RONKELLEHER
Equipping, Enabling, and Encouraging Marketplace Leaders

What Are the Essential Elements You Need to Build A High-Performance Team?

First of all, do you need a high-performance team? If you are in a situation that relies solely on your own efforts for success, then the answer is "No." If, however, you are part of a group then your results can be enhanced by building a high-performance team.

Take for example a professional golfer. The golfer's results are an individual versus the course. Right? Wrong! There is a caddy in the background checking conditions, yardages, etc. There is a sports medicine doctor who creates specific training routines to keep the golfer in the best physical condition. There is an instructor that helps the pro with his game. There may be a sponsor who develops customized equipment. And to take care of business, there is a business manager, an accountant, and attorneys.

So, while it may appear as though it is just one golfer versus the course, there are really at least six or seven other people on a golfer's high-performance team.

Building a high-performance team requires five key ingredients:

- belief in a common vision,
- commitment to work towards a common mission,
- unity among the people on the team,
- participative leadership, and
- an effective communication system.

Common Vision

A vision is the organization's reason for being. Sometimes referred to as a statement of purpose, the vision must be an integral part of every member of the team.

ServiceMaster's vision is to "Serve God in all we do." IBM's vision is to "Provide the best customer service." Procter & Gamble's vision is part of their statement of purpose: "We will

provide products of superior quality and value that best fit the needs of the world's consumers." Jesus' vision is concisely summarized in Luke 19:10, *"For the Son of Man has come to seek and save that which was lost."*

To build a high-performance team, every member of the team must live the vision of the organization. Jesus' high-performance team, the twelve apostles, believed in the vision unto death.

Beyond having a vision, the team leader and every member of the team must be committed to the vision. If every single person on the team does not believe in every aspect of the team's vision, you will never have a high-performance team.

Common Mission

Creating a mission is the second key ingredient in creating your high-performance team. Your team's mission should be an overall expression of the work to be done as well as an understanding of the principles and values that will guide your team's behavior.

A mission is a vision put into action. Jesus' mission is clearly laid out in John 8:8: *"Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but have everlasting light."*

His mission was to give the message of God's salvation to the disciples so they, in turn, could give the message to the world.

Unity

If there is no unity among the people in an organization, then the vision and mission cannot be achieved.

Speaking to Israel, Moses emphasized the importance of unity in warfare in Deuteronomy 21. He commands those who have new homes or vineyards to return to them, those recently engaged to return to their loved one, and those faint of heart to return home, *"so that he might not make his brother's heart melt like his heart."*

Moses did not want anyone who was not physically and mentally prepared for the rigors of war going out to battle.

Jesus knew that Judas Iscariot did not believe in the vision. He sent Judas from the room before he continued teaching the apostles saying, *"What you are about to do do quickly…"* Jesus knew that anyone that did not believe in the vision had to be cast out. In a high-performance team, one single person who does not believe in the vision can destroy the combined efforts of the rest of the team.

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There is a difference between individual differences and team unity. Most of us have participated in groups or teams where there were those who disagreed with what work needed to be done or how the work should be done. But you knew that they had the best interests of the team at heart.

This is a very different situation from the individual who does not believe in the vision of the team and who sabotages its efforts. To be effective, all team members must be bonded together by the vision and mission. No exceptions.

Leadership

Jesus also understood the importance of a leader providing an appropriate example, *"I have set an example that you should do as I have done for you"* (John 13:20).

If you are the leader of a high-performance team, you need to set an example of what you want from the balance of the team. What you do as a leader will set the pattern of behavior for the balance of the team.

Many of us have been trained that the job of a manager is to be the supreme commander, to delegate, and to hold people's feet to the fire. In a high-performance team, the team leader is to serve the members of the team: to lead, coach, encourage, and to keep the focus of the team activity on the mission. There is still a chain of command, there is still accountability, but the leader's attitude is to be exemplary.

Jesus demonstrated the attitude when he washed the apostle's feet. Even though he was their leader, he assumed the role of a humble servant.

In the high-performance team, the manager as team leader is responsible for using the unique skills of each team member to enhance the ability of the team to achieve its mission.

This can best be done when each individual feels their participation in the team is a valued, integral part of the team's mission.

Effective Communications

No team can survive without an effective communication system. Every member of the team must feel like his or her thoughts are important. People must feel that they can voice their concerns without fear of recrimination.

Jesus taught the disciples one on one and in groups. He patiently taught the same message over and over again. He encouraged questions by creating an open atmosphere. As the manager of a high-performance team, your challenge is to maintain an environment that encourages thought and expression while maintaining focus on the vision and mission.

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Getting Started

Building a high-performance team will be challenging, especially the first time you try it. Here are seven steps to get you started.

1. Empowerment

Your team needs empowerment. As the team leader, securing empowerment for the team is your responsibility. If you do not have complete authority to empower your team, then it is incumbent upon you to secure it.

The worst mistake you can make as a team leader is to create a team that has no authority to act. Secure a charter for your team from your management so that everyone has a clear understanding of the responsibilities of the team.

2. Team Members

The next step in building your high-performance team is to decide who should be on the team. Ask yourself, "Whose contribution might lead to success for the team?" If the team's objective is to develop, produce, and market a revolutionary new product, you might include representatives from finance, research, manufacturing, transportation, marketing, and sales.

Jesus assembled a most unusual team to achieve his mission. There was a doctor, a tax collector, several fishermen, and a tent maker. There was a Roman, a Greek, a Hebrew Zealot, and a Pharisee. There were rich men and poor men, well-educated and uneducated. Each individual was specifically selected for what Jesus knew he would become.

Most of us would never have selected such a crew! We would have sought out our friends, those on the "inside," or those on the "way up."

As you consider the members of your team think about the skills and expertise each individual brings to the team. Don't worry about the size of your team being too large as much as having the right people on the team.

3. Leadership

Leadership in a high-performance team must be participative. The team leader coaches, encourages, and maintains the focus of the team. The team members are empowered to lead the team in their areas of expertise.

Members of the high-performance team participate in the leadership of the team by choosing strategies and tactics that will accomplish the vision and mission, and they review their own results.

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In a high-performance team, members feel empowered to make their own decisions. They do not wait for the leader to assign jobs or review their work, they do these things on their own. Such individuals will hold themselves accountable for the quality and quantity of their work because they do not want to let their team down!

4. Communications

"Open" is the key principle in establishing a communication system for a high-performance team. The team must feel free to express opinions with each other and the team leader.

The team leader should encourage open communications by developing and maintaining an atmosphere in which members feel free to express themselves without fear of recrimination, rebuke, or judgment.

5. Create Unity

Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would be with the apostles after He left, but the Holy Spirit did not come until "…they were all in one accord…" (Acts 1:14, 2:1).

Before starting the work of accomplishing the team's mission the team leader should take care to establish unity among team members.

Establishing and maintaining unity in a group of individuals is not always an easy task. Unity can be built if:

- team members agree on the vision and mission,
- everyone has a clear set of expectations for himself and the team as a group, and
- the team respects and values the unique skills and abilities of everyone on the team.

6. Define the Work

Once the team has been assembled, they need to define the work for which the team is responsible. This should be done by writing vision, mission, strategy, and tactics statements.

The vision provides a statement of purpose for the team. It answers the question, "Why does this team exist?"

Once the vision has been established the mission must be developed. The mission describes the vision in action and includes the values and principles that will guide the team.

Next, the team should develop specific strategies and tactics designed to accomplish the vision and mission.

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As the team leader, you should outline the situation, ask the team for input, draft your vision and mission, review and discuss with the team, and prepare the final working documents.

7. Be Patient

Because a high-performance team is characterized by participative leadership, it will take longer to establish initial results. Most of us will not have been on a team before, and it will take time to become accustomed to the need for individual leadership and accountability. Most of us are used to being told what, when, where, why, and how to do things and it will not be easy for some to begin doing for themselves.

As the team leader, there will be times when you spot a problem and could jump in with a solution. Fight the urge. Let your people develop their own solutions to problems facing the team. By doing this, you will help your people develop their skills to the utmost!

Profile of a High-Performance Team

High-performance teams are characterized by participative leadership, open communications, a united attitude amongst team members, and a strong focus on the work to be done.

If these characteristics are evident on your team, congratulations, you have a high-performance team!

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