



LEADING A TEAM TO HIGH PERFORMANCE

TEAM NOUN

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1. A diverse group of people functioning in a healthy environment producing results exponentially greater than an individual contributor.
2. A group of flakes snowballing into disaster.

Over the course of our careers, we have no doubt seen both of the definitions above realized.

A well-constructed team of people with diverse skills, experience, and perspective will accomplish tasks and solve problems with amazing effectiveness and efficiency. The difference between an effective team and an incompetent one is often the leader. Applying a few principles to team leadership can almost guarantee success.

PRINCIPLE 1: BE HUMBLE, MAKE PERSONAL SACRIFICES, AND INSTILL TRUST.

This principle relates primarily to who the leader is. A humble leader credits the team for success and takes personal responsibility for shortcomings. A genuinely humble leader highly values others' individual contributions and regards the collective thoughts higher in value than their own. That does not mean that they don't see value in their own thoughts and contributions, they are simply willing to sacrifice their own equally effective ideas and place greater value on the collective contribution of the group. They recognize that most (though not all) of the best ideas come from others.

The leader must be trustworthy and create an environment of trust. Team member's ideas and thoughts should be freely volunteered and discussed without bias or pre-conceived judgements. The moment people hesitate to

share a thought or disagree with an idea is the moment that much of the benefit of the team approach is lost. If team members feel they need to constantly think about how their contribution will be perceived and continually assess the politics in the room, the leader has failed to create a trusting environment. Political intrigue has no place on a team or in the mind of a team leader.

PRINCIPLE 2: MAKE A GENUINE PERSONAL CONNECTION.

This principle is primarily relational. We work best with people whom we have connected with, and when we have demonstrated genuine care and concern for who they are as individuals. That level of connection does not need to be the same with everyone, it simply must exist for everyone. And by the way, if it's not genuine they will know it before you do.

PRINCIPLE 3: NAVIGATE.

A leader's ability to navigate is the ability to move the team toward the accomplishment of a goal. The leader must be familiar with the terrain and have credibility in the area in which the team is working. They must know what success looks like and know how to guide progress. That does not mean the leader must be the subject matter expert on every aspect. In fact, its best that they are not, as it will force the leader to rely on the expertise of the individuals. The genius of collective individual contributions is what allows the team to find the best path to success.

The ability to navigate also involves the ability to keep the team on track. This is the most difficult aspect of team leadership, and where a majority of teams fail. There must be very clear and concise expectations and well communicated criteria for success, and a leader must ensure that everyone is held accountable for their contribution. The team should be rewarded for how they perform as a team. If they are held accountable as a team, they will tend to hold themselves accountable as individuals. A form of positive peer pressure will self-regulate individual performance most of the time.

There should also be an individual aspect to performance evaluation. Not everyone will make an equal contribution, and not everyone plays as well with others as they should. When a member falls short, the leader must have the courage to deal with the individual and address the issues early. Individuals should also be rewarded for exceptional contributions.

Lastly, a good navigator fosters healthy conflict. Conflict exists on every team, and if it's not readily visible, it must be uncovered. Hidden conflict undermines performance. It will surface in some form, either through a dramatic emotional outburst or simply through a team failing in their endeavor.

A team is a collection of people just like us, flawed and fickle, and success is never guaranteed, but the application of a few simple common sense principles goes far in achieving an exceptional result.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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