



The SMMarT Guy

Building a Management

Team...

By Kim Robinson

I was racing my boss. We were on a track in Formula One race cars and it was serious. I needed to expand my sales team and he'd been dragging his feet on approving the added head count. I challenged him to this car race to settle the matter. If I won, I got my extra people. If I lost, I got zip and had to make do with the sales reps I had. Second place didn't count. Make it or break it, right now.

The race was close. Real close. He was the more experienced driver, but I had desperation on my side. I took many chances and somehow managed to be on the final lap with my boss ahead by only a car length. We were both going more than 150 miles per hour, and I had to pass him in the final turn or I was done. No win. No expanded head count. No chance to hit my numbers. No annual bonus. I had to pass my boss. Now.

The last turn curved sharply to the left. My boss was just a car length ahead on my right. So far, he had taken every corner smoothly and quickly and I knew I was in trouble. But suddenly, his concentration broke and he went wide to the right in the turn. I had my chance to pass. I jammed the accelerator to the floor and dropped down below on his left as I came out of the curve. It was a good shot, but I could instantly tell that it wasn't enough. Even though we were now neck and neck with the finish line in sight, the final dash curved ever so slightly to the right and his car was as fast as mine. He would beat me to the finish and win by a hair.

Mercy had no place in this contest. I had to win. So I jerked my steering wheel to the right and knocked his car into the wall. He crashed and his car burst into a huge fireball and disintegrated. I grunted a mirthless *gotcha* as I shot past to get the checkered flag and win the race.

The car race was about more than expanding the sales staff, however. How we competed told us both a lot about



each other. We had known each other only a short while, and this one exercise helped us to get to know each other a lot better real quick. Even though he was the boss, we had become teammates.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary describes team as "a number of persons associated together in work or activity." All corporate management teams fit this definition, but companies today need more from their managers than just being *associated together in work*. Successful companies and business units have good management *teams*. And good executives know how to bring their managers along so the managers know each other well enough to have good communication and coordination between their respective departments. Good executives know how to build a management team where the whole can be truly greater than the sum of its parts.

Many years ago, I was the sales guy with a start-up company in the hot competitive industry of cable and Broadband. The vice president wanted everyone to change from the standard corporate mold of *I'm doing my job, so just leave me alone and do yours*, to one of actual teamwork where everyone would communicate and work together for the betterment of the entire company. So he involved us in different

fun team-building activities. He felt that if we knew each other more as people away from work, then we would be more comfortable around each other at work and would, therefore, become a better team of managers.

One time after a management meeting, he took about 40 of us out for a fun afternoon at a high-tech video arcade. The goal was to play together and get to know each other as we all had fun.

The big attraction at the arcade was a Formula One race game that had six race cars side-by-side, all pointing at a video screen that showed the track and the location of each car during the race. The players got inside the cars and the race started.

As my boss and I watched others play, he bragged about how much he loved the game. That's when I decided to take a wild shot at getting him to approve expanding my sales team. I threw out my challenge. He accepted, and the race was on. I won by driving him into the wall and I got my extra sales people. ■

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