



Swing

Thoughts on leadership

by Karl Pister



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A couple of years back I needed to lay off running and treadmill exercise to heal a foot problem. I started on the rowing machine at the gym and became a great fan of the rhythm, power, and fitness that comes from that machine.

At around the same time, I was doing work up in North Seattle, where I was doing some coaching. The road I used cuts right across Lake Union where the rowing teams from the University of Washington practice. To see the boat rocket across the water, with all eight or four rowers pulling perfectly together is choreography.





A client of mine, hearing that I was into rowing, recommended to me a book, *The Boys in the Boat*. With brilliant writing, the author weaves together various story threads regarding the University of Washington rowing team and their quest for Olympic glory. I won't be a spoiler on anything here, but this is a must read for you. There are so many real-life examples of leadership and teamwork examples that can be extrapolated to your world.

Here is one:

There is a thing that sometimes happens that is hard to achieve and hard to define. It's called "swing." It happens only when all are rowing in such perfect unison that not a single action is out of sync.

Rowers must rein in their fierce independence and at the same time hold true to their individual capabilities. Races are not won by clones. Good crews are good blends—someone to lead the charge, someone to hold something in reserve, someone to fight the fight, someone to make peace. No rower is more valuable than another, all are assets to the boat, but if they are to row well together, each must adjust to the needs and capabilities of the others—the shorter-armed person reaching a little farther, the longer-armed person pulling in just a bit.



Differences can be turned to advantage instead of disadvantage. Only then will it feel as if the boat is moving on its own. Only then does pain entirely give way to exultation. Good "swing" feels like poetry.

We spoke of *Flow, The Psychology of Optimum Experience*, a couple of weeks back. Hard to describe to those that have not yet experienced it and unforgettable to those that have. Same thing with "swing". I have been on teams that swing. I find, literally, that I don't need an alarm clock during those times. 5:15 hits and I am out of bed. Why? I go to sleep anticipating the next day. "Swing and flow" is that powerful.

In the quote above, it speaks about the different roles that each rower plays. Interestingly, that may change from race to race. As you read the book, or even if you consider the short quote above, it might be worth asking yourself some questions:

As no "one" rower wins any race, how will my ego play as I work toward 'swing'?

When are those situations where I will need to 'lead the charge'?

When are those situations where I will need to cede that position to another?

Am I willing to take a back seat?

Really?



*What other roles do I see myself filling on my boat?
What roles do I see my team members playing?
How do they see it?
Have I explained 'swing' and 'flow' to them?
Have I taught the foundations for 'swing' and 'flow'
What have I done to set an environment that sets a stage
for 'flow' and 'swing'
Are they bought in?
How will they measure their commitment and success with
these two elusive, yet foundational, concepts?*

These are such key principles! Those organizations that can promote and adopt 'swing' and 'flow', produce an energy that is priceless. It is a growing trust, and with trust comes superb efficiencies.

I have worked with some of you on big projects. There is not a person on this distribution list, with whom I have closely worked, that I do not trust. That "*Speed of Trust*" concept (described so well by the author Steven M.R. Covey in a book by the same title) personifies 'swing' and sets the base for 'flow'.

Let's start rowing!



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