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Interactive



# BUILDING A POWERFUL SENSE OF TEAM

How a special services mindset can help businesses survive and thrive in the tough channel world

The last three-to-five-years have represented a period of change, some might even say turmoil, that is unprecedented in the history of the channel. We have seen traditional PBX vendors wrestle with the advent of new, nimble digitally-focused competitors. We have seen some channels realign propositions and we have seen consolidation as some channels have bulked up to create the mass and economies of scale needed to make a margin-based business viable.

The constants that appear to be present in those that are thriving in this environment are an agile mindset and an ability to execute any approach, underpinned by a well-considered and thoroughly-tested strategic plan.

Still, more importantly, is a continuous focus on team work – vendors and distributors all knowing their individual roles and responsibilities, but all also understanding the importance of coming together and pooling skills and resources for the greater good. By building strong, mutually supportive relationships that play to the strengths of every business within the partnership ultimately helps the combined entity win new customers and then also retain them.

With this in mind, Enghouse recently invited Ant Middleton, former member of the elite special boat service, who many will recognise from his hit Channel 4 TV show, “SAS: Who Dares Wins”, to share his thoughts on how to survive and thrive in a hostile and rapidly-changing environment.

In his powerful, emotive and thought-provoking speech, Ant focused on key aspects of team work that can drive success, not only in army and special forces units, but also in the business world and in environments where collaboration is especially key.

Ant began to learn about the importance of team work from his earliest days in the Army. His first few years were marked by great individual success as he picked up the prestigious awards of Best Recruit and Best Personal Trainer (PT) at the Royal Engineers and then went on to gain his maroon beret in P-Company.

Despite this, however, Ant was conscious that something was missing. He was focused on personal goals but in pursuit of

them, was isolating himself from his fellow recruits. People were getting promoted over him and winning places on courses that he wanted to be on. Frustrated and uncertain of the path forward, he left the military.

### **Becoming a Team Player**

After time on 'civvy street', and a period of soul searching, at the age of 22 Ant returned to the forces with a renewed sense of vigour. He had come to realise that what was missing was an understanding of the importance of the team. Army life, just like life in the communications channel, needs to be about working together to achieve common goals.

It's a lesson that any channel partnership can learn from too, of course. There needs to be a mutual understanding of the overall objective of any business opportunity, with all the parties involved fully committed on pulling together to focus 100% on achieving the end goal. Any focus on individual business objectives must be subsidiary to the overall focus of the wider partnership, and any examples of divergence from this core approach must be quickly identified and resolved.

### **Acknowledging Weakness to Drive Greater Strength**

It's also important when working in any team to be able to acknowledge skill gaps and ask fellow team members or partners to help out. Team work, both in the military and in the business world, is about honest communication with your colleagues: playing to your strengths but being open and upfront about your weaknesses.

Ant knows how important this is and wasn't afraid to ask for help from his team when made section commander during a tour of Afghanistan. Conscious that the promotion had come before he was fully ready for it, he sat the team down and was upfront about it, telling them all that while he was going to take the job, he would not always get it right. Ant reinforced that when he did get things wrong, he would need the rest of the team to step up. As a result Ant received unwavering support and

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commitment in return for his honesty and he knew the team would help him and step into the breach when required.

Again, the parallels with the channel experience are striking. Vendors, resellers and distributors can work together as teams on a variety of projects, helping the other as and when required. Vendors can, for example, provide critical product training support while resellers could help open new markets to vendors by giving them the benefit of their vertical expertise.

### **Trusting in the Team**

In line with this focus on supporting each other, Ant recalled a troubling moment in Afghanistan, when pursuing an enemy combatant, he was paralysed with fear and unable to punch his way through a door into a room where he knew the combatant was likely to be hiding. A fellow soldier sensed Ant's hesitation gave a reassuring squeeze to his shoulder. Just knowing that support was at hand and that his team had his back gave Ant the strength to carry on.

There is a lesson here in the business sense too. When times are hard, colleagues within an organisation, or partners working on the same project, will give each other a reason to step outside of their comfort zone, but will need to be safe in the knowledge that if they fall, the team will be there to catch them and put them back in the fold. That's the very essence of team work: dedication and commitment to each other.

From Ant's perspective, success in any mission is not about dedication

to the cause, it's about unwavering dedication to each other and having the certain knowledge that if one team member is in difficulty, the others will pitch in to help him or her out.

It's another compelling example of the fact that as Ant himself says: "If you have got a team where everyone is sticking together and is completely honest with each other, and you can communicate in that way, then you will be unstoppable. You will be able to take those calculated risks that push you onto that next level because you know that you have got a team behind you that are going to catch you if you fall. You will feel that you can take on any task – no matter what the job is." It is the reason that the best teams succeed both in the military and in the business world, of which the communications channel is such a compelling example.

In Ant's early career, where the focus was on going it alone and working in isolation, the constant worry about whether or not you are good enough to do a job, are things that many workers in the communications channel may have experienced. No matter the field of operations, however, the message coming through loud and clear from Ant Middleton's speech was that if you can understand yourself and can be honest with yourself and if you have the right people around you focused on working as a team, that will help you to achieve a huge amount. It might not seem an obvious parallel but it is true nonetheless that the communications channel has a lot to learn from the military experience.