

HOW TO BUILD A GREAT TEAM CULTURE

A Great Team is all about “People”

Good team work is mathematics – it adds leverage, divides work and multiplies success. People are at the heart of a great team. Where there are human beings, there will be dynamics of how they operate. Human dynamics remain the same –be it team, family or community.

Treat them as humans. Living, breathing, emotional and intelligent people are not “resources”. They are not a part of machinery. They are humans.

- Human beings have self-esteem.
- They are driven by ambition.
- They want to grow.
- They want independence.

If ambition is the driver, inspiration is the fuel. Feedback is the compass that enables them to validate direction. Trust is the currency.

Why Team?

A team of discrete individuals join hands because they want to achieve something that is beyond their own selves. Having a compelling purpose is the first pre-requisite of building a great team.

In today’s world, people cannot be simply “roped into” the team. They have to “opt-in” – which means that a leader’s first job and biggest value addition is to articulate the clear vision and principles for how the team will reach it. To clarify the purpose in so many words (and through actions). People need to know how their work fits into a larger picture.

Clarifying the purpose and setting the vision is not a one-time communication. It has to be re-iterated in every meeting and every interaction. Vision and values are not “feel good things” written on the wall plaque – they have to be lived in every decision that an organization takes. Formal and informal forums like water-cooler conversations, one-on-ones, all hands meetings, and internal newsletters are a great way to reinforce the message.

If you want to ENLIST people onto your vision, you have to LISTEN – probably a reason why both the words are made up of same letters.

Communication is the most important tool in a leader’s toolkit. Communication that sets expectations right!

“If people are subordinates, what are they subordinating to?” In my view, people never subordinate other people. They are subordinates to a cause. In that sense, even a leader is a subordinate to a cause.

Set expectations on behaviours you value. As Michael le Boeuf says, "You get more of the behaviour you reward. You don't get what you hope for, ask for, wish for or beg for. You get what you reward."

Getting the Right People

A team is as good as the people in it. Get people on your team who are either rock stars with proven capabilities or the ones who possess the attitude of being rock stars.

Never hire on capabilities alone. Attitude is as important as capabilities. In fact, with the right attitude, a team member can build capabilities. Skills alone, without right attitude doesn't move a needle.

As Tom Peters says, "Attitude > Ability"

Embrace diversity. Diversity is the key to an innovative team. If everyone belongs to a similar background or have similar thought processes, how will the team think different? How will they look at same things with a new set of lens? How will they challenge the status-quo? Celebrate these outliers, for they are the ones who will help you grow!

Before hiring a team members, look for actual working skills. Learning history. Communication. Adaptability and most importantly, integrity.

After all this, ensure that the person is fun to work with, social and emotionally intelligent. Get people on team with complementary skills. A good team is the one where people complement each other. It is like a puzzle where the whole picture is not complete without any one of its parts. Each piece of puzzle fills the other!

Even after having all traffic rules, accidents still happen. It will happen when you are building team. The key is to know when to let someone go.

Managing Smart

People don't need micromanagement. They don't need carrot and stick. They need an ecosystem where they can exercise their discretionary effort and deliver their 102% – 100% of what is expected and 2% value addition.

How to create such an ecosystem? Dan Pink's new theory of motivation comes in handy. People need autonomy (control over their work). They want to pursue mastery (work that helps them become better). They need a strong purpose (working on what matters).

Trust is the currency for eliciting excellence. Because it is simple: people only do their best work when they are trusted. With traditional "command-and-control", people will comply at the best. With trust and empowerment, they will exceed the expectations.

In a team, people share the same vision, but not accountability. Establish clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities early on.

If people are involved in planning, they co-own the plan (buy-in). Involve people when planning for tasks that impacts their work.

Rituals are powerful. Communication cannot be left to a chance. Establishing rituals (daily stand-ups, weekly meetings, one-on-ones, retrospective meetings) are a powerful way to ensure that team stays on track.

Have systems in place. It is said that “Processes without results are a waste. Results without processes are not sustainable.”

Share feedback early and often. Feedback validates the direction and helps in course correction.

Manage meetings well. Keep them short and focused on actions.

Foster collaboration. Don't rely on emails when you can walk up and talk to a team member. Play to their strengths and let them shine. A lot of team leadership is knowing who can do what and delegating accordingly.

Let them take lead. People fondly remember what they started or owned.

In Storming phase of a team's lifecycle, conflicts are inevitable. It is not about conflicts but how you manage them.

The harder the conflict, the glorious the triumph – because every conflict tests (and strengthens) the team fabric. It refreshes the dynamics.

Treat people well when they make mistakes – when they least expect it.

When you have to be firm, be firm – but not at the cost of politeness. Being firm and polite is an art! Dealing with others without grace kills autonomy.

Manage the grapevine. Avoid small talk within the team. Encourage people to address issues directly.

In all situations bad and good, always be transparent about what is really going on and how will it impact the team.

Monitor progress, not people.
Question process, not individuals.

When you encounter an ego situation, quiz your goals. Am I (are you) focusing on 'who' is right, or doing 'what' is right?"
Be graceful, always!
Inspiration and Gratitude

Someone rightly said, “We always get more from people by building a 'fire within them' than we do by building 'fire under them.'”

Be generous about recognizing contributions. Be authentic when appreciating. Say more than just “good job” and tell them what exactly do you appreciate.

Thank often.

Own failures but share success.

Gratitude and Recognition feeds self-esteem (one’s assessment of self-worth) – one of our basic needs.

Inspire by improving the work, processes and rituals. Constant improvement leads to better engagement. “The greatest danger a team faces isn’t that it won’t become successful, but that it will, and then ease to improve.”

Celebrate successes and early wins.

A Note about Culture

It is said that an organization is an elongated shadow of the leader. As a leader, your beliefs, opinions, likes and dislikes will become the culture of your organization. It pays to be careful about what kind of organization you want to build.

Be the example others want to follow. If you want excellence, be excellent first. First “be” and then “seek”.

Culture is built one choice at a time. Choices made up in start-up phase often end up building culture.

If you are not conscious about what culture you want to build, culture will happen. Culture by default or Culture by Design? That is the choice every business leader has to make.

Growing Others

When people do the work, their work makes them. It helps to see what people are becoming as a result of the work.

A leader’s real legacy is the net positive difference they have made in lives of people working in their team.

Actively mentor them through the journey. Mentors elevate human potential and hence performance. Mentors open up a world of possibilities for people being mentored. Great leaders are farmers – cultivators of human potential.

Practice tough love with them – push them to achieve more or achieve better!

Have a goal to make yourself redundant, so that others (with potential) can step up and play a bigger role.

Dr. John Maxwell puts in brilliantly, “The point of leading is not to cross the finish line first; it’s to take people across the finish line with you.”

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