

## Do You Have a Tiffany on Your Team?

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By Ron Schmidt

I was sitting on the exam table in the casting room at the Cleveland Clinic to have the cast on my foot “refreshed” when a woman walked up and introduced herself to me as Tiffany. And my response was “so you’re the infamous Tiffany,” to which she smiled and I shook her hand.

Tiffany was the first person I spoke with to set up the appointment to see Dr. B, who operated on my foot, and since it had been six weeks since we had originally talked I had now finally matched the name with the face. As we casually spoke I asked how long she had been working with Dr. B., to which she replied, “Fifteen years.” I then commented that was a lot of years together on the same team. I also mentioned my interest in effective teams and that “teams are teams” whatever setting they’re in, to which she didn’t hesitate to agree.

### Three Tenets

Here’s what impressed me about their team:

- Tenets of communication with customer – engage, listen and leave your ego at the door.

In my consultative appointment with Dr. B, she explained the surgery procedures and listened to my concerns. When I asked how many of these surgeries she’d performed and her success rate – without missing a beat and with no hint of a defensive tone, she replied: “Thousands, and around 90%.” Good enough for me. I rated her communication with me an A+.



- Tenets of communication amongst the team – respect of input, mutual honesty and no need to come off as the smartest person in the room.

Doctors are notorious for pulling rank and condescending to other team members. None of this was in play on this team. As reported in medical cases when doctors intimidate, team members feel threatened to engage in the process and unfortunate things happen, i.e. mistakes are made and patients hire attorneys. But this team demonstrated their skill sets without an attitude.

- Tenets for team focus – have some fun and feel the love.

When Dr. B walked into the OR to begin my surgery, it was around 4 in the afternoon and I knew she began surgeries that morning around 6. I asked her how she was and quipped, “Take a break – I’m not going anywhere.” Her response: “This is what I love,” and then she wrung her hands together like a kid anxious to play in a pile of dirt.

### **A WOW Moment**

Three days later I received a card in the mail signed by each member of the team with a short message. Think about it, every team member felt the love on that team – enough to respond to me personally. Now that’s a WOW moment!

So what similarities from this one team in one hospital in one city can we identify which may help your team be more effective? In a nutshell it’s how we communicate in the context of our behaviors to others. And as a coach, think about your challenge in the context of your team. In an age of over-coaching, your first play is just to understand how people learn and how they become better.

In a recent *New York Times* piece by Richard Friedman he states, “There are also easy and powerful ways to enhance learning...For example, there is intriguing evidence that the attitude that young people have about their own intelligence – and what their teachers believe – can have a big impact on how well they learn.

Carol Dweck, a psychology professor at Stanford University, has shown that kids who think that their intelligence is malleable perform better and are more motivated to learn than those who believe that their intelligence is fixed and unchangeable.

One of the simplest but most effective steps as a coach is just to get to know your team, encourage them, and ask them how you can help them perform.

In a recent Corner Office piece by Adam Bryant of the *New York Times*, Mary Laschinger, CEO of Veritiv, was asked about team members.

"I think about it in dimensions, in this order. First I want to know their values. Are they a team player? Are they egomaniac? Are they there to help the enterprise succeed? Will they help their colleagues succeed? Or is it just about them? The next thing I test for is their willingness to learn and grow. We are always confronted with change at a mind-boggling pace. We need people who are willing to learn and grow and adapt. We can't teach willingness. They have to want to adjust. Then, and only then, I look at their technical capabilities. We can teach them a number of things, but we can't teach them a willingness to learn, nor can we teach them their values. But if we get those first two right, we will have the right people, the right team. We will be aligned. I have been operating on that philosophy for quite a while, and it's paid dividends."

### **Consider Your Team**

So in evaluating where you are as the coach of your team, first stop and think about the Tiffanies of your team. After 15 years, what makes her still effective, what makes her an integral part of the team? And second, consider how inclusive each team member feels. If your team wrote a note to your customer/members thanking them for their patronage, would your team members truly feel they are an integral part of their team and appreciated by their teammates? And, are they having fun and feeling the love?

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