

Q¹²® ELEMENT: Q09

My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.

This element measures the degree to which an employee feels his or her team is committed to quality. Involved in this element is a keen awareness of work standards and of group members' performances. However, adherence to high standards cannot be forced; it must be developed and arranged by a talented manager. The best managers foster in their teams an environment of honest and complete communication, an understanding of each other's work, and respect for each other's efforts and results.

In an average team, about one in three employees strongly agrees that her associates are committed to doing quality work. But the Ninth Element is highly sensitive to the presence or absence of one or more slackers. When a team perceives one of its members is dragging his feet, the proportion that rates the Ninth Element high drops to only one in five. If a team is free of deadwood, the proportion that strongly agrees with the statement jumps to half of the team, with most of the rest giving positive, although slightly less emphatic, responses.

Responses to this element are remarkably similar across industries and type of job. But like the other 11 elements, it varies dramatically from one team to another. There are plenty of workgroups in which no one feels their fellow employees are committed to quality and those in which everyone on the team perceives a kind of universal allegiance. The consequences apply to more than just pulling rope. At an Australian bank, variation in the Ninth Element accounts for a 14-percent difference in profitability across its many branch offices. For a food manufacturer in Europe, assessments as to whether everyone is doing his part account for a 51-percent range in on-the-job accidents. The many companies' performance data matched to Ninth Element scores show that people who feel part of a solidly committed team are routinely safer, better with customers, less likely to quit, and more productive.

For a manager, the contrast cannot be clearer. Would he rather go easy on the foot-draggers and allow his

team to become disheartened, possibly sidetracked by the powerful emotions of "altruistic punishment," or maintain work standards so the group enjoys the benefits of ever-higher levels of individual investment in the team's accomplishments? Faced with one or more drones, a team has two avenues for relief. They may use various forms of social coercion to correct the behavior, or they must rely on the manager to punish lazy associates.

A less flammable, but still frustrating, situation is created when team members seem to be trying, but just don't have what it takes to perform "quality work." Gallup asked a random sample of United States workers which made them more frustrated: a colleague who tries hard but doesn't have much ability (a bungler), or a colleague who has the ability and doesn't try (a slacker). By a margin of six to one, workers are more upset with a slacker than a bungler. Still, the level of frustration with an incompetent is high, and can drop the level of those strongly agreeing with the Ninth Element question to one in four. Although the heart of many miscast employees may be in the right place, and they therefore may be candidates for different jobs in the same company, they cannot be left in a position where they can't maintain the same levels as the rest of the group.

Continued ...

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A good manager must continually ask herself whether her team tips that maybe-I-will/maybe-I-won't newcomer toward jumping in with both feet. This assessment was among the first questions asked by Nancy Sorrells, the Marriott hotel manager profiled in the first chapter of this book. "Who is the worst employee at this hotel, and how long have they been here?" she asked. Why did she want to know? "Whoever is the lowest sets your standard, no matter what you say to the contrary."

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This summary is a revised excerpt on this Q¹² element from *12: The Elements of Great Managing*.