

No Blind Aye in Team

Several years back my boss' boss walked into my office and declared me to be an outlaw-rebel-maverick. I thanked her, which was clearly not what she wanted. But what did she expect from an unbranded individual who frequently strayed from the herd?

As I recall this particular issue called for me to give up on the idea of a PC on every desktop and just accept a couple of shared resources that would be placed in a public area. I kid you not. The powers that were, wanted to put two "personal" computers in a room for 30+ people to share. The absurdity of such a request was lost on these executives who held that a terminal view of mainframe processing was all the computing power that was needed (Pun totally intended).

In 1984, (no joke), I stood up and stated we should be giving everyone some processing power of their very own. We should use the mainframe network to share our individual accomplishments until such time as a faster more efficient method is developed. And everyone in the company should be given an email address.

The level of executive outrage and defiance that reigned down upon me was matched only by the number of people who lost their jobs as this company struggled to keep up with their competition while using outdated, slow responding, ever more expensive central computing systems, locked away in an enormous squeaky clean expanse. While I did not lose my job over this, the wasted resources and missed opportunities embraced by those who just wanted to git along like little dogies drove me and every other outlaw-rebel-maverick that remained at this company, out.

Years later I was approached by a group of trail bosses from this organization asking me to return to the fold, to rejoin the team, to help them blaze new trails and find greener pastures. I did not oblige them. As Gomer Pyle once warned, "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice shame on me." This wisdom was well heeded for shortly after that recruiting session, the company imploded.

The point is, those of you who are (or were once) outlaw-rebel-mavericks should never give up your independent spirit in the name of team unity. If you disagree with the direction the team is taking you have an obligation to the larger organization to stand your ground until you are convinced that theirs is the better way or they are convinced that yours is or there can be found some alternate solution on which you can all agree. If the team proceeds without your consent and everything works out, it's okay to admit you were wrong but don't let that stop you from standing up the next time. If things go seriously wrong with their approach, don't say anything, just help fix it. If they proceed successfully down your path share the glory with the team.

If your path leads to disaster, accept the defeat, find the root cause, fix the problem and adjust your thinking accordingly. You may have to work twice as hard to convince them of your next proposal's merit, but your integrity will be unquestioned. Those of you who are not outlaw-rebel-mavericks should learn from those who are. Don't be afraid to ask your questions. Challenge the prevailing opinion, regardless of its source. Be heard, not herd. Of course if you simply agree with the direction of the team, then you still need to contribute always mindful that, having no "I" in team is not an excuse for taking YOUR eye off of innovation and improvement.

About the Author

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