- **Confrontational Claire.** These people are the ones that interrupt otherwise comfortable and constructively critical conversations to challenge each detail. If it's not the project timeline, it's the budget; if it's not the strategy, it's the tactics. Put Confrontational Claire on the spot by assigning them a challenging task and closely watching (read: nicely scrutinising) their execution.
- **Doubtful Dan.** Always in need of reassurance, Doubtful Dans like to come up with worst case scenarios and then talk about them to a lot of people. Reassurance from time to time might be necessary, but be mindful if Dan's doubts turn to mistrust or suspicion.
- **Negative Nicola.** The glass is always half empty with Negative Nicolas. Theirs may be an issue easily reconciled by taking time to talk to them. It may just be a self-esteem issue you can help with on a more personal level, so before you write them off completely, find out more about them and be prepared to mentor them a little bit.



For the Clives, Claires, Dans and Nicolas, mitigate their risky behaviour as soon as you see it. If it's a minor one-time thing, a quiet chat in passing should suffice. However, if the general pessimism is ongoing, waste no time addressing it. You can do so by saying a few words at the next team meeting without naming names, scheduling a smaller group meeting and making a few more direct remarks, or you can send an invitation for a one-to-one meeting and some assertive reminders about the culture of team spirit you're working hard to implement and how their behavior is not conducive to its growth.

We'd be remiss if we didn't mention bureaucracy. It's not an office personality, but bureaucracy impacts employee engagement, investment and collective team spirit. Slow decision-making at the individual and team level is detrimental to forward momentum and slow-moving organisations don't inspire much confidence from their employees, particularly if they're on the lookout for weekly or monthly wins. Do what you can to create a fast and effective decision-making environment to keep progress - and productivity - humming.

## Be like Branson. Coach, be coached and cheer a lot.

Team spirit, at the most basic level, is all about people. It's about assembling the right individuals, engaging them, and rallying them by giving them shared purpose. If you want to pull this off, you have to like working with people and you have to genuinely care about them, too. In fact, Richard Branson was once quoted as saying "Having a personality of caring about people is important ... You can't be a good leader unless you generally like people. That is how you bring out the best in them."



If you don't like and care about others, how can you expect your team to do the same?

Like Branson, you may have had an idea, one that led you to found and run an incredible business, but an idea is nothing without the right people to turn it into a reality. Creating and selling a compelling product or service is heavily contingent upon the buy-in of the people that make up the organisation. Are they individually happy? Are they engaged? Do they help one another? And, most importantly, do they believe in your mission?

The mission is the 'glue' for the team, a shared goal that keeps them motivated. Lucky teams have a strong and reliable leader to help them along the way. As team captain and leader of the pack, team spirit starts with you.

Be like Branson. Work hard, play hard, and practice often. When you do, you'll experience the ultimate game-winning: When one of your own cheers you on before you have the chance to encourage them. That's team spirit.

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