
Row, Row

Row Your Boat

I can think of nowhere I enjoy more in the fall than on the east coast. And there is nothing more east coast than a regatta on a

crisp fall morning. My first semester of college in NY I was introduced to crew, and that sport took hard work and teamwork to an entirely new level for me. And while my still-limited knowledge of that great sport will be exposed here quickly, the basic carryovers to life, leadership and office are endless.

How to be a good Coxswain: On my first day of crew, while I was not surprised to see a bunch of broad-shouldered rowers, it was the handful of jockey-sized people in the mix that initially confused me. What I quickly learned was that they were arguably the most critical piece. They were the only person in the boat facing where we were going, calling out the precise commands we all followed, and the one who could see everyone else on the boat and determine how and when to push us to produce the best results. While they never rowed one stroke, the great ones knew when to bark and when to cheer; they knew how to motivate and pull the best out of us. They were in the boat with the team setting the pace, direction, and tone and we followed.

How rowing works best: The best investment of time early on is figuring out where on the boat each rower is most productive and helpful to the rest of the team. While I've long since forgotten many things (please forgive me crew experts), I remember a couple of things clearly. I had to figure out quickly how to be in synch with everyone





else, gliding and skimming water with my oar at the right angle when reloading for the next stroke, and then pulling the max amount of water to propel us forward. There was a place in the boat for everyone as long as you could figure out how to synchronize with everyone else. Occasionally, it just didn't work for someone. You could be nice about it but the truth is all it took was one person to derail everyone else's solid effort. The sooner you both identified this AND did something about it, the sooner you could get back to rowing.



Leaders lead, teams work in harmony or things just don't happen:

"Everyone ready? Here's what we've got for today. We're going to row down to the point and back. We did good last time but agreed that we needed to work on a and b today. Hey Jim, you really showed improvement last week – keep it up today. Joe, I need you to give me more today – you're making Bob work too hard. Let's go have some fun and give it all we have." That's a coxswain leading. They will not row a single stroke and yet somehow their vision casting and direction setting are essential to overall success. And no one rowing cares; the good ones are there to support their fellow rowers, keep their head down, and they expect their leader to lead. Office, there are so many nuggets here but based on the conversations we have on a weekly basis, leadership needs to establish and maintain tone and direction, and ensure they have the right people in the right places to achieve maximum success. The team can't always see where you're going like you can, so you need to tell them (with consistency and frequency). "Hey team, gather around, here's what hospitality and customer-oriented office of the future looks like for us. We can't do it all at once, but all that we will do needs to be excellent so that our customer can trust us enough to stick around. That trajectory will drive our strategy, our offerings, our technology, and our ultimate success."



Why did I love Braveheart so much back in the day (I think I just got goosebumps thinking about Freedom!!!)? Intense moment + leadership from the front + focused troops = powerful outcomes. I can still almost hear the sounds of those late afternoon sessions on the Hudson River when we were at our best: methodical, faint sound of oars in and out of the water as if they were just one oar, periodic commands given, and the ever so slight sound of success as we almost just floated over the water. It is time to start moving Office and start moving forward in synch. Leaders, your team is counting on it, team, your leaders need you to listen close and follow, because your customer desperately craves a work solution capable of meeting today's many challenges.



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