



8 STEPS TO BUILDING AND MANAGING A WINNING TEAM

Advice from ourCHRO - White Paper Series

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Great managers build winning teams who work together to reach shared stretch goals

INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of a manager is to build and manage an effective team. Good managers do this well. Great managers build winning teams who work together to reach shared stretch goals and support each other in pursuit of those goals. I've been fortunate throughout my career to have both contributed to and built several high-performing teams. I have come to believe that there is a relatively straight-forward process to building and managing a winning team, and this article outlines eight key steps to doing so.



Bryan L. Olson
FOUNDER & MANAGING PARTNER



Your short-term team of HR experts

The ourCHRO team has substantial experience helping leaders across multiple industries skillfully manage through M&A, turnarounds, restructurings, leadership changes, and other types of company transitions.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Gallup has studied workgroup performance at hundreds of companies and measured the engagement of tens of millions of employees. In doing so Gallup has determined that workgroup “performance fluctuates widely. . . [due] in no small part [to] the lack of consistency in how people are managed.”

According to Gallup, managers account for at least 70% of the variance in employee engagement scores across business units. I look at it this way, a person's manager is the factor that has the largest impact on their overall engagement at work. If you build and manage a winning team, you will have a tremendously positive impact on the work lives (and therefore, overall happiness) of your team members. That is a worthy goal and aspiration.

STEP 1:

Get the Right People in the Right Positions

The first step is to get the right people on your team. To do this you must first identify the skills your team needs to possess to meet its objectives and accomplish its goals. These skills may include technical expertise, problem solving, organizational familiarity, communication, and so on.

Then you must evaluate your existing team and determine whether, as a team, they possess the required skills. Assess each team member's skills to ensure they are equipped to succeed in their roles and complete their tasks. Keep in mind that poor performance or low participation might stem from a poor fit of the team member to the task or role that he or she has been assigned.



After evaluation the abilities of your team members, you will likely determine that your team has a mix of high and low performers. Most teams start out that way and you need to manage both to build an effective team. Keep high performers engaged by giving them freedom to do things their own way. Point them in the right direction, be there to help and provide support, but give them a chance to succeed or fail on their own. Set objectives for them, not the specifics methods to accomplish those objectives. Empower them to take appropriate risks and give them stretch assignments whenever you can.

It's just as important that you do not avoid discussing performance gaps with underperformers. Take the time to explain your expectations and develop a picture of success. Coach, train, and provide frequent feedback to these employees to give them the best chance to be a successful team member.

STEP 2:

Manage Both High and Low Performers

STEP 3: *Motivate Them All Towards a Common Goal*

The next step is to define your team's purpose. Involve the team in exploring and shaping a shared vision. As the leader, you can and should guide the direction of the vision. However, for the team to be fully engaged, it is important for them to have a voice in shaping the vision. In addition, no one person is smarter than the group as a whole. Each team member brings different life experiences to the conversation and the team will almost certainly come up with good ideas that you had not considered and improvements to your original vision. Once the shared vision is clear, translate your purpose into goals through shared goal setting exercises. Make sure to connect your team's goals to the bigger picture.

As an HR leader, I often visit different locations and offices of the company for whom I work. One of the most important aspects of those visits is walking around and talking to people. I can generally tell whether a team is working well together and communicating just by watching how they interact with me and with each other.

Successful teams demonstrate two characteristics:

Conversational turn-taking
(everyone has a chance to talk and to be heard)

Empathy (paying attention to how other team members are feeling)

**TIP: IN THE BEST TEAMS, MEMBERS LISTEN TO ONE ANOTHER
AND SHOW SENSITIVITY TO FEELINGS. ENCOURAGE THIS BY
OPENLY DISCUSSING ITS IMPORTANCE.**

These traits contribute to "psychological safety" – the shared belief and confidence that the team will not embarrass or reject someone for speaking up.

The manager plays a crucial role in establishing the team's communication cadence. Be sure to hold frequent, recurring team meetings. For larger projects you may also need to hold meetings of sub-groups within the team. Each meeting should have a clear purpose and an agenda.

STEP 4: *Establish Effective Communication*



STEP 5: *Build Trust*

Trust is fundamental to the success of the team. Trust and mutual respect allow the team to embrace the constructive disagreement that can lead to innovation. As the leader of the team, you should communicate explicitly the importance of trust for the team's success. Create opportunities for team members to get to know one another personally. You can do this by encouraging informal discussion and personal updates. You might also consider using the first few minutes of calls and meetings for casual conversation or ice breaker exercises.

Sports team coaches often talk about team chemistry, and how it raises the overall effectiveness of the team.

Here are a few ways you can foster team chemistry:

Find opportunities to get individuals within the team working together on tasks and projects

Praise collaborative behavior – foster a sense of being dependent on one another for success

Revisit shared goals frequently as a reminder that their work is important to the team and to the organization

STEP 6: *Create an Environment Where They Have Each Other's Backs*

STEP 7: *Communicate the Decision-Making Process*

The manager's role is often not to make decisions for the team, but to facilitate the right decision process under the circumstances. It is important that as a manager you help your team understand different approaches to decision making and when it is best to use them.

Options include:

- Majority rule

- Consensus

- Unanimous agreement

- Delegation to designated subgroup

- Leader decides with input from the team

You may use different decision-making processes for different types of decisions. When making the determination, consider what matters most under the circumstances. Is it most important that the decision be the best possible decision, that all team members agree with the decision, or that the decision be reached promptly. Once you determine the decision-making approach in a given situation, it is important to communicate the process to the team. This helps continue the open communication and trust environment that you will have been working to create.



STEP 8: *Establish Accountability*

The steps in this White Paper will help you establish a culture of ownership and decision-making. You should then establish targets and hold your team accountable. Specify the tasks involved in accomplishing the team's goals and assign those tasks to appropriate team members or subgroups of members. Be sure to check in on progress regularly according to an agreed-upon schedule to maintain accountability.

Once you've done that, empower your capable strong performers. You'll be surprised what your team can accomplish if you let them, and they may surprise themselves with what they can do. A word of caution is that when you empower your team members, you have to be comfortable that they can deliver. You need to provide them air cover, support them, and own the results with them. Thus, you need to be careful to only empower team members who are ready, willing and able to take on that level of responsibility. As Arnold Glasow put it, "a good leader takes a little more than his share of the blame, a little less than his share of the credit."



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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