

# Be Counted

 [E-mail article](#)  [Print](#)  [Subscribe](#)  [Get e-mail alerts](#)

## Bonding and camaraderie key to mankind's success

Home News Tribune Online 02/13/06

HAYM BENAROYA  
Be Counted

Sports permeate our society and most societies in the world. For athletes it is fun, physical, has clear-cut goals of winning — something rare in a very vague, gray world — and as important, it leads to camaraderie. This last aspect is much more important than may be obvious, and it exists in various groups from the corporation to military units. And camaraderie is a crucial component for an organization to run effectively.

Does such camaraderie exist between researchers who are located at diverse locations around the country and around the world? What kind of bonding can exist under those circumstances where there is no physical closeness? It turns out that geographically distant research workers that are in relatively frequent contact do develop camaraderie of a similar nature to athletes. The Internet has made that even easier.

It is not unusual to have friends who do similar work but whom you have never met, or met a few times. An interesting phenomenon happens as a researcher goes to a conference to present the latest findings. He or she will chat with colleagues not seen for a year or two. Yet, after a few minutes catching up, it will seem as though they were never apart. In this way, a community is built.

Much is written about community and its importance for the human spirit to endure and thrive. Effective leaders are able to create a framework for their organizations so that a pleasant and nurturing environment can exist, where the workers are happy to be and are eager to make the organization a success. In the corporate world, this leads to dynamic and exciting companies and products.

In the educational world, the challenges are different because there are two groups with different time scales. There are the students who are with the school for only a few years, and there are the teachers and supporting staff, which in principle may be with the school for many years to decades. The goal of the permanent workers is to teach or support the teaching enterprise, and the goal of the students is to learn and mature. Successful schools are ones where there is camaraderie, not only between similar groups but also between disparate groups. In the corporate world there could be bonding between professional staff and support staff. At a school there could be bonding between teachers and students.

By bonding and camaraderie, I mean a shared vision of the organization's goals, as well as an understanding of how each person in the organization is important to meeting those goals. It is that shared vision and understanding, and being comfortable with one's own role, that elicits a loyalty to the group. That loyalty leads to working beyond the basic requirements of the job. It leads to "doing what it takes" to succeed. The student works harder than otherwise because the teacher is someone she respects and wants to please. The football player fights extra hard for his team and for his coach because of the bond he feels with them and his belief that his efforts make a difference.

People will give so much more of themselves if they feel a part of the group and believe in the mission of the group. Job-satisfaction surveys clearly demonstrate this. Interviews at NASA during the Apollo era with custodians, for example, elicited a deep pride at being part of a glorious mission, and rightly so, as compared with custodians elsewhere. Organizations today seem to have lost what was once well understood: that loyalty is the foundation for a successful enterprise. Successful organizations embody loyalty and respect up and down the chain of command. This is true in the military, where people give their lives for each other. But the same human need for bonding and camaraderie is also the seed for a successful organization.

Be Counted columnist Haym Benaroya is a professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering at Rutgers University and directs the Center for Structures in Extreme Environments. He is a resident of East Brunswick.