



Teams do not come together by themselves. They are developed around a common purpose and mission.

A Clear, Elevating Goal

By Harry M. Jansen Kraemer

To build, motivate, and engage your team requires the team members to be as passionate about achieving an objective as you are. Of course, that means you must have a high degree of energy and commitment around what you're trying to accomplish. Your leadership comes not from telling others what to do but from showing them why what they're doing is important to the entire organization.

Building your dream team

The objective for any leader is to build a successful, high-performing team. For individuals and teams to reach targets and realize goals, they must be highly motivated and engaged. I was very fortunate to learn these lessons from a senior human resources executive at Baxter named Frank LaFasto. Frank held a PhD in

organizational behavior and wrote several books on team development. He interviewed thousands of teams, from scientists at NASA to the people at IBM who invented the first PC. To understand the real differences among these teams, he studied both those that succeeded and those that failed. What Frank found was that it all came down to people feeling that they were part of something worthwhile and significant. He referred to this as having a clear, elevating goal.

As a newly appointed president of a division at Baxter, I had the privilege of working with Frank as I put together my team. Frank stepped in to help us

through the process, which he purposefully kept very simple. In a meeting with my direct reports, Frank explained that we could operate as a team only if we had an overarching objective around which the entire team could be brought together. Without a broader sense of purpose and direction, a team would run the risk of disintegrating into individual players separating in different directions.

One way to tell if a group is really a team is to ask each member individually what he believes the group is trying to accomplish. If eight different people give you eight different responses, you know there is no real team. Granted, the team will be made up of people who have different tasks and assignments that reflect their expertise or the area of the company in which they work.

In the end, however, all of these tasks must relate directly to achieving a clear, elevating goal.

Removing roadblocks for your team

Depending on their earlier experiences with teams, some people may think this solution sounds too good to be true. If they had been among 10 people in the room, they had seen each person remain an individual contributor who was more focused on her own territory than on the overall organization. The question then becomes: What are some of the barriers that keep groups from becoming teams?

1. Eliminate sidebar conversations. I'll never forget what I learned from Frank in regard to this issue. He used to say that the way to tell whether a team is

really effective is if there are no sidebar discussions. Here's what he meant: Ten of you have been meeting in a conference room for two hours. Now it's time to take a break. As you and a colleague walk toward the water cooler, your colleague says, "Can you believe what Ralph just said? Where is he coming from?" As you pass two other people who are on their way from the conference room to the coffee machine, you hear them say, "We're the ones who know what's going on. Those other people I'm not so sure about."

Before you shrug this off as "just how people act in groups," consider what is really going on here. People engage in these sidebar conversations because their concerns, questions, and comments were never aired in the meeting. For a team to be effective, everything



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must be laid out on the table for discussion with everyone in the room. There should be no sensitive topics or taboos that are off-limits. So when 10 people are meeting and someone says something that doesn't make sense, one of the team members asks for an explanation.

Your team can eliminate sidebar discussions by ensuring that everything that needs to be said is expressed at the meeting. Team members are encouraged to openly, honestly, and respectfully question everyone, including the team leader. People don't see challenging others as a threat because they give their fellow team members the benefit of the doubt. They understand that these challenges are being made to present all sides of the issue and arrive at a better answer. How else can the team move forward to determine, in a logical way, the right thing to do?

2. Value accountability. Sometimes we mistakenly think that teamwork requires some false sense of getting along. But if everyone wants to “play nice” and resists challenging or arguing specific points, then you will end up with a mediocre team. Having a great team means holding each other accountable and refusing to accept anything less than doing the right thing for the right reasons.

2. Set ground rules. One of the critical ways for you as the leader to transform a group of individuals into a team is to set the ground rules and expectations. The first expectation is that people leave their individual silos behind. To be part of the team, they must view the task at hand from the perspective of what is best for the total organization. Next, focus on the issues, not the personalities. Facts make for a better discussion than opinions and guesses. Facts let people concentrate on the central issues of an important decision, grounding the discussion in reality and not fantasy.

Discussions should be framed as collaborations aimed at achieving the best possible solution for the overall organization. This means shifting from “I win, you lose” to “We win.” Decisions should be framed so that everyone shares an

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interest in achieving and supporting the best solution for the group.

Establish a sense of fairness and equity in the process. People do care about outcomes, but they are also concerned about the process that gets them there. Some team members may not have chosen a particular decision, but as long as these individuals provided input to the process and felt that their opinions were heard by the leader, most likely everyone will be okay with the outcome—even if the leader's final decision is contrary to what some of them recommended. Through open and thorough discussion, the team members understand all sides of the issue and can see that the leader, whom they trust, believes that this decision is in the best interest of the entire organization.

Engagement is key

Learning to motivate and engage a team is so important you will want to get your arms around these strategies early on in your career, even before you have people working for you. Remember, people will always have competing priorities. Your responsibility as the leader is to get them to see the big picture and to understand the importance of what needs to be done. The motivation and engagement of your team will multiply your effectiveness as a leader.



You don't have to be a superhero, nor do you have to spend an inordinate sum of money. What you must do is relate to others by letting them know who you are and the values you stand for. At the same time, you need to understand what matters to them and establish a respectful environment that allows them to contribute fully. Then you will create a team that produces extraordinary results.

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