

This

Everybody

Accomplish

Must!

When you hear the phrase “team work”, what do you think of first? Do you imagine a sport team winning a championship, a team of artists standing in front of just finished brilliant piece of art, do you think of a group of people successfully solving a riddle, or a small everyday team working example crosses your mind? I bet not many would immediately think of what’s behind the shiny outcomes a team produces, nor imagine spending hours and hours at meetings and carefully planning each next step, day by day.

Although it looks easy, spontaneous and natural on the surface, presentation is actually the very result of preparation. I remember myself last year at the aces Academy, listening to speeches and introductions and watching sketches held by aces facilitators at the scene: I couldn’t assume anything but those people creating that positive spirit “from head”, being naturally happy, satisfied, relaxed and yet concentrated on what they’re up to. In spite of being an aces “insider” as a school project presenter last year, I wanted to explore more: the very depths of aces land...

And so, I participated in the aces Academy 2014 tutors call. It looked as an opportunity to see, hear, feel things from behind the scene, to enrich myself with another perspective of aces, and, of course, be involved with aces once more – a chance which one ought to take. I remember learning to write catchy though not pretentious CV and motivation letter, and waiting for the decision to be made... Still, despite being an experienced aces tutor now, I cannot describe the panoply of feelings I was overwhelmed with when I found out that I became one; dimly but distinct, intense but peacefully definite – it was at the same time an enjoyable privilege and responsible duty.

You might think you’re fully up to your tutor role as you’ve been chosen as one - however, this premise of yours turns out not to be as true as you thought at the very beginning. Whilst having our first tutors’ team meeting, two days before the Academy officially started, Jelena, Žan and I had faced the main difficulty of any team: when taking a leadership in a team, even in small amounts, leads to disunity only. Our ostensibly naive task was to complete three puzzles in one minute – so each of us took one puzzle and we exchanged the puzzle pieces, but we failed to accomplish team work. We faced this difficulty once more – while being in Pleasure&Leisure area and making a structure of wooden pieces following a scheme, which took us more than half an hour only because we lacked communication and cooperation. It wasn’t easy for us to admit the lack of teamwork, but as soon as we’d done that, our teamwork became more satisfying and successful. Looked from the outside, we were completely coherent team – but inside there are lots of little steps and efforts you must make, lots of confessions to yourself and other team members.

The main thing which makes a team work out is – openness. We were taught openness constantly: the first meeting was aperitif – talking about our personal interests, hobbies, attitudes, aims; the second day brought us not only further tutors’ job explanations, but also six or seven in-a-row meetings, with breaks for meals and coffee only. First we met with the aces team in its wholeness – coordination, organisational (aka orga), finance, Pleasure&Leisure (P&L), facilitators and tutors team continued playing the openness game, continued exploring each other nevertheless we meet for the first or the fifteenth time. The last meeting of that day was only Reinhard’s,

facilitators' Katrin, Darko and Gülesin and tutors' meeting; even though I was completely exhausted after long hour meetings I hadn't been used to, I experienced a breakthrough meeting which announced what was to become a pleasant and not-imaginable-without daily routine. What was so special about that specific meeting? We were about to pass through the next day schedule, when Gülesin suggested doing a little talk before – talk about our expectations of the Academy and our feelings beforehand and afterwards we came. And then it was when I realised that what I'd perceived watching them from the outside last year hadn't been as ideal as I'd wished. I realised that they're also just people struggling everyday struggles, fighting life battles we all fight and trying to stay smiled no matter what. If there's a raincloud above your head, share it with someone – you'll both be gloomy and wet for some time, but you'll get dry and shine again much faster and easier together than on your own. And so we were letting ourselves go with the flow... celebrating openness and sharing day by day.

In aces you ordinarily do those little – and some would say childish things you rarely do; in the end, what's so ridiculous about making little fun of yourself to make others laugh from their hearts? about holding hands in a jump and screaming 'Hooray!' to get rid of jitters, insecurity and negative energy? about giving warm appreciations: patting backs, shaking hands, hugging and kissing without any reason in advance? Nothing is ridiculous about that – we're just to "adultish", serious and afraid to act as kids do: without much pre-thinking, courageously, naturally and wholeheartedly.

Tutors do many "tasks" – they are co-presenters at the stage, occasionally interviewers, cameramen, helping orga team with the materials and tools... but, above all, they are the aces spirit ambassadors and the bridge between the participants and the aces team: they're the microphone receiving and speaker emitting participants' suggestions, dilemmas, insecurities, appreciations, advice, critics, highlights to the aces team members in order to create the most comfortable and harmonious environment possible for everyone. If this Academy showed something, it showed how disharmonious and struggling world we live in – not only through projects answering this year's topic: "I and the others: Discovering diversity around and within me", but also through a severe example of non-understanding, non-appreciating and non-accepting tendencies which want to thwart aces noble goals. Even so, it showed something more: that people willing to try to clean themselves from prejudices, to admit their failures as well as celebrate every little success in the "cleaning" process, to speak out courageously, openly and honestly and stand against disruptive tendencies "armoured" with precious values they developed together – may bring a little balance to the imbalanced world they live in. I say "may" because what should be remembered is that teaming up and team working isn't always about winning: it's about trying, failing, trying again, failing again, continue trying... without giving up, because eventually you're going to change SOMETHING. It might not feel as sport team winning a championship, nor artists standing above the brilliant art piece they've just made; it might not be even a riddle wholly solved... It may just be that "small, everyday" team working experience. Tiny example of improvement and betterment.

And isn't it the challenge worth taking up?

*This essay had been written a few days before massive floods hit Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. Although it wasn't inspired by these catastrophic events, it becomes more meaningful in such situation where team work and keeping the spirits up are essential to live on. Deepest thanks to all the aces people who support us, our countries and our people in these immemorially hard moments!

Anja Ilić, Zemun high school graduate
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