

Seven Ways to Spot a Positive Team Player



Some Highlights From The Following Article:

- “Positive team players do not believe in or need the rather sterile notion of a blame-free culture”
- “They do not confuse being positive with being nice”
- “A whole ‘how to praise’ industry emerged during the eighties and nineties”
- “Don’t be sidetracked by the fashionable ideas of well-meaning but misinformed positive thinkers”
- “Managers have an enormous responsibility to help team members develop appropriate individual and collective self-images”
- “Failure is something you *do*, not something you *are*”



How to Spot a Positive Team Player

Studies show that a *positive* mind-set gives us a feeling of well-being, aids creativity and memory recall and releases much more of our potential for excellence and achievement. We now know that the human immune system responds to our state of mind, although we have probably always suspected that when we are positive about ourselves we feel well and do well.



A positive mindset has an impressive enough effect on us as individuals but the synergy within a team where every member has the same success-orientated approach is truly remarkable, creating a kind of “collective super-brain” from which constructive ideas flow, free from the inhibiting effects of embarrassment and the feeling that we are being judged.

Someone once asked a senior executive how it was that his airline had such wonderful cabin staff. His reply should interest anyone responsible for building or managing a successful team – “We appoint wonderful people, then teach them the job”. It would be easy to think of the executive’s approach as simplistic but why would you want to take as your raw material anyone who was less than wonderful?

Working with thousands of motivational and attitude development course delegates over a twenty-four year period, Mancroft International has pieced together an informal profile of a productive team player. Bear in mind that the term “productive” as used here takes into account the effect of the individual on the team as whole.

- I. **POSITIVE TEAM PLAYERS EXPRESS THEMSELVES POSITIVELY** They talk in terms of what they are *going to do*, not in terms of what they *want to avoid*.
 - “I am planning to succeed”, **not** “I am planning to avoid failure”
 - “I will feel confident”, **not** “I don’t want to feel embarrassed”
 - “I think you will find this interesting”, **not** “I don’t want to bore you with this but...”

Using negative words, even when expressing a positive idea (“I mustn’t fail”) can sow the seeds of under-performance or failure itself. Listening to the way your colleagues express themselves can be a fascinating and revealing experience. Try to note the difference between self-empowering and self-defeating words and intonation.

What you say is what you get...



However, don't be sidetracked by the fashionable ideas of well-meaning but misinformed "positive thinkers" who urge you, for example, to say *challenge* rather than *problem*. This is nothing more than a semantic argument, completely missing the point that the most important factor when dealing with a challenge/problem is your mind-set. Would you rather work with colleagues who say, "We have a challenge, I think we're finished" or "We have a problem, I know we can find a solution"?



2. **POSITIVE TEAM PLAYERS ARE COMFORTABLE WITH SUCCESS** They celebrate both their own and other people's successes. Aim to surround yourself with colleagues who:

- Are able to talk about their own successes with pride but without arrogance or apology
- Openly admire other people's successes, whatever the scale of the achievements
- Accept the anonymity implicit in team success without diminishing the importance of their personal contribution when it is highlighted

Our actions always take us in the direction of increased emotional comfort. Your people cannot, therefore, achieve their full potential for excellence until they are completely mentally at ease with the prospect of greater success.



3. **POSITIVE TEAM PLAYERS UNDERSTAND PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY** They take full responsibility for what they do and how they feel. Key indicators are:

- Congruence. What you see is what you get. Because they know they are responsible for their own actions and emotions, they don't allow external factors to determine what sort of day they are going to have. And you won't have to worry about what mood they will be in
- Saying, "I agreed to do that" rather than "Look what you made me do"
- Knowing the way they feel about their work has more to do with their values and expectations than with work itself
- Understanding the importance of *self-reliant interdependence* – having confidence in their own ability plus the strength of character to trust, without the need for checking, the work of fellow team members
- Allowing blame to rest where it should fall

Positive team players do not believe in or need the rather sterile notion of a "blame-free" culture, another favourite of the misinformed positive thinker. You can't get things sorted if you can't place blame. In a team of positive players, personal accountability means the guilty accept the blame due to them (probably before others place it on them) and the innocent understand, help and support, knowing there will be no need to hide should the finger of blame ever point at them.

4. **POSITIVE TEAM PLAYERS ARE OTHER-PEOPLE CENTRED** They recognise the importance of understanding, although not necessarily agreeing with, other people's perceptions and opinions. Typical indicators are:

- Using interrogative words – who, why, what, where, when, which and how - much more than I, me, my and myself
- A readiness to give praise and recognition to others without regard to relative wealth, status, age, gender or seniority
- Helping others feel at ease in stressful circumstances
- Maintaining a willingness to listen even when preparing to speak

**You move towards
your dominant thought**





Next time you interview several job applicants, try running a *group* session in which each of them is asked to give a short presentation on a subject of personal interest. Don't spend too much time assessing the candidate who is speaking. Instead, observe the remainder of the group; you may well find your successful applicant among those who, at this stressful moment for all the candidates, are showing most interest and giving support during other people's presentations.

5. **POSITIVE TEAM PLAYERS HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF PURPOSE** They bring the infectious qualities of passion and self-belief to their work. A strong sense of purpose can exist only when three key factors are present – goals, desire and belief; your employee development initiatives are incomplete if you are failing to address each of these synergistic areas. Typical behaviours of a team player with a strong sense of purpose are:

- The ability to clearly and concisely define their work and life goals.
- Better than average problem-solving skills with a healthy balance between creative thinking (“look at all these possibilities”) and analytical thinking (“but will they work?”).
- Using *definite* language – “I will / I am going to” rather than, “hopefully / with luck I will.”

These behaviours can easily be tested and observed during group interviews and team meetings when the pressure is on and individuals' self-belief is put to the test.

**Do your staff realise they are fully responsible
for their reaction to people and events over which they have
no control?
When they do, can you imagine the effect it will have on their
ability to release more
creativity, innovation and discretionary effort?**



6. **POSITIVE TEAM PLAYERS ARE STRONG ENOUGH TO BE CRITICAL** They do not confuse being positive with being nice. Being truly positive is about using the *most appropriate* approach (including forthright criticism) with the right person at the right time for the right reasons. Ask any successful football manager. Going back to the airline story, some troublesome passengers have found themselves handcuffed and tied to their seats – for entirely the right reasons!

Look for and encourage these qualities in your team members:

- A desire for complete openness
- A strongly held contempt for the futility of office politics
- An easy ability, based on a secure self-image, to identify and tackle with sensitivity the shortcomings of others in circumstances where team performance is being compromised



Being appropriately critical is another area in which we have paid the price of misunderstanding the meaning of being positive towards our colleagues. A whole “how to praise” training industry emerged during the eighties and nineties, usually with good intentions but often geared much more to being nice than to doing what is best.

7. **POSITIVE TEAM PLAYERS LIKE THEMSELVES ENOUGH TO CARE FOR OTHERS.** They have a secure image of themselves as confident, competent and caring, while accepting that they are but fallible human beings. This mental state creates a personal *stature* that enables team members to feel comfortable with any colleague without the need to borrow power from their job title or engage in expressed or internalised self-deprecation. Key indicators are:

- The absence of self-deprecating remarks – “It’ll go pear-shaped, knowing my luck”; “I’m hopeless at remembering names”; “It’s only me”; “I just can’t stick to a diet”



- An unselfconscious willingness to perform minor tasks for others – pouring the tea at meetings; keeping the office tidy
- Understanding that right and wrong are often a matter of perception; having the generosity of spirit to accept that other people see their own opinions as truth
- Seeing success as the norm and personal failure as a temporary aberration rather than a self-definition. Helping others develop the same mind-set.

In Summary

Bearing in mind that we cannot for long outperform the image we have of ourselves, managers have an enormous responsibility to help team members develop appropriate individual and collective self-images. Building a success-orientated self-image has at its core the process of enabling staff to identify and internalise their strengths while realising that if they are prepared to work on their shortcomings, failure is something you *do*, not something you *are*.

Choosing and developing positive team players is a largely empirical process. It's more a matter of observation and feelings you get than measurements you make. Personality profiling, with its inherent narrowness, is useful but lacks the intuitive quality of the interviewer's or manager's mind.

While we await school and university qualifications in success-orientated thinking and being a great team player (don't hold your breath!) finding and growing wonderful people for your team looks set to remain something of a DIY project. If you need the support of a passionate and experienced partner, contact us at Mancroft International.



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the power of

positive training

**“What you think about isn’t nearly
as important as the way you think
about what you think about”**



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