



Trust Is the Foundation of a Good Team

An interview with Kajetan Kajetanowicz, rally driver, two-time European Rally Champion, four-time Polish Rally Champion, and three-time winner of the Rally Poland.

Romeo Grzębowski: Congratulations on your second European Rally Champion title in a row! How do you go about becoming a master in this sport? Budget? Good car? Talented driver? Training hard?

Kajetan Kajetanowicz: *The truth is that every element is important. Every, even the smallest detail may prove decisive. Rally driving is an emotional and fascinating sport. At the same time it is very complex. Ultimately, success is determined by whether it is possible to achieve an advantage over the competition, then whether that advantage can be maintained or better yet, increased. Both the first and the second steps must be made. I am convinced that this cannot be done without a team of people who believe in our mutual success. Such faith can be seen in engagement in actions and in taking care so collaboration is good, even when not everything is going smoothly.*

Waldemar Olbryk: True, the media usually talk about the drivers, sometimes about their co-drivers. How many people really worked for the success of “Kajto”?

KK: *Actually, there are dozens of such people, maybe even into the hundreds. My road to being a European Rally Champion did not start at the beginning of the 2015 season, but many, many years earlier. I successively climbed up the rungs of a rallying carrier and very many people helped me. I no longer work with many of them today. Our contacts are less frequent. However, there is one thing coupling us: I am very grateful to all of them. During a rally the team is large. Including mechanics, it comes out to almost twenty people. In practice, we are still a small team whose core consists of four people. Paweł is our coordinator. He keeps track of such a broad range of topics that it would really be difficult to list them all. It includes everything, from tires, through catering, all the way to flights and accommodations. The office, all administrative and financial matters are the domain of the always reliable Wojtek. Then there is Gabriel who totally immerses himself in the function of press secretary. There is also me, the guy driving everything and everyone, but mainly the car. Obviously, during rallies, there is also Jarek, my co-driver, the photographer, cameraman, the weather boys, the mechanics, the cook... The best part is that everyone has something to do :-).*

RG: What does “good team” mean to you?

KK: *If I were only looking to results, I would say that a good team is one that achieved success. However, for me, a good team is one that allows me to act, concentrate on being the fastest, and on driving the most effectively. For that to happen you have to have a clear and unencumbered head and know that everything will be done well. Among other things, that is*

the basis of a good team that is based on trust. My team really works hard and effectively in order to provide me with conditions for development. In return, I try to appreciate their efforts and motivate them to work. Thus, we mutually turn up the heat so as to act even better and more effectively. Someone once said that your company is as good as how well it can operate without you. I am proud of the fact that my team is capable of taking on the responsibilities and working even when I am completely absorbed by other tasks.



RG: How do you go about building trust in your team?

KK: The first step to building trust is understanding its essence. The word does not have the same meaning for everyone. For me, trust is something that is built on very many planes. It is not exclusively a question of confidentiality, but also of effective action and responsibility. I am convinced that in building trust, it is an open and concrete approach to people that is important. At times, things get so hectic that I don't even know what day of the week it is. This means that I must very carefully decide how to allocate my time so it is utilized appropriately and so I become even better. In the team, we trust each other in that we feel that every one of us is acting exclusively for its good. Such an approach facilitates the facing of difficult topics.

WO: What hinders good collaboration?

KK: Most certainly the absence of the already-mentioned trust. It makes it difficult to strive for and approach the ideal. The seeing by every member of the team of a common goal is important. Among other things, its outline encompasses a striving for successive, ever-greater achievements. Sometimes, it is necessary to suppress oneself to this in order for everything to work correctly. This is not always the case when the team is made up of twenty people. Some time go, one of my colleagues said that a tour made up of just guides would never ever get anywhere (laughter). It is for this reason that I am very happy that everyone in our team is striving to develop their skills jointly, with successive each rally.

RG: In professional sport, one should use advanced tools on various levels. You don't cut corners on your car's "tooling." Recently, you used some specialized diagnostic tools to improve communication and collaboration within the team. How do you assess the usefulness of such solutions in your situation?

KK: *That is true. We arranged for a workshop based on the Extended DISC assessment for the whole team. Prior to the meeting, each one of us completed the online questionnaire. At the meeting itself we received individual reports describing our predispositions, what we feel comfortable with and what makes us feel uncomfortable. We also analyzed how we communicate, what draws our attention when talking to someone, how we make decisions, and how we react to stress. It is especially reaction to stress that is very important for us because the pressure is really high during a rally and that is when conflict is easy, but never called for. What is interesting is that many of the results were a surprise to us. During the workshop, I saw in myself as well as on the faces of others that the process stirred many emotions. This is because we all approached the topic very seriously. At the conclusion, we talked together about the results and also received a "psychological map of our team." Thanks to this, we better understand our reactions and know what is important to each of us as well as what should be avoided in relations with a given person. I think that such an "oiling of the bearings" is useful in every team. This sport delivers moments of extreme stress. What we learned is intended to help us better concentrate on the goal, which is the winning of rallies.*

WO: Are you ever completely satisfied with the result? For example, after winning a championship or some other title, do you say to yourself: We did everything in the best possible way.

KK: *Although it may seem hard to believe, in my case satisfaction does not equal the result. Sometimes, I am pleased with a rally I did not win. On the other hand, I am very demanding. First and foremost I am demanding of myself. Sometimes, I come back from a competition where we took first place, but my head is just thinking about all the things that we could have improved on. There are also rallies where we failed to triumph, but I know that we gave everything we had to win and it would have been difficult to do anything more on that day. However, if we look at it philosophically, then I would say that it is worth being in agreement with oneself in life. One should do what one believes in, in a way that one expects of oneself.*

WO: How do your victories affect you? Do you still find place within yourself for new challenges?

KK: *Every victory provides me with motivation. It is then that I always wonder what I might have improved and where might I have given more of myself. This was the case in the run-up to this year's Barbórka Rally when I was wondering if a better performance was possible. Up till now I have won three times... four times in that insidious and unpredictable Karowa [Street]. You can see in the results that it was possible to do something more. We won all the special segments and achieved the greatest lead of the past dozen or more years. I always look for challenges that require even more and serve as a successive level to achieve.*

WO: How do you react to defeat—big ones and small ones? How is it when it is your fault and how is it when it is caused by the action or inaction of other team members?

KK: *My own failures make me mad. The minor mistakes of other people simply sadden me. A lot depends on how a person approaches his own errors or mistakes. Rallies have taught me humility, which is something that is very important in both life and sport. I try to provide my colleagues on the team with this experience while knowing that I can also learn a lot from them. When I make a mistake I become a little insufferable. I want to find the cause at all costs so I can understand what happened. In the case of the failures of others I try to help because it is in our common interest for the team to function properly, at the very least. :-)*

RG: After winning this year's Barbórka and Aces' Criterion [rallies] with its famous Karowa [Street segment], you started your interview with reporters by thanking your team. That is not common among rally drivers...

KK: *I started that way because I know how hard they work. In many sports it's the competitor who is in the limelight so almost no one is aware of the just how many people work for his result. In our case, it is not only the team, but also our sponsors. I want to thank them through my results, but also by the fact that I always keep in mind just how much I owe them.*

Thank you for this interview.

Kajetan was interviewed by:

Romeo Grzębowski

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