



5 STEPS TO BEING A STAR TEAM MEMBER

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It's virtually impossible to be successful without teams



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INTRODUCTION

It's relatively easy to find articles and training materials on building and leading effective teams. It is considerably more challenging to find content about being an effective team member. This article provides a five step approach to not only being an effective team member, but to being a star team member.

WHY IT MATTERS

Simply put, it's virtually impossible for organizations to be successful without teams. Most products and services that companies provide are a result of the seen and unseen work of teams of people. That's why there are very few successful organizations that have only one employee. Even the delivery of professional services is a team sport, rather than an individual effort. Think about it this way, when you last visited your doctor, was he or she the only person you interacted with in the office?

How important is teamwork to the success of teams and the individual members of those teams? There aren't many quantitative studies on the topic, but one of the more noteworthy found that "teamwork" is by far the most significant difference between high and low performing teams.¹ The study found that teamwork is the most significant factor in team effectiveness, accounting for 44% of the variance between high and low performing teams. The second highest factor accounted for only 4%.

For those of you more interested in qualitative reasoning, a Forbes Tech article included the following outcomes when explaining why teamwork is important:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| → Increases quality of output | → Increases learning |
| → Increases accountability | → More momentum |
| → Lows are less demoralizing | → Highs are more motivating ² |

¹ P CANTU, C. (2007). EVALUATING TEAM EFFECTIVENESS: EXAMINATION OF THE TEAM ASSESSMENT TOOL.
² LAU, E. (2013). WHY AND WHERE IS TEAMWORK IMPORTANT? FORBES TECH.

STEP 1: *Communicate Constructively*

The first step to being a star team member is effectively communicating with other members of the team. In today's environment of often globally dispersed teams, cultural differences in communications can sometimes make effective communication difficult. However, there is a simple approach that will generally do the trick to ease communication between team members. Every team member has valuable thoughts and ideas to contribute, and as a team member, you should step up and do so. However, you should do it in the most effective possible way – in a positive, confident, and respectful manner. This approach tends to work across different cultures.

Constructive team communication also requires effective listening. By this I mean not just hearing what your fellow teammates have to say, but actually listening. You don't have all of the best ideas. Your team members have important contributions to make. Listen to understand – not just to find an opening to make your own point.



Strong team members keep their colleagues in the loop. Sharing information and experiences prevents surprises. A fully informed team is a more effective team and star team members do their part to help ensure that the team is all working with the same information.

TIP: DON'T WAIT FOR YOUR TEAM MEMBERS TO ASK FOR AN UPDATE, PROACTIVELY KEEP THEM INFORMED WHEN SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT HAPPENS.

It doesn't require a meeting to share information with your team. Much of a team's communication is informal. Take advantage of the many communication methods that are at your disposal to keep team members informed.

Examples include:

- Check in with a team member using internal social media channels
- A quick call to a colleague to ask for their opinion
- A short e-mail to co-worker to provide an update on your part of a project
- Stop by a team member's office to see how things are going

STEP 2: *Choose to Share Information and Experiences*

STEP 3: Check Your Biases



Star team members embrace the concept of diversity and understand that the best ideas and results tend not to come from individuals, but rather from a group of diverse, smart and hard-working team members. The challenge is that we all have biases that tend to get in the way.

Allow me to demonstrate this by sharing a couple of examples. The following popular quote is generally attributed to John Quincy Adams on social media, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader." Learning from the wisdom of one of the founding fathers of the United States can be motivating. The challenge is that it seems that he wasn't the person who said it. Rather, it appears that Dolly Parton was the source.

Parton's long list of accolades include: 25 number one songs, eight Grammy awards, and two Academy Award nominations. She is co-owner of one of the 25 most popular U.S. theme parks and a film and television production company. In addition, she has invested in many charitable causes through her Dollywood Foundation. The evidence suggests that she knows more than a few things about being a leader. Did your perception of the quote change when I told you that she was the source? If so, that's an example of bias coming into play.

Another example is a Stanford University study that found the number of women musicians in orchestras went up from 5% to 25% since the 1970s – a shift that happened when judges began auditioning musicians behind screens so that they could not see them.

TIP: CHECK YOUR IMPLICIT BIASES BY HONESTLY ASKING YOURSELF WHETHER YOU ARE DISCOUNTING THE IDEA OF A TEAM MEMBER BECAUSE IT'S A DIFFERENT IDEA THAN YOU WOULD HAVE COME UP WITH ON YOUR OWN.

Perhaps Malcom Gladwell described it best, "all of us have implicit biases to some degree. This does not necessarily mean we will act in an inappropriate or discriminatory manner, only that our first "blink" sends us certain information. Acknowledging and understanding this implicit response and its value and role is critical to informed decision-making. . ." We all have these biases. The key is to be aware of them, challenge them, and keep them in check when you are working on a team.

The most effective team members collaborate with their colleagues. Teamwork and collaboration are often used synonymously. So for clarity, here's what I mean by collaboration: to work jointly on an activity, especially to produce or create something. This seems to be the way the modern world works. Examples of mass collaborations (like hack-a-thons, crowd sourcing, and Wikipedia) abound, but the concept is also important on the smaller team-based scale.

There are a number of reasons that collaboration leads to teams being more successful, but perhaps the most important is that collaboration builds trust within the team. Collaborating with others causes them to need to rely on you and to trust you to get your part of the project done. If you deliver your part and work with team members to help them get their part done, trust will begin to form. Numerous studies have identified trust as a key component to the success of teams. If you are leading the way in creating that trust by fostering collaboration among the team, you will be taking a big step towards becoming a star team member.

STEP 4: *Collaborate*



STEP 5: *Commit to the Team's Success*

Vince Lombardi won five NFL Championships, including Super Bowls I and II. In his honor, the NFL renamed "The Super Bowl Trophy" to the "Vince Lombardi Super Bowl Trophy." Here's what he had to say about committing to the team's success. "Individual commitment to a group effort - that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work."

Many high performing individuals are hard-wired to focus on excelling as individuals. In my experience, the leaders I have worked with who are most highly regarded are those who focus on the results and success of the teams that they are apart of. I understand that my experience is just one data point. For another point of view on how you can become a star team member, let's look to John Wooden, an American college basketball player and coach who as head coach at UCLA. John won seven national championships in a row, no other team has yet to replicate his success.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bryan Olson has over 30 years of professional experience, more than 15 of which is as senior executive in Human Resources at several leading global companies. He has supported more than 50 corporate M&A transactions as either an HR leader or HR M&A attorney. These deals ranged in transaction size from under 5 million to over 10 billion dollars.

In addition, Bryan has significant experience leading executive teams through corporate turnarounds, leadership changes, and other company transitions. He is currently serving on a part-time contractor basis as the Chief Human Resources Officer of publicly-traded The Cannabist Company, where he is helping its senior leadership team reshape the business. Bryan is the former CHRO of global law firm K&L Gates, where he was awarded an HR Hero Award by a national HR organization for bringing the best of HR from the corporate world to a major law firm.

Bryan previously held senior HR executive positions at Aetna and United Technologies Corporation (both in the top 50 of the Fortune list at the time). Bryan is a former practicing employee benefits and executive compensation attorney at one of the top global law firms, Skadden Arps. He started his career at Fidelity Investments. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Business from Westminster College and a Juris Doctorate from Boston College Law School.

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