

Teamwork and Community

This time of year can be, for me anyway, a combination of excitement about new beginnings alongside feeling miserable when anticipating months of short, dark, cold, winter days, with nothing much to look forward to before spring. So we need to start finding things to look forward to. At Northampton High we are planning lively inter-house singing events, preparing for the school musical 'The Wizard of Oz' and there is the annual excitement of interviewing for and selecting our new Head Girl and Leadership Teams. These spring term traditions all help to brighten these otherwise gloomy days.

As a school, Northampton High is one large community, but it is made up of lots of smaller communities. From Year 7 to Sixth Form, to individual houses and forms, sports teams or musical ensembles, our pupils belong to any number of smaller groups within an overarching school body.

Sometimes, as just one member of this much bigger entity, it can be easy to feel that maybe some people are more important than others. The reality is that everyone is equally important and has a vital role to play. To build a high functioning and effective team, we need to embrace the concept of Me^{We} which explains how being part of Northampton High enhances the potential and experience of every individual within it, while that individual also enhances the wider community through their contribution to it: we are more than the sum of our parts.

Fundamentally, no school is an island and at Northampton High we believe our pupils grow in character and resilience by widening the circle of people they meet which enables them to grow into valuable and productive members of society. Being part of a community promotes an atmosphere of unity and harmony which serves as an important part of that preparation.

To allow for the Me to We shift, we need to consider communication, empathy, and respect, these areas can and will help to jumpstart the conversation and mindset shift.

- **Communication** is what you say, how you say it, and to whom you say it.
- **Empathy** gives us permission to be curious, discourage assumptions and judgements, and demonstrate a genuine concern for the team's wellbeing. This creates an environment in which conversations become open, honest, and real.
- **Respect** is earned over time. It is also an opportunity to collaborate and learn from one another.

No school can grow without teamwork, and no one can truly thrive by being outside the team, and every individual needs the team to succeed for their success too. Therefore it is imperative to work towards the common goals collectively because there's no ME without WE. In other words, teamwork means more We and less Me. So, challenge yourself to reflect on what you will start doing, cease doing, and do differently to allow our school community to shift from "Me" to "We".

Thinking about this interaction between the individual and the group has made me think about geese... a bird I used to be a little scared of if I am honest but which I have come to admire the more I have learnt about their distinctive behaviour. If you have ever looked up when hearing them overhead, you might well have noted the familiar v-shape formation - the 'wedge' or 'skein' as they pass. So, what can we learn from these interesting birds?

Lesson 1: By flying in the wedge, the flock increases its flying range by 71%. As each goose flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the birds behind, meaning that they can cover much greater distances together than they could individually. It is a wonderfully vivid illustration of how working together can produce vastly improved outcomes as we are lifted up by the positive energy of those around us. By pooling our resources and building a sense of community, rather than struggling individually, we can be more efficient and go further because we are working together to achieve common goals.

Lesson 2: The lead position in the wedge is the most energy-intensive spot, so when the lead goose gets tired it drops back in the formation and a more rested goose switches up to lead the flock. This rotational approach to leadership builds trust and confidence, sharing out the hardest work and removing the pressure by having no single leader. In a team situation, it is hugely powerful to understand how the team is interdependent on the unique talents, strengths and capabilities of every member. Sharing both responsibility and accountability and empowering others to lead helps to develop stronger, more lasting and connected teams and therefore, everyone has the opportunity to function as a leader and as a supporter.

Lesson 3: Geese are social creatures, remaining with their flocks all year round, except when nesting, and their migration follows a predetermined path, even down to favoured spots for resting en route. From one generation to the next, they pass on this knowledge. In the teams we belong to within school, more experienced team members can pass on ideas and beliefs about what it means to belong to Northampton High as new people join. These informal networks help shape our understanding of values and culture so that individuals learn what matters to the group as a whole.

Lesson 4: Geese aren't just being noisy when they make their distinctive honking sound as they fly - they are actually encouraging those at the front to keep going! When did you last remember to encourage or praise someone in your team? Productivity improves in teams where there is consistent encouragement and recognition. So, when you are working in a team, give some thought to how you could support a fellow team member, encourage them or offer a bit of a confidence boost - the result will benefit both that individual and the whole team. The power of encouragement is the quality of honking we seek and can do wonders when it comes to overcoming obstacles and getting results.

Lesson 5: If a goose gets sick or wounded when flying in formation, two other geese will leave the formation to stay with it while it rests or recovers. They won't abandon it and will wait until it can fly again and then begin a new formation or catch back up to the flock. This distinctive behaviour to offer protection and support - never leaving a team member to struggle alone - is a touching reminder that we should stand by one another, particularly in difficult times, caring about the wellbeing of our fellow team members, showing kindness and looking out for one another, and being 10% braver.

Patterns in nature can teach us a great deal about teamwork and community. Next time you see geese migrating overhead, remember that the way of nature can also be your team's way: flying together, supporting one another and reaching the destination more productively and successfully.

On that note, we must not forget to bring focus to the ever-brilliant achievements of our community, of course, as this is how we will be and make the change for a brighter and happier future.

Here's hoping that you and your family can get some time off this weekend to recharge and recuperate. That need to look after yourself has never been more important with a long term ahead and we should all embrace and acknowledge this change. Plus, as the economist Noah Smith, reminds us: "Fifteen years ago, the internet was an escape from the real world. Now, the real world is an escape from the internet."

Have a good weekend, hopefully in the real world. Wrap up warm.

Dr May Lee
Head