

SPARTADIA

A BATTLE PLAN FOR TODAY'S BUSINESS

E-Book Excerpt

DEVELOPING SHARED RESPONSIBILITY



By Ray Martin

E-Book: Developing Shared Responsibility excerpted from:
Spartadia: A Battle Plan for Today's Business
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Developing Shared Responsibility

Making the transition from a “group of individuals” to a functioning team is a major undertaking, one that requires constant supervision and refinement. Team building is a philosophy that must be instilled into new hires but also re-instilled into longer-term employees, since the passage of time is not enough for true team dynamics to take root.

In a functioning team, everyone has to pull their weight and do their part for the group to meet its goals, both in terms of performing their actual, clearly defined tasks, but also in terms of training or cross-training individuals on an ongoing basis. Sometimes analogies can help.

Migratory birds are useful in this regard. When flying in V-formation, each bird flies slightly above the one ahead, which cuts down on wind-resistance and maintains momentum from the wake of the bird in front. Fair labour distribution is a key part of the plan, since birds will take turns rotating positions while flying in formation, falling back when they tire, then edging ahead when the leader needs a break. Since migration is fraught with inclement weather conditions and long distances, each bird must be willing to undertake a follow-the-leader strategy to help the flock arrive at its destination. The V-formation enables them to fly farther without stopping to rest, while using less energy.

At Qualifirst, we parlay the essence of the labour-sharing concept by giving new hires a minimal amount of formal training followed by ongoing peer-to-peer support. If training on a particular technique requires more than one day, we include real-work scenarios to test the employees in action. We devise small hurdles for the new employee that act as both a filtering process and a way to gauge skill level. We have found that by minimizing classroom-style training and getting people to join the flock, employees learn at a quicker pace, while allowing management to assess the individual’s skill level and ability to adapt to the company culture.

In essence, we direct employees to lean on each other, but also to be self-sufficient and high functioning. Creating smallish teams that produce very clear and measurable results is the holy grail for us,

and to do that, we make teamwork an integral part of our onboarding process.

Once a new employee starts, we set the scene so that the success of the initiate links to the success of other employees. This further instills a sense of team, and on a more practical level, if a person is a bad hire, management will know right away, because the team will reject the newcomer. We do our best to hire employees who can and will rise within the company and fly with the flock, so to speak.

I don't believe in titles either, since, to me, titles represent rungs in a personal career ladder, and speak more to individual career motivation than dedication to a team. I think what is more important is what an individual can actually do, in support of the team effort.

In the previous chapter, I mentioned that we start most of our in-office workers in the warehouse, so that as they transition they have a thorough working knowledge of our products, our customers, and our day-to-day operations. There is also an additional benefit to warehouse assignments, which speaks to the team dynamic of shared responsibility. Observing new employees working in the warehouse gives management the opportunity to vet productivity and self-motivation levels. It's easy for an employee to mask excess socializing as peer-to-peer support in an office environment. In the hands-on warehouse, however, that simply isn't possible. When co-workers interact, it's primarily to train each other, solve a problem or to refine an existing process.

The ultimate best new hire is the one that does not have to be over-managed. It is far more cost-efficient and energy-efficient to hire people who can do the job well, or even better than their predecessor can, who are solutions-oriented and to whom a clearly defined task can be handed off without worry. This is an employee who understands what to do, and will do it without being asked. This employee will help the team. This employee will last.

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SIDEBAR: Music in the Warehouse

Not everyone is cut out for office work, and, not everyone is cut out for warehouse work. When hiring a new employee, or when helping an existing employee develop, part of the examination of “fit” involves understanding their preference for self-directed work versus regular interaction with a manager.

We were already aware, from studies that we had read, that the ideal match for warehouse work is usually an employee who is highly self-directed, who likes to work alone and who requires little in the area of interaction with others or interaction with a manager. These types of people are not necessarily introverted or antisocial, but have great focus, are highly organized and methodical and genuinely take pride in their work and in the way in which they organize and process their tasks, to the point of even referring to the space as “my warehouse,” because of this natural affiliation.

We wanted to know whether this particular attribute could be further enhanced by allowing music into the mix. Some employees had already asked for permission to listen to music on headphones while performing their tasks, and, again, we were aware of many case studies that demonstrated a correlation between music and productivity.

Therefore, we decided to allow an experiment in which employees could listen to music on their personal music players, providing the level was not so loud as to damage hearing or block out any possible emergency alarms.

We asked the employees at the end of the experiment period to report their level of satisfaction; as expected, they noted an increased sense of satisfaction, while we noted no decrease in accuracy or productivity; in fact

overall the experiment highlighted a marked increase, with fewer breaks taken.

We concluded, as did the employees, that access to a personal choice of music enhanced the quality of work in the warehouse as well as an individual's sense of work satisfaction. It was a match once again of environment, job and personality.

