

How to Boost and Maintain Your Team

GO-TO-ISM: Building The Ultimate Team Spirit

Bruce Tulgan, Author

Go-to-ism is “the way of the go-to person”: a philosophy of work and a way of conducting yourself at work. You must believe that serving others—making yourself incredibly valuable to the people around you, building goodwill and a positive reputation—will make others want to do things for you and make good use of your time. And you must approach every relationship determined to add value to every interaction and to every other person.

Some teams are created to be just that. There’s a lot we can learn about fostering a company culture of go-to-ism from teams that are created, from the beginning, to be indispensable.

Dave Christiansen, who served for decades as president and CEO of Mid-Kansas Coop (MKC), a billion-dollar agricultural cooperative, says he truly grasped the true power of culture while observing employees at Walt Disney World. He loves to tell the following story—a classic example of go-to-ism in action.

On a visit to Walt Disney World, Dave noticed one person in particular, a woman who worked backstage, away from the limelight of the Cinderella Castle, the stage extravaganzas, and elaborate rides. She was a member of the housekeeping staff at a Disney hotel, a difficult and largely invisible role. Yet, despite the hard work and long days, she was

smiling through it all.

Dave recalls: "When I asked her how her day was going, she said, 'Great!'" Then she told Dave something remarkable: "She told me she had one of the most important jobs on property."

The reason? "When people go to bed at night," she told Dave, "they turn back their bedclothes, and those crisp sheets and pillowcases are what they fall asleep on. It's the last impression they have of Disney every night."

Dave says, "I knew then if I could ever bring that type of culture to any company I lead, it would be transformational. It was and is." For years, he sent members of his team to Disney for training in customer-service excellence.

Of course, exporting a Disney-level culture to other companies isn't easy. Many leaders have tried and failed to do it. So, what was Dave's secret all those decades? "I always knew that virtually every one of my employees shows up on day one enthusiastic, ready to go to work, and ready to make a difference," he says. "They're looking for someone to emulate whom they respect. They want to know what good work looks like, how they can measure it for themselves, and how *you*—the boss—are going to measure it. They want to know, 'To whom do I make a difference?'"

Dave ensures that each employee understands their importance to MKC, from day one and every day after. "Managers play a pivotal role in building a strong company culture," he says, "but only if they do the hard work of turning vague values into concrete actions employees can take."

"We would always look for people who are coaches and teachers," he explains. "People who love helping others grow." He would also encourage managers to discover their people's special talents and interests, and to tweak the job description accordingly. "Help every person understand exactly how their contributions will make a difference." To do that,

Dave says, you have to get to know your people. “What are their skills and strengths? Retaining talent is easier when you give them opportunities to demonstrate their skills. Giving people more opportunities for industry involvement and recognition can also make a huge difference.” That means offering high-potential employees special projects to see how well they perform. “But also give them opportunities to mentor, coach, and meet with other high-potential employees, and challenge them to innovate. That will tell you a lot about what sets them apart.”

He continues: “Identify the people who are motivated by the mission and how they contribute to that mission. Then, find out what connects them to their work and tap into that natural motivation whenever possible. Support, guide, and coach them.”

That’s how Dave fostered go-to-ism at MKC. And he did it because he knows go-to-ism holds the key to working effectively across blurred and crisscrossed lines of accountability.

How can you foster go-to-ism throughout *your* organization?



About the Author: Bruce Tulgan is a bestselling author, an adviser to business leaders all over the world, and a sought-after keynote speaker. His most recent book is *THE ART OF BEING INDISPENSABLE WORK: Win Influence, Beat Overcommitment, and Get the Right Things Done*. Since 1995, Tulgan has worked with tens of thousands of leaders and managers in hundreds of organizations, ranging from Aetna to Walmart and from the US Army to the YMCA. He lectures at the Yale Graduate School of Management, as well as other academic institutions. He is the

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