

# *“VANGUARD – Always Forward”*

R2 Team Newsletter

AUG/SEP 2020: Teamwork



*“An SFAB is a Team of Teams, Founded on TRUST, Capable of Global, Decentralized Employment ISO FPF- always representing America and Her Army with Honor and Distinction. Recognized by our Partners and our Army as an Expert, yet Humble Organization worthy of their Trust.”*

*BG Scott Jackson, SFAC Commander*

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## Chaplain's Corner

### "Better as a Team"

*"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up." Ecclesiastes 4:9-10*



I remember taking some single Soldiers on a whitewater rafting trip. Six of us got into the raft and our guide asked if anyone could lead the others in "swing." We all just stared back blankly, and he said one of us had to row in a rhythm and pattern so others could stay in sync. The better we stayed in sync, the easier we would navigate the river.

In the 1936 Olympics, the University of Washington 9 man crew team, known as "the boys in the boat" took the idea of "swing" to propel themselves to the gold. In the 30's, rowing was as popular a sport as there was in the nation. This sport was usually reserved for the wealthy and the stronger east coast colleges usually had all the success.

However, through teamwork, the UW team made up of largely lower and middle class men overcame so many obstacles.

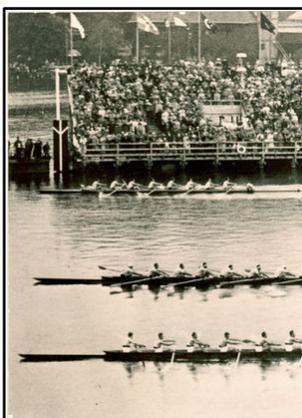
"As they flew down the last few hundred yards, their eight taut bodies rocked back and forth like pendulums, in perfect synchronicity. Their white blades flashed above the water like the wings of seabirds flying in formation. With every perfectly executed stroke, the expanse between them and the now exhausted Cal boys widened. In airplanes circling overhead, press photographers struggled to keep both boats in the frame of a single shot."<sup>1</sup>



Unity and teamwork was their strength; their ability as a team to be in perfect sync. To them, "swing" symbolized the unity and bond of their brotherhood describing their, "ideal state of harmony, one that can only be achieved when all the rowers trust and respect each other."<sup>2</sup> It would carry them all the way to the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, where they narrowly defeated both the Italian and German teams and brought home the gold medal.

In the Scripture above, we see teamwork has always been a part of God's plan. We were put on this earth to have relationships and work together, ultimately for His glory, and when we are able to "swing" in harmony we are able to accomplish so much more than we ever could on our own. When we work together we have a better return for our labor. We go farther, faster and are stronger with others helping us. And that is the true value of a team.

So what makes a successful team? To me as a Christian, it is brothers and sisters in Christ who love one another as Christ has loved us and who truly respect one another as God's children. It is me seeing everyone I work with through the eyes of my Lord and Savior so that I would always treat them with the love and respect my Father in Heaven would want. It is selflessly putting others first so that the God's mission would come first.



No matter your faith, the way we build our Vanguard Teams here in 5th SFAB has got to be with the same level of love and respect for one another. When our partner forces see us operating will they see a true team? We may be different and diverse, and yet we are stronger simply because everyone knows their role and realizes what they do affects their fellow Advisors. It is when we have relationships of trust and respect within our teams, that we will build true relationships of trust and respect across cultures.

So how is your teamwork? Are you in sync with the rest of your Vanguard Team? As a husband or wife, are you in sync with your spouse? I promise you whatever the work and sacrifice it takes, it more than pays off in results. If we are filled with advisors who love, respect and trust one another, then we will make a larger impact than we ever could have imagined. The question is, "Are we willing to pay the price?" To get in sync, to "swing" in unity means we must. The prize is too great not to pay the price. Our mission is too vital.

<sup>1</sup> Brown, Daniel James. *"The Boys in the Boat."* Penguin Group, New York, NY, 2013. Ch. 14

<sup>2</sup> Arn, Jackson. *"The Boys in the Boat Symbols: Swing."* LitCharts LLC, May 5, 2017. Retrieved August 13, 2020.

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# A Team of Teams

“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” African Proverb

Head coach of the Seattle Seahawks, Pete Carroll, along with the team psychologist, Dr. Michael Gervais, have managed to take current societal challenges and use them as a vehicle to enhance performance and enrichen their team culture. In a recent interview with InsideHook (2020), Dr. Gervais provided a glimpse into the Seahawk culture, *“Relationships are at the center of the culture...Creating a container of psychological safety and exploration and high regard for each other’s experience is really important. What we do is help create conversations and practices to help people know themselves better and to know their teammates better. So really, the relationship begins with yourself and extends to other people.”* High performing teams consistently do three things well: 1) they establish purpose, 2) build psychological safety, and 3) share vulnerability. These characteristics do not develop by chance, rather, they are fostered and intentionally cultivated by all members of the team. The relationship between purpose and performance was discussed in the last issue of the newsletter, so this issue will explore the remaining two factors, safety and vulnerability.

## Build Psychological Safety:

Psychological safety refers to the team’s shared belief that it is safe to take interpersonal risks without fear of reprisal (Salas, Reyes, & McDaniel, 2018). Safety develops over time, as the result of many small moments of connection between team members and it serves as the foundation upon which a strong unit culture is built (Coyle, 2018). Teams with high levels of psychological safety build connection by consistently transmitting *belonging cues*. These cues communicate inclusion, shared purpose and high standards, and the belief that all members can meet that standard.

### Condition Setting: Psychological Safety

- Over-communicate listening:
  - Make eye-contact, don’t interrupt, use non-verbal responses, and *listen to understand*.
- Embrace the messenger:
  - Be open to constructive criticism and difficult feedback. Cultivate an environment of growth.
- Make sure everyone on the team has a voice.

### Condition Setting: Shared Vulnerability

Conduct internal AARs: Ask tough questions. Ask a lot of questions. The goal is to clarify what happened and why so that the team walks away with a shared mental model that can be applied to future missions.

- Where did we come up short?
- What did each of us do and why did we do it?
- What will we do differently next time?

**Shared Vulnerability:** Vulnerability refers to the idea of taking mutual risk (Coyle, 2018). There is tremendous power in acknowledging vulnerabilities and working together as a group to create solutions. Instead of viewing vulnerability as “touchy feely” or “weak,” view it as the acknowledgement of shortcomings that the team can work together to improve. Although counterintuitive, trust and safety

do not precede vulnerability. Instead, willingness to share vulnerability is the foundation upon which exceptional teams build trust and safety (Coyle, 2018). A team’s level of cooperation and cohesion are often defined by how they respond to two critical moments in the group’s life: 1) the 1<sup>st</sup> vulnerability and 2) the 1<sup>st</sup> disagreement (Coyle, 2018). When the team encounters their 1<sup>st</sup> vulnerability, the team makes important decisions about whether it is more important to appear “strong” or to grow together from the vulnerability. Likewise, when the team addresses the 1<sup>st</sup> disagreement, they are collectively deciding whether it is more important to win the interaction or to work together (Coyle, 2018). Ultimately, the goal is to create an environment where insecurities and egos can be put aside so that the team can address challenges in a cohesive, supportive, and intentional way.

**Summary:** Decades of social science research has taught us that the most effective teams, “self-correct; are adaptable, flexible, and cohesive; and hold shared mental models of their task, objectives, and teammates” (Salas, Reyes, & McDaniel, 2018). As we continue to prepare for collective training events, there will be ample opportunity for teams to conduct honest, direct, and candid internal AARs that bring all information to light. These AARs are a prime opportunity to build safety, discuss shortcomings/vulnerabilities, and create shared mental models that serve as templates for future team operations.

## Building a Cohesive Team through Physical Training

Good physical training builds team relationships, fosters collaboration, and promotes Esprit de corps. Poorly planned physical training leads to malingering, injuries, extended time on profile and loss of confidence in the leadership. A few years ago I attended my first battalion run at a new duty station. The entire battalion formed up and the Sergeant Major called for injured Soldiers to fall out. Half of the formation fell out of the run. I observed that many of these Soldiers performed excellent workouts on their own but did not participate in “team building” formation runs. Obviously there was a breakdown in the intent of the workout. I reviewed the training calendars, the workouts remained exactly the same over the course of a year. Monday run day, Tuesday calisthenics, Wednesday hill running, Thursday muscle failure, Friday formation runs. Physical training was a block check for the commander and offered no value to the formation. No substantial effort was made to enhance the experience. I would like to share with you my thoughts on how to create cohesive team building workouts.



The first step is understanding the needs of your team. Physical training is too often driven by the commander’s preference. Instead, physical training should purpose driven and based on mission demands. Soldiers’ exercise needs vary considerably. Exercise has medicinal properties. I wouldn’t take medication because my commander is taking it. Most people know their weaknesses. Be open to ask the team what they need to work on. Be open to acknowledging and changing plans for better ideas. Taking the time and effort to get team members feedback will build trust. Typical leaders exhaust a lot of mental energy ensuring Soldiers take PT tests. However, they rarely exert the same effort to plan quality physical training. Soldiers will actively participate when it is personalized to meet their fitness needs. Physical training is most effective when a Soldier’s fitness

needs are nested with mission demands.

The next step to building a cohesive physical training session is offering a product of value. The exercise group leader is the subject matter expert. Running is often the default plan because the leader doesn’t want to plan, didn’t plan, or doesn’t have the skill set. If you are an exercise group leader invest in developing an exercise science skill set. Good exercise leaders should be able to explain the physiologic rationale, energy systems used, muscle groups worked, and correct movements to the exercises they are leading. Leading exercise is a good opportunity to identify knowledge gaps. You can find an abundance of fitness resources on the internet. In the private sector clients pay personal trainers good money for their expert assistance. I challenge you to constantly innovate,



research, and further your physical fitness education. Giving your team professional quality exercise advice makes training sessions valuable.



The last step in building a cohesive physical training environment is being a servant leader. Physical training is not basic training. Leave the drill sergeant hat at home. You are there to help your team improve physical performance. Showing genuine concern, care, and compassion for team members is the greatest thing you can do to build compliance. Kindness and patience are vital to being an effective educator. Use encouraging language when leading exercises and avoid putting others down. Always remember that leading physical training is an exercise in selfless service. The leader is there to facilitate a safe and healthy exercise experience. Conducting physical training

is the most obvious way the team sees your leadership style. The amount of effort you put into planning, serving, and developing solid physical training programs will directly influence both physical readiness and team cohesion.

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### Chaplain's Corner: Better as a Team

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### A Team of Teams:

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