In examining facets of our culture for evidence of successful teamwork among people, the world of sports immediately comes to mind. The definition of the term "team" seems to fit here quite easily. A team is made up of persons associated in some joint action and demands cooperative, coordinated effort in the interest of a common cause. As we watch such games as football, baseball, or basketball, we note the necessity for a high degree of cooperation. Yet at the same time we realize the importance of competition for status and prestige in winning the game. As spectators, we urge the team members to cooperate so that the team can compete successfully.

At first glance, this attitude does not seem compatible with the concept of "teamwork"; however, upon further analysis both cooperation and competition must be considered concurrently if man is to develop successful teams working together to solve identified problems. Perhaps the motivation needed for successful team effort is the challenge offered by competing with obstacles not yet mastered by man.

Hundreds of scientists, manufacturers, and engineers cooperated to create the mechanisms that make the space flights possible. Millions have observed on television screens perhaps the highest degree of cooperative teamwork yet realized by man. Thus the challenge and excitement created by man's cooperative effort have been felt throughout the world. The men involved were serious in purpose and had clearly stated objectives. Too, they were in competition with unknown elements.

Cooperative effort demands personnel who continue to redefine purpose and adjust procedure in order to keep realistic goals in focus. As recent events in the space program indicate, success is not always forthcoming even though careful planning and coordination have been undertaken. In the space program, the challenge will not be forgotten: without doubt, further study and work will continue and a better understanding of our universe will be the result.

The field of medicine has a long history of team effort. Disease is being conquered because groups of scientists share knowledge, plan programs, and build upon their findings. The list of medical specialties is long, and when man becomes ill or injured, he appreciates the fact that successful teamwork is present. An interesting human process takes place in successful teams when one considers that a few members of the team become recognized for the work of many. The medical profession seems to find teamwork satisfying because of the need to compete against disease. Medicine has not conquered
this competitor completely, perhaps it never will, but the challenge keeps men at work in teams.

The examples of cooperative-competitive enterprise needed by man are endless. The most recent example found in popular literature has to do with the politics of ecology. We have just begun to realize the limited nature of world resources as we assess the evidence of environmental deterioration. Conservationists have tried to warn man of his folly, but it has been only recently that groups of people have organized "earth days." College students are demanding environmental courses, including law courses, in this area. Environmental institutes are being established which require the cooperative effort of politicians, academicians, and corporations. Once again team effort requires clear definition of the problem in order for the results to be successful. The strongest motivation seems to be the competition against those elements which can bring harm to man.

Educators, too, realize the need for cooperative effort in overcoming the competitors—public ignorance and apathy. An example of cooperative effort in education is the utilization of television for the production of "Sesame Street." The program has depended upon the resources of the Carnegie Corporation, Ford Foundation, and the U.S. Office of Education, as well as specialists in television production. The defined purposes were clear; therefore, success in helping culturally deprived children gain the necessary verbal skills required to meet the standards of public school programs seemed feasible.

To Overcome Ills

Teachers throughout the nation are beginning to engage in serious discussion regarding the need for teams in conquering some of the ills of education. No longer can one teacher be expected to know enough or have the necessary competencies to help 30 or more youngsters meet all the challenges during one academic year. Teachers such as the ones in Illinois, Harlem District, recognized the need for team effort as they worked toward restructuring their education program in such a manner as to become members of a diagnostic educational enterprise. They requested a consultant team from Northern Illinois University to help initiate team teaching and nongraded units within their school district. The Harlem District group was interested in providing more opportunity for individual progression among learners as they help them upgrade their skill competency.

As a member of the university consultant team, the writer discovered that the challenge inherent in the identified problem provided the needed motivation for progress. However, the group members were not without frustrations as they attempted to change their teaching styles and to work together in diagnostic, educational teams. In the past, each teacher as an individual had been in a position of rather clearly defined leadership and authority. Now that team effort was felt to be a more satisfactory method in bringing about stated goals, new role definition must take place.

Initially, the greatest fear seemed to be that few among the group would be selected to represent the efforts of many. The selected few would be chosen for reasons which would probably be vague and therefore unfair because it seemed impossible to understand the dynamics of group behavior. As time progressed, the group members worked through some of the basic fears and concerns and were able to build understandings which allowed redefinition of roles. This process was not at all easy; however, those who succeeded were able to gain a great deal of personal, professional satisfaction in the knowledge that team effort can more effectively accomplish the goal of helping each learner meet his own individual potential.

In working together, the teachers of Harlem District gave strong support to the need for administrative procedures which allowed each member of the team the opportunity to utilize his particular talents, competencies, and teaching style. There is room for various kinds of instruction in team teaching: therefore, each member can find his rightful place and help to bring success in meeting identified goals. The problem of over-specialization was carefully considered by
some members of the Harlem District group. They decided that for an educational team to be effective each member should have a basic knowledge of human growth and learning as well as a grasp of the total problem area under study. The specialist is only effective when he can contribute universal generalizations. Such a person must of necessity be intelligent, creative, and adaptable. The Harlem District teachers came to realize that being a member of a diagnostic, educational team requires skills and competencies which enable each person to gain a positive self-concept; thus, the basic need for recognition can be met.

Education has far to go in establishing effective teams which can identify and work toward the interests of a specific cause. Teamwork is not impossible and certainly there are enough serious educational problems to provide the challenge. There is ample evidence to support the idea that men will work together when the competitor is identified as harmful to progress. Educational leaders are needed—leaders who can help groups identify problems and can bring about human relationships which enable teams of specialists to work toward a more successful educational enterprise.

References


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