

CHAPTER 15: SELFLESS

There Is No I in Team

This chapter begins with the story of an amazing man named Philip Toosey, who joined the British Territorial Army in 1927 because he wanted to develop aspects of himself other than his career in banking and commodities trading. In 1939, when war broke out in Europe, now Major Toosey and his unit were called to active service, fighting first in France, then fight to defend Singapore from the Japanese. When it was obvious that the British would have to surrender Singapore, he was ordered to leave his men and ship out, so that his expertise could be used elsewhere. Toosey, as a Territorial rather than a regular army officer, was allowed to refuse on that ground. He knew that leaving his men would have a demoralizing effect on them, and he chose to stay with them. In 1942, he became a Japanese prisoner, alone with the rest of his men. They were assigned to a POW camp near the Kwae River.

There he was given an assignment by the Japanese to build first a wooden and then steel and concrete bridges across the river.

Although he wanted to refuse the assignment, Toosey knew that the reprisals would be "immediate, physical, and severe." Facing this terrible reality, he chose to ask his fellow prisoners to do as their captors asked. But Toosey "risked his life daily by standing up for his men and arguing for increased rations, regular working house, and a day off each week." In taking responsibility as he did, though, he suffered regular beatings, and other tortures, yet he caused the Japanese to improve conditions for the prisoners. In ten months, the Japanese had their bridges, and only nine prisoners lost their lives in the process.

Later, as the commander of a POW camp hospital, Toosey showed the same courage and selflessness in serving the men in his care. The men were always his first concern, and he took responsibility for infractions whenever possible. When the war ended, he traveled over three hundred miles to find the scattered men of his regiment and to determine that they were safe. After a three weeks vacation, he resumed his prewar work at the merchant bank Barings.

Fleshing It Out

Poet W. H. Auden said, "We're here on earth to do good for others. What the others are here for, I don't know." Putting others ahead of ourselves isn't easy, but it is the way to progress.

1. Be Generous

St. Francis of Assissi stated, "All getting separates you from others, all giving unites to others." Maxwell says, "The heart of selflessness is generosity." A team whose members act by these rules will succeed.

2. Display Loyalty

Just as Colonel Toosey was loyal to his men, they repaid him in kind. Loyalty not only fosters loyalty, it fosters unity, and unity breeds team success.

3. Value Interdependence Over Independence

In this country, we tend to value independence because it often brings with it innovation, diligence, and a sense of justice. But too much independence can result in selfishness and self-centeredness.

Reflecting On It

What kind of team player are you? Do you put others ahead of yourself? Do you celebrate the success of others when they are in the limelight? If you are bumped off the starting line-up, how do handle it?

Bringing It Home

Promote someone other than yourself. If you are in the habit of often talking about your own successes, turn that praises on someone else for a few weeks. Practice saying positive things about the actions and qualities of other, especially to your superiors, family and close friends.

Take a subordinate role. For a day, be the servant. Let others go first. Be the one who serves for a week and see if your attitude changes.

Give secretly. Think about why you give to others. "If you give to others on your team without their knowing it, they cannot repay you." This may be a radical idea for some, but everyone should try it just to see how good it feels.

Daily Take-Away

The chapter ends with a sad and funny story about a football massacre back in 1916. Near the end of the game the ball was snapped, but the quarterback fumbled it and he cried out to the others, "Pick it up! Pick it up!" The fullback, tired of being slammed to the ground by the opponents, yelled back to the quarterback, "Pick it up yourself - you dropped it." That team lost the 222 to 0. To be on the winning team, look for opportunities to pick up the ball if someone fumbles . . . and quietly hand it back to them.

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