Teamwork at Its Best
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A Blueprint for Team Triumphs

Teamwork. Nice idea, isn’t it? The notion of getting individuals to put aside selfish interests for the greater good of the group sounds ideal in theory. And if you can get everyone pulling together, you’re that much closer to becoming a true leader.

But in practice, building teamwork is a messy and often frustrating experience. It’s also a relatively new phenomenon, at least in the corporate world.

Just 40 years ago, the classic command-control model led managers to give orders and expect compliance. Period. Your place in the corporate food chain defined your organizational power. Hierarchy mattered. “Team-building” consultants didn’t exist, and leaders rarely worried about whether their employees got along well and collaborated enthusiastically on projects.

Today, teams produce results. In most professions, individual achievement flows from group triumphs. Example: A cross-departmental committee is formed to overhaul a company’s product mix, and the most capable, influential team members parlay the group’s success into nice promotions for themselves.

Your career advancement largely rests on your ability to manage teams effectively. You may possess outstanding technical skills and serve as an excellent one-on-one coach, but if you fail to lead teams wisely, the higher-ups will surely notice.

Why Teams Matter

One reason teams have taken off in recent years is that managers are realizing they can no longer rely solely on delegating to one individual. If you ask Joe to handle a project and he doesn’t complete it properly, you’re stuck. You may need to restart the process by asking Mary to step in. Even if she delivers, you’ve lost precious time and left Joe demoralized.

Assembling a small team to tackle the project—instead of only Joe—can prove safer and give you better results. Here’s why:

1. You spread the risk. Joe may strike you as a solid performer, but if he struggles to implement the project or gets distracted by personal problems, he may not come through. All your eggs are in one basket, so you’ve placed yourself in a vulnerable position. Assigning a team to work on the project gives you insurance: If one
member does not or cannot contribute—for any reason—the others can pick up the slack and stay on schedule.

2. **You “buy” more knowledge.** Joe may be a genius, but he’s only one genius. If you pool the resources of, say, five sharp, talented staffers, you’ll probably get an even better result. When you encourage a team to work together to solve problems and confront challenges, you’re increasing the odds that they’ll devise answers surpassing what any one of them might conclude on his own. In short, their collective brainpower can give you more bang for your buck.

3. **You harness cooperation, not competition.** Even if Joe does his job brilliantly, that means his co-workers were probably left watching on the sidelines. They might grow jealous or bitter that you chose Joe for an interesting or high-profile assignment. Their disenchantment can fester and breed a “me-first” mentality: They become more concerned with topping their peers—seen as rivals vying for your approval—than with doing their work to the best of their ability.

Like many managers, you may already see the wisdom of teams. You don’t need to be sold on why it’s better to delegate to groups rather than to individuals. But you may face a deeper dilemma: how to improve teamwork so that your employees maximize their cooperation and learn to contribute to a larger good.

This Special Report will help you master the art of leading teams and ensuring they work together seamlessly. The more you appreciate the benefits of collaboration, the sooner you’ll accept the formidable power of teamwork over individual accomplishment.

**Are You a Team Player?**

You need to live and breathe team spirit if you’re going to enhance the teamwork in your unit. As a manager, you cannot just pay lip service to group achievement; rather, you must embody the characteristics you seek to instill in your staff.

Take the case of Ann, a marketing director who is a big believer in teamwork. She often asks her staff of seven to “put their heads together” to recommend new campaigns, community outreach programs and other corporate image-building projects. Lately, however, she’s been losing faith in her employees’ ability to propose fresh ideas. While they seem to work well as a group, Ann senses they aren’t trying hard enough. She bursts into their meetings and lectures them. She chastises them for “coasting” and blames them for a “mediocre performance of late.” She says she would give the team a grade of “C minus.” In her defense, Ann insists that she’s simply rallying the troops. “It’s my way of motivating team members to try harder,” she says. “If I don’t do it, no one else will.”

Perhaps you can spot the problem. Ann wants her team to improve, but she resorts to publicly berating them and prodding them to pick up the slack. The participants are surprised and embarrassed by her tongue-lashing. After all, they figured they were trying hard and doing their best. If that wasn’t good enough, then they’re not sure what’s next.

Ann has good intentions. She just needs to adjust her strategy and empathize better with her employees.

Use Exercise 1 (page 3) to help you determine if you’re ideally suited to managing teams—or if you might fall into the same trap as Ann did.
Measure Your Own Teamwork

Read each statement below and answer on a 1–5 scale: 1 is “never true”; 3 is “true about half the time”; 5 is “always true.”

_____ If I’m recognized by my boss for a job well done, I’ll immediately praise others in my unit who deserve credit.

_____ When I’ve participated on teams, I’ve enjoyed the camaraderie of the group.

_____ I’ve impressed clients or bosses by showing how well I’ve worked with others.

_____ In my performance reviews, I’ve been recognized by my boss for my effective teamwork.

_____ I prefer to engage in group brainstorming sessions instead of coming up with ideas on my own.

_____ If a colleague is struggling with an assignment, I’ll offer to help.

_____ I’m comfortable working with other managers on a project, even if they’re rivals for a promotion.

Total your score. If it’s 24 or more, you’re clearly a team player who enjoys collaboration. You should have no trouble leading teams and empathizing with your employees. If you scored 17 to 23, you’re on the right track, but you may need to polish certain areas to become more engaged in group activities.

If your score falls below 17, you might still be a strong leader; to improve teamwork among your staff, however, you may need to become sensitized to their situation. To gain credibility with your team, identify ways to strengthen your awareness of group dynamics.

5 Ingredients of a Winning Team

You want to instill a team ethic, so you reward employees who contribute to the group’s success. You stop them in the hall and say, “Thanks for chipping in and making us better” or “I realize how much you’re giving to our team.”

That’s a good start, but it’s not enough. Recognizing team players shows that you want people to work together, but it doesn’t guarantee you’ll get through to those who don’t care about earning your kudos. They may prefer to keep a low profile and quietly perform only enough to get by.

But here’s the rub: You need everyone on board to create truly effective teamwork. If just one stubbornly resists lending a hand, his selfishness can spread and infect the entire unit. Workers who are on the fence about participating on a team may be influenced by a vocal malcontent—and then mimic his petulant or alienating attitude.
Since one bad apple can ruin an otherwise fine crop, your challenge as manager is to insist on across-the-board teamwork and reinforce it gently but firmly. But before you can take steps to convert potential saboteurs into enthusiastic teammates, you need to know what elements comprise a strong, seamless group.

In the following section we discuss the five most important ingredients that go into a winning team.

**Clarity of purpose**

The best way to stamp out conflicts before they escalate is to ensure that all the team members understand and accept their roles. They should also know why they’re working together and what they’re trying to achieve.

*Test:* To determine whether your team has clarity of purpose, meet with the members individually and ask each one, “What do you think is the purpose of this team?” and “What do you see as your role on the team?” Their answers to the first question should roughly match; for the second question, they should identify what skills, talents or knowledge they see themselves contributing to the group.

**Mutual trust**

Put any group of people together for an extended period and ask them to collaborate, and you will almost certainly get some bickering and testiness in return. Throw in crunch deadlines, high stakes and other forms of pressure, and you have yourself a powder keg, which could explode on any given day.

The best countervailing force against such tension is trust. When teammates see the good in one another and communicate with honesty and integrity, they can work without fear of back-stabbing, scheming and ever-shifting alliances. In short, a spirit of mutual trust enables participants to work together rather than compete for individual glory.

*Test:* To weigh the level of trust on a team you manage, confront the issue head-on. Host a roundtable discussion and ask each employee, “To what extent do you trust your fellow teammates?” If individuals mutter something like “Sure, I trust these guys” or “I haven’t really thought about it,” ask for examples of how they put their faith in each other. Listen carefully to the responses; if speaker after speaker seems evasive, that’s a red flag.

**Strong leadership**

Here’s where you come in. By modeling the kind of team-oriented behavior you seek in your employees, you can set an example for them to emulate. That means soliciting input before giving orders and treating what your staffers say with genuine curiosity and nonjudgmental concern.

As the boss, you can get away with expressing your opinions more freely and waving away disagreements or challenges to your authority. Your employees lack that luxury. But if you indulge in such flagrant displays of your power, you will turn team members into meek or resentful followers. They won’t heed your guidance and may turn on each other as they try to supplant you.

*Test:* To learn whether you’re an effective leader, appoint a temporary replacement to oversee the team’s progress for at least two weeks. Watch from the sidelines to see
how the team responds. Compare its performance in key areas, such as willingness to
take risks and the speed and quality of its results. Treat this exercise as a learning tool.
Don’t fret if the team rises to a higher level without you in the picture; introducing any
type of change often invigorates a group. It’s more important that you monitor the
group’s working relationship and note any dramatic changes—for better or worse.

**Individual accountability**

On a high-flying team, individuals cannot hide behind someone else’s work. Everyone
chips in and takes responsibility for lifting the collective output of the group. Each team
member is a self-starter who shows initiative and thinks creatively. On a winning team,
there are no do-nothings—duds who quietly kill time while others do the heavy lifting.

*Test:* After a team has worked together awhile, give each participant an assignment.
Ask them to jot down “the top three contributions I’ve made to this group.” Collect
their answers and review them. Ideally, each slip of paper should list distinct, measur-
able efforts the individual has made. If you notice page after page of vague or non-
existent “contributions,” it’s a sign that some people aren’t pulling their weight.

*Note:* Don’t insist that team members put their names on their papers; that will
increase the odds they’ll complete the assignment without fear of judgment.

**Discipline and determination**

Top teams bear down and produce results. They treat their mission seriously and want
to stand out as an elite force. When faced with a tough choice, the participants resist tak-
ing the easy way out. They goad each other to excel.

Individual determination isn’t enough. The group as a whole must strive to attain
its goals in the face of adversity. That way, any stragglers will either get squeezed out
or will harness their energy so as to contribute to the team.

*Test:* Schedule an early-morning team meeting and note the group’s punctuality. Is
everyone seated and raring to go at the appropriate time? Do they seem excited and
eager to participate—or are they yawning and hiding in the back of the room? Does
anyone gripe about having to come in early?

When teams possess the five elements of purpose, trust, leadership, accountability
and discipline, they are unstoppable. Problems will still erupt, but a strong, resilient
group will overcome differences in opinion or outlook and press ahead. Individuals
will willingly collaborate and work as a seamless unit, rather than withhold informa-
tion from each other or claim credit for every minor victory.

Most importantly, teams that work well together don’t waste time or energy on
petty squabbles. They are solution oriented. All the team members put the group’s
interests above their own—and that makes everything else fall into place.
Tim’s boss had given him strict orders: Build a great project team. That was it. Tim didn’t know where to begin. He managed 36 people, but he could draw upon 300 employees throughout the company for the team. He had one month, so he had to move fast.

But he was immobilized by concerns: How do I decide who’s best? Will my colleagues treat this team seriously? How can I ensure there’s chemistry among the people I choose?

Tim knew he had to approach this systematically if he was going to assemble a group that would make a difference.

Birth of a Team:
Laying the Groundwork

Like bulbs you plant in your flowerbed months before they grow above ground, teams don’t just sprout up overnight. You need to nurture them and pave the way for teammates to get along.

If your organizational culture reinforces a dog-eat-dog mentality, where workers vie for managers’ approval and fight for a limited number of promotions, it will prove much harder to foster team spirit. The best teams operate in an open, informal climate—one in which the company salutes group achievements and frowns on individual displays of politicking or power-grabbing.

Another factor that will largely shape the success of your teams is how your organization handles change. Even the most effective groups will lose their focus if they’re continually reeling from upheavals. Sudden strategic shifts or personnel moves can prove distracting, especially if employees have already withstood quarter after quarter of wrenching reforms and restructuring.

Does your company provide the right backdrop for teams to thrive? To find out, turn to Exercise 2 (page 8).

Pick Stars for Your Team

You can never predict how a team will perform. But that doesn’t mean you should just throw a randomly selected group together and expect top results.

To raise the odds that a group will gel, evaluate each potential member in terms of temperament. Avoid filling a team with clones; try to mix and match personalities so that they complement one another. For example, you don’t want to combine too many strong-willed egoists who’ll constantly interrupt each other or exchange put-downs. And you don’t want to put too many hotheads in a room—they might resort to screaming matches to get their points across.
Create a Culture Where Teams Thrive

Does your organizational culture provide the right climate for teams to thrive? Answer the following questions with Yes or No:

Is your organization more likely to reward individual achievement over team achievement? *(Example: At its annual awards dinner, does the company recognize individuals rather than teams?)*

Does your organization encourage competition among individuals rather than cooperation? *(Example: In running the sales force, does the sales manager pit person against person to earn the most commission, or can salespeople earn more by working together to woo a big account?)*

Do your senior executives routinely assign projects to individuals rather than teams? *(Example: When the CEO confronts a complex problem, is she more apt to say, “I want the best person we have on this” or “Let’s put our heads together on this and assemble a team”?)*

In the halls and common areas of your organization, are the walls covered with photos of individual employees rather than groups? *(Example: Are you more likely to see “Employee of the Month” than “Team of the Month” photos?)*

When left to their own devices, do your employees tend to work independently as opposed to sharing ideas and information? *(Example: When you wander around the work area, are you more likely to see individuals seated alone at their desks or pulling up chairs and holding impromptu meetings?)*

In terms of the physical layout of the workplace, are the meeting rooms underused and shabby as opposed to vibrant and appealing? *(Example: Are the conference rooms dark, uncomfortable and ill equipped for groups, or are they clean and well stocked with supplies?)*

Add the number of Yes answers to the above questions. If the total of Yes responses is three or more, that’s a strong indicator that your organization lacks the kind of team-based culture that enhances collaboration.

While none of the above questions is conclusive in and of itself, as a whole they can help you determine to what extent your workplace provides the proper setting for teamwork.
Before choosing your next team, identify the candidates’ personalities. Overcome your personal biases; don’t label people as heroes or villains. Remember: The best teams aren’t necessarily going to consist solely of your favorite characters. You’ll need to accept some folks who rub you the wrong way.

Try to select at least one person who loosely fits each of the following types:

**Doug the Dreamer**

His wide-ranging interests and lively imagination make him a big-picture thinker. Doug will bring initiative and enthusiasm to the team, proposing a string of creative ideas. If you’re lucky, he’ll also offer a practical blueprint of how to implement his brainstorm—or at least an initial action step the team can take to make quick progress. He may also possess an uncanny ability to sift through new ideas and isolate the one true winner, the brilliant plan that will guide the team to greatness.

*Downside:* He craves recognition for his sweeping vision. He may inflate the value of his dreams and assume that every word out of his mouth is worth millions. His runaway ego can alienate more humble, diligent, detail-oriented team members. Acknowledge his ideas and indulge his dreaming so that he doesn’t feel neglected or taken for granted.

**Roger the Realist**

His feet are planted squarely on the ground, and he maintains a close eye on what’s probable, possible and far-fetched. When team members start bouncing wild ideas off each other, he stays calm and clearheaded.

Roger arrives at every meeting with spreadsheets, activity reports and financial exhibits to substantiate his points. When someone challenges his opinion, he can support his position by citing facts. He prides himself on giving a dispassionate analysis of any situation, free of emotions that could cloud the harsh glare of reality.

*Downside:* His unshakable grasp of reality can put a damper on a team’s high-minded pursuit of ambitious goals. If circumstances appear grim, he can turn into a Cassandra, always warning of disasters ahead. Such incessant pessimism usually deadens a group’s will to persevere in the face of adversity. Tame his dark side by encouraging him to suspend disbelief—at least while the team attempts to test its limits and overcome formidable obstacles.

**Jane the Judge**

She walks into a room and commands respect. Why? She treats everyone fairly and listens to each speaker with deep interest and open-mindedness. She chooses her words carefully to avoid vague or misleading remarks. She gives precise descriptions and speaks with an authority that comes from years of making hard but prudent decisions.

Before giving her opinion, Jane tends to ask clarifying questions so that she fully understands the issues at hand. When the team tackles complex matters, she can cut through the clutter and restate the core concepts in accessible terms.

*Downside:* Her imperious bearing can alienate more genial, informal individuals. They may not want a judge in their midst who remains aloof from the gang. What’s worse, her slow, deliberate way of expressing herself may sabotage her attempt to make
herself heard. On a boisterous, high-energy team, her voice may get drowned out by more vocal participants. Make sure she tries to blend in rather than remain detached. Prod her not just to render verdicts, but to showcase her bolder, more impulsive side.

**Jan the Joker**

She’s an upbeat addition to any team. Her warm humor and gentle smile bring combatants together and help puncture the egos of even the most arrogant types. Jan’s a natural storyteller who can capture the team’s attention and redirect its focus without heavy-handed coercion. Her jokes are genuinely funny but never crass or inappropriate.

When pressures mount and deadlines loom, her quick-witted comments and easy-going good cheer can help everyone release pent-up tension. Best of all, her humor helps teammates see the good in one another.

**Downside:** Because humor is so subjective, some team members are bound to find her jokes offensive. Plus, she may misread a situation and inject levity into a serious discussion, thus hurting others’ feelings. Finally, her funny perspective may make teammates feel slighted when trying to get their points across amid laughter.

**Archie the Admirer**

He finds something to admire in everyone—and he won’t hesitate to share his favorable impression of others. His ratio of offering praise to dishing out criticism is 10:1; most of the time he looks for reasons to compliment teammates. He has an innate ability to extract the positive from every statement, even seemingly dumb or absurd comments.

When Archie makes a point, he never fails to recognize previous speakers who’ve helped him reach his conclusion. For example, he often uses phrases such as: “As Joe put it earlier so well…” or “Tina’s insights made me rethink this, and now I agree with her that…”

**Downside:** His eagerness to praise can produce a bunch of cynics who disregard him as a Dale Carnegie fanatic gone awry. His admiration can strike others as fake, especially if it’s frequently directed at the team leader or high-ranking executives. His credibility will erode if people begin to view him as spineless and afraid to rock the boat. Let him praise freely without making him self-conscious; give him the benefit of the doubt that his admiration is genuine.

Let’s hope the above cast of characters loosely resembles at least some of the individuals in your workplace. Before forming your next team, review this list and try to pick a complementary group of people. Too many clones or buddies won’t produce the kind of diversity you need to propel the team to a higher level.

**Launch a PR Campaign for the Team**

If newcomers perceive your team as just another irritation that complicates their day, they’re going to drag you down. They may not put up much active resistance, but they’ll wind up adding nothing while expending the least possible effort. Employees who join groups out of a sense of obligation rarely bring the kind of enthusiasm needed to generate exceptional results.
You should “market” the birth of your team the same way a motion picture studio hyps its new films. In the months before a big-budget action flick opens, a studio might whet the public’s appetite by introducing a Web site, screening enticing trailers, sending the stars on press junkets, courting influential critics and even starting rumors about the film’s breakthrough use of special effects or its shocking final reel.

Before unveiling your team, capture the “romance” of the group’s mission to draw everyone’s interest to your project. How do you do that? Give a bold speech at a companywide meeting that describes what you’re setting out to achieve. Send all employees an e-mail that reinforces why the team’s work will largely shape the organization’s destiny. Interview your company’s CEO or most celebrated customer and ask, “What kind of impact do you think this team will make?” Then distribute the answer widely so that employees at all levels will recognize the importance of your new team.

When picking team members, make sure they buy into the buzz you’ve created. If they seem distracted, skeptical or just plain negative, don’t invite them aboard. To assess their attitude, administer the test shown in Exercise 3 (below).

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### The Hunt for Gung-ho Dynamos

*After you’ve explained the team’s purpose and provided an overview of how the team will operate, give each prospective member this exercise to complete. Have them read each statement and select the best response.*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>I am eager to join this team.</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<tr>
<td>I see how I can contribute to this team.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think my work on this team can enhance my stature or career prospects.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joining this team will help me establish valuable alliances.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I respect the team leader.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The work that this team will do excites me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A year from now, I’m sure I’ll be happy with my decision to join this team.</td>
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To score the exercise, assign three points for **Agree**, two points for **Not Sure** and one point for **Disagree**. The higher the total score, the more likely you’ve found someone who truly wants to play a role in the group.
Another way to build excitement for your team is to pull back after you’ve created the initial buzz and let individuals clamor for involvement. If you’re going to select a handful of people from a large department, alert the whole unit that you need a specific number of representatives. Then bow out.

Let the employees in the department decide for themselves who should enlist. That way, you raise the odds of recruiting those who care the most about the team’s project. Better yet, if you withdraw from the selection process, you won’t need to worry about hurting the feelings of those who were not chosen.

5 Ground Rules for Collaboration

All teams need some structure. After assembling a team, don’t assume you can leave it alone for six months and expect stellar results—you may wind up instead with anarchy.

At the same time, however, keep in mind that too much rigidity can kill a team’s spirit. Insisting on too many do’s and don’ts may make individuals feel like pawns who lack the ability to function on their own.

You’ll manage your team more effectively by establishing simple ground rules from the start. That way, everyone knows what you expect and which behaviors fall outside those you deem acceptable.

The following guidelines will help you set fair, reasonable rules for the team:

- **Respect comes first.** Make it clear that team members should remain polite, attentive and respectful at all times. A marketing manager likes to run his teams by announcing at their first meeting, “I hold each of you in high regard, and Rule No. 1 is that from now on, you feel the same way about each other. That means you must show unconditional respect for everyone.”

- **We admit and learn from our mistakes.** You want teams to acknowledge their errors forthrightly, rather than shifting blame or engaging in coverups. This creates a more supportive, nonthreatening environment that’s conducive to true collaboration. To reinforce this rule, you can post colorful signs in the team’s meeting room that read, “What have you done wrong today?” and “We recognize our mistakes. We don’t hide from them.”

- **Everyone’s equal.** Most teams appoint a leader who facilitates discussions or represents the group in front of senior executives. But that doesn’t make the rest of the team members mere followers. You can help a team appreciate its equality by treating it as a seamless unit. When you interact with team members, spread yourself around so that you don’t play favorites. Set an example by seeking out the quietest individuals and soliciting their opinions.

- **We don’t waste time.** Left unchecked, teams can squander countless hours on minor issues or overdosing on process-oriented concerns. The classic example is a group thatdevotes 30 minutes to debating what they’ll discuss during their 30-minute meeting! As the manager, make it clear to everyone that they must show up on time, get to work and stay on track.

- **No loafing allowed.** Many teams have at least one member who tries to do the least amount of work possible. His sole expertise: squirming out of accepting responsibility for anything. Alert the team from the outset that every member must play an
active role in contributing to the group’s greater good. If they’re unwilling or unable to chip in, ask them to see you to explain their plight.

The above guidelines are just a sampling of the requirements you may want to consider when forming your team. You can customize the ground rules to fit the needs and mission of the particular group you’re managing. For instance, if the team will be handling lots of proprietary information, you should state that any breach of confidentiality is unacceptable and will result in swift, severe penalties. Then prepare to enforce such a rule to give it teeth.

**Align the Team With Your Company’s Core Values**

Every company has its own distinct character, which is shaped largely by its employees. In a freewheeling environment, workers may frequently show emotion—whether they’re joyously exchanging high-fives or commiserating over lost business. In a more sedate workplace, employees may dress in conservative suits and adopt a bureaucratic mind-set.

A team’s behavior often reflects an organization’s personality. In a high-pressure, deadline-oriented office, team members may interrupt each other and impatiently insist on “moving on” rather than belaboring a topic. A sense of urgency can affect the group’s judgment. Individuals may act impulsively rather than amassing support before speaking up.

Yet in many companies, teams can take their time to gel and produce results. They need not rush to conclusions or react without analyzing all the facts. Participants can bond on their own terms, without having to work against the clock to fix what’s broken.

In paving the way for teams to thrive in your workplace, it’s helpful to identify your corporate culture. For Peter Drucker, America’s foremost management expert who has studied the evolution of teams in the 20th century, a supervisor can encourage successful teamwork by ensuring that the group embodies the organization’s core values.

In his book *Managing in a Time of Great Change* (Truman Talley, 1995) Drucker writes that there are three types of teams—each related to a sport:

- **The Baseball Team** consists of players who are each stationed at a position and rarely stray from that post. Individuals complete their jobs; then attention shifts to another person who takes over in a different role.

  Example: a manufacturing team where workers install separate parts at different stages in an assembly line.

- **The Football Team** acts in tandem to accomplish its tasks. While baseball players often stand by as their teammates complete a play, a football team’s offense will take the field, huddle to discuss the next scrimmage and then mobilize as a unit to gain yardage. While football players have designated positions, they must synchronize their performance to achieve victory; an outfielder for the New York Yankees, by contrast, has no involvement in an infield play.

  Example: a cross-departmental team at a bank that includes representatives from lending, marketing and underwriting, who work together to cut expenses.
The Doubles Tennis Team is more fluid than the other two groups. Just as tennis players must switch positions and react quickly to changes during a match, this team re-creates itself constantly. Teammates’ roles aren’t fixed as they are in baseball and football; they can step out of their normal function to help someone in trouble.

Example: a brainstorming group that must devise and implement an innovative solution to a competitor’s new product.

Your job as a manager is to decide what kind of team to assemble to achieve its goals. It’s not enough to say, “My company prizes teamwork, so I’ll create a really strong group of winners.” That’s too superficial.

You need to dig deeper to align your team with the organization’s needs and values. If your firm can trace its manufacturing roots to Henry Ford’s auto assembly line, then a baseball team may make the most sense. But if you work at a high-tech startup, where computer programmers, marketers and designers must collaborate to compete in a dynamic marketplace, then you’ll want to nurture a doubles tennis team, where everyone can wear different hats and adjust to changing circumstances.

By mapping out the best way for your team members to operate, you can give them the right tools. Drucker warns that it’s hard to transform one kind of team into another. Once you choose baseball or football or tennis, that’s what you’ll get. So it’s important to think through what you want the group to do and what kind of structure will complement your team’s mission.
Sally predicted that leading this team would sap her energy and require extra hand-holding. And she was right.

Her “crisis management corps” consisted of 10 proud, high-ego braggarts. At team meetings, they would spend hours trying to show how smart they were and top each other’s boastful claims.

It drove Sally crazy. She knew she had to find a way to tame these showboats while at the same time drive them to produce great results as a team.

A Tough Sell: Teamwork Over Individual Glory

There’s a certain romance to teamwork in action. Many books and movies revolve around the theme of hard-charging or independent-minded people who are willing to give of themselves to make a team better.

In *Hoosiers*, a 1986 film starring Gene Hackman, a high school basketball team filled with stubborn, conflicted players learn to “operate like pistons” synchronized to perform seamlessly as a whole. In *Apollo 13*, a 1995 film about the abortive space mission, we watch an elite team of engineers work together to troubleshoot under intense pressure to bring a crippled spacecraft back to Earth.

When individuals act selflessly for the good of a group, it’s a stirring, uplifting experience to behold. Even though high school students learn that our forefathers lauded the notion of rugged individualism, we still admire those who make heroic sacrifices in the name of unity—people who choose to contribute quietly to a team rather than hog all the glory.

As the manager in charge of a team, you may face a tough sell in trying to turn prickly mavericks into eager, trusting collaborators. Some workers view teams with cynicism and prefer to forge ahead on their own. With the growth of quality circles in the ‘80s and team-building seminars and cross-departmental task forces in the ‘90s, today’s employees may treat the whole notion of teamwork as a tired trend—a throwback to a time when you could remain at the same employer for decades and enjoy job security.

Today you may find yourself battling against the “last person standing” mentality, whereby workers compete for a limited pot of spoils. But that doesn’t mean you can’t fight back by championing a pure, glorious sense of teamwork.
Raise the Perceived Value of Teamwork

As you assemble a team, consider how the participants will feel once they’re together. You can bet they’ll ask themselves three questions:

• What’s in it for me?
• Why should I give 100 percent for this team?
• Will my effort pay off, and will I be recognized for it?

While you can’t answer these questions for them, you can make it easy for them to understand the benefits of accepting their team role. Stress that they are lending their expertise to achieve a common goal. That way, you’ll help them reconcile their self-interest with the group’s interests.

How can you get your employees excited about joining and contributing to a team? Hold an informal meeting. Begin by asking the group, “What are some advantages you see to working with your colleagues on an important project that you couldn’t get by working on your own?”

Jot their answers on a flip chart. Here are some of the answers you might hear:

- **Social benefits.** The group can provide a sense of community and camaraderie that workers would otherwise miss. They might welcome a chance to talk with each other rather than sitting alone at their desks trying to problem-solve in isolation.

- **Networking.** From a career perspective, employees may look forward to getting to know their colleagues better. Ambitious go-getters know that by strengthening their working relationships, they can tap the grapevine about job opportunities and build valuable alliances.

  It’s increasingly common for employees to have an ulterior motive in joining teams: If they’re thinking of leaving their employer to start their own business, they may want to develop bonds with influential colleagues now—while they’re on the inside—to contact later for business leads.

- **Gaining visibility with management.** Aside from networking with their peers, team members may like to showcase their skills and talents for senior executives monitoring the team’s progress. An individual working solo may fly below the chief executive’s radar screen, but if that same person joins an important team, there’s a greater chance of mingling with influential leaders in the organization.

- **Learning on the job.** Even the heartiest self-starter can learn only so much in a solitary role. But when she becomes part of a vibrant, high-achieving team, the group can stimulate an intellectual exchange of ideas that enhances the individual’s skills and knowledge.

- **Efficiency.** Some loners come to realize that they waste lots of time surfing the Internet or rereading minor memos. Without the structure of a team meeting—with an agenda and stated short- and long-term objectives—they may kill countless hours performing unproductive tasks. A chance to join a group can provide more well-defined, time-effective ways to contribute to the organization.
Collective accomplishment. The gratification that comes from enriching a team and lifting it to a higher level can surpass the satisfaction found in individual work. Teammates may feel more empowered or valuable to the organization if they combine forces to produce exceptional results. Team achievement can propel them out of a rut and reawaken their enthusiasm for their job.

As you collect these types of positive responses from your employees, you’ll help them identify the lure of teamwork. Even the most team-resistant people should find at least one benefit of collaboration that they may not have realized earlier.

When you help workers recognize how much they can gain from teamwork—from a purely self-interested point of view—they will no longer define individual glory the same way.

Lending strength, experience and expertise to a team can provide a juicier, more exciting payoff for them.

Give Your Team Some Swagger

All your employees should view joining a team as evidence of their value to the organization. Like members of a SWAT team or Top Gun squadron, they should enter their first team meeting with a swagger that comes from knowing they’re part of an exclusive club.

Think of the slogan “We’re known by the company we keep.” Plant that notion in team members’ minds. They should look around the room and feel as though they belong among high achievers who’ve been chosen for a specific reason.

As a rule, the harder people must struggle for something, the more valuable it becomes to them. That’s why you should treat each invitation to join the team as a symbolic event—a sort of mini-promotion that rewards individuals in a meaningful way. When preparing invitations to send to potential members, consider what special traits, skills or talents each one possesses. If you deliver written invitations in the form of a memo, personalize each correspondence with a few sentences explaining why you’ve chosen that individual.

Remember: Belonging to a team won’t matter all that much if almost anyone can join. The best teams breed a sense of exclusivity.

When assembling your team, tell them your criteria for admission. Explain that they meet your requirements in terms of experience, expertise or enthusiasm. If you invited only those who earned an educational prerequisite or professional designation, let them know. Make them feel special, and they’ll bring more energy and commitment to the team.

Many managers find that by using stiff criteria for team selection, only the most motivated individuals wind up lobbying for inclusion. Less confident or less energetic workers bow out. The ones who ultimately make up the team view it as an honor, not an obligation. They derive pride from belonging to your group.

To assess how well you have convinced them of the group’s perceived exclusivity, do Exercise 4 (page 18).
How to Hype Your Team

You want both your team members and the rest of the organization to treat the group as an elite, respected unit with an important mission. To determine whether you’ve maximized the group’s perceived exclusivity, take the following multiple-choice test:

1. To enlist team members, you:
   A. Personally contact employees via written invitation or phone call and ask them to join the team.
   B. Post a sign-up sheet for anyone to join the team.
   C. Ask a few supervisors to “round up” some people for the team.
   D. Delegate the team selection to your assistant.

2. To persuade individuals to join the team, you:
   A. Emphasize the importance of the project to the organization.
   B. Explain that their contributions can help them learn and grow on the job.
   C. Ask the CEO or company president to discuss why this team matters.
   D. Let employees convince themselves by holding a meeting where they can get to know one another.

3. To show that the team’s work is a top priority, you tell them:
   A. How much their work will affect the bottom line.
   B. There’s never been “quite another team here that’s this strong, with such an important job ahead.”
   C. To treat the team as their No. 1 duty and to delegate other parts of their jobs to co-workers.
   D. You’ve already arranged for them to be relieved of some of their routine, daily tasks.

4. You inform the rest of the organization about the team’s existence by:
   A. Mentioning it in passing at staff meetings.
   B. Sending an e-mail that lists the team’s formation among other developments in your unit.
   C. Sending a memo to key managers and staff that discusses the team’s mission, lists its members and ends with a “please cooperate with the team” request.
   D. Waiting until others ask you about it.

5. You arrange for the team’s first meeting to take place in:
   A. A standard conference room.
   B. The company cafeteria or some other open area that’s not in use.
   C. Your office or a team leader’s office.
   D. A reserved room in a nearby restaurant, library or other off-site location.
Answers:

1. **A.** Create an air of exclusivity from the start by personally contacting individuals to join the team. The benefits are twofold: You show that you treat their inclusion on the team as a matter important enough to justify your call or letter, and you make them feel “preselected” for the unique strengths they can bring to the group.

   **B** and **D** aren’t necessarily bad answers: If employees sign up on their own or hear from your assistant, they may still want to contribute to the team’s success—but they won’t view it as much of an honor. In terms of **C**, knowing that their supervisor suggested them for the team can help them feel special, but if you’re going to go to that much trouble, you might as well contact them on your own.

2. **C.** There’s no better way to inject a dose of exclusivity than to have your CEO or president attend a closed-door meeting to discuss the team’s importance. Fence-sitters will almost surely decide to join up if they see that the corporate bigwigs care about the group’s work.

   **A** and **B** are decent, effective approaches, but neither carries the weight of bringing in the head honcho to do the selling for you. Plus, there’s a risk that your assurance of the team’s importance or your promise that teammates will learn and grow can sound predictable. Jaded individuals may dismiss such entreaties, figuring they’ve “heard that all before.” **D** is also risky: While taking a hands-off approach can pay off, you may find that the chosen employees don’t particularly like one another or don’t want to band together for a common purpose.

3. **D.** Taking proactive steps to alleviate team members’ workloads can signal how much you want them to view their inclusion on the team as a prestigious invitation, not an additional chore. They’ll certainly appreciate that it’s a top priority if you give them the gift of time to concentrate on team duties.

   While **C** is similar, it’s not as effective because you put the monkey on their shoulders: They still need to delegate and possibly face conflicts with their coworkers, who may be unwilling to help out. **A** and **B** may be true sentiments, but they’ll probably ring hollow. Most employees simply ignore hyperbole about how they’re “the strongest team ever” or how their work will “affect the bottom line.”

4. **C.** Unless you’re assembling a top-secret team, you should enhance the group’s stature by preparing a memo describing its goals and listing each member. Send your memo to division heads and key staffers throughout the organization.

   **B** works almost as well, but an e-mail doesn’t attract attention the way a printed memo does. Plus, if you list a series of items in an e-mail—burying news about the team in the body of the message—readers may not pay much attention, and team members won’t feel as special. **A** and **D** are reactive: Waiting for staff meetings or for people to ask you about the team is an ineffectual way to build up the group’s exclusivity.

5. **D.** Holding a team meeting off-site can enliven the proceedings. The group will work together more effectively if they see that management takes the initiative to make team gatherings unique or memorable.

   **A, B** and **C** won’t help enhance the exclusivity you want to foster for the team.
Make Teamwork an Ego Booster

You want each person joining the team to think, “This shows I’m on the fast track here” or “It’s great to know my bosses think so highly of me.” But that’s not enough.

To really arouse their egos and sell them on team involvement, you need to direct their attention to a compelling challenge. That way, they will fancy themselves as fighters up against a formidable foe. Rather than just joining a team, you can help them see the group’s mission as a crusade—a test of fortitude that lends meaning to their jobs and gives them a larger sense of purpose.

Remind them of the words of Michael Jordan, who integrated his individual talents into a successful basketball team. In 1991, when asked to reflect on his experiences as a record-breaking, attention-grabbing showman, he said: “It’s hard to celebrate individual accolades with the team. It’s a lot better when you do it as a team, when you win things as a team, when you become champions as a team. Then everyone can feel some of the excitement that you feel.”

When faced with a tough adversary or a life-or-death challenge, even the most pompous or arrogant team members will seek ego gratification not in individual glory but in mobilizing the collective will of the unit. In short, by setting the team’s sights on a paramount challenge, you’ll lead all of them to toss aside their own selfish desires to pursue a victory that’s larger than themselves.

In the following section we discuss some ways to introduce the kind of challenge that will redirect their egos away from narrow self-gain in favor of a greater good.

Raise the bar

Tell the team that it needs to attain stretch goals because of time-sensitive factors, political pressures or other serious developments in your organization. Explain that if they work together and give 100 percent, they will have a “one-time chance” to accomplish something exceptional, which can change their careers and usher in all kinds of new opportunities.

For example, if the company is about to embark on a major reorganization, let team members know that their work in spearheading a smooth transition will affect the lives of hundreds of employees for years to come.

Identify a rival

Teams come together easily when they’re up against a ruthless competitor. By identifying a hostile force that threatens to block their progress, you can convince teammates to put aside their internal, petty squabbles and direct their energy to vanquish the opposition.

Open new doors

Lead a team to go where no one has gone before. Give them the freedom to experiment with new technologies or explore options that were previously off-limits. When they test the boundaries of what’s possible—such as finding new applications for breakthrough software programs or discovering a new product that’s ready to market—the excitement level can serve as the glue that bonds them together.
As a rule, individual egos will flare if you fail to present the group with a compelling challenge. Unless they see themselves as battling under unusually demanding or exciting circumstances, they may lapse into bad habits. Prima donnas may seek special privileges, such as requesting to miss certain meetings or curtailing their obligations to the group, while others take on more work. Or senior teammates may use their seniority or loftier job titles to boss around others.

Sell team members on their mission by defining their “cause.” Make it so powerful that they cannot help but work as a seamless unit. Reinforce the magnitude of their crusade. Then they’ll focus on what counts the most.
Kate presided over the team’s first few meetings with an outward show of poise and confidence. But inside, she was a wreck.

The group seemed lifeless and motionless. They seemed to talk at each other without trying to understand what anyone else was saying. Kate would cut in to assert her authority and insist that everyone “focus,” but that only seemed to make things worse.

Kate realized she needed to take a different tack to salvage the team and redirect it toward success.

A Team’s First Month

Once you’ve selected a team and paved the way for its success, it’s “show time.” You convene the first meeting with high hopes and clear objectives. But as soon as the participants start interacting, you know that the group will take on a life all its own.

Even though you can’t force people to work as a team, you can make it easy for them to like and trust each other when they first meet. Ideally, they should feel a sense of camaraderie right from the start, which will make them willing to share their expertise and learn from each other.

If the first meeting goes well, the team will gather momentum. Individuals can let down their guard and speak their minds without fear of judgment. They can exchange bold proposals and give honest, tactful feedback. If a loudmouth tries to sow seeds of divisiveness, others can exert peer pressure to nip the problem in the bud.

That’s why the first month of a team’s existence is so important. Early rapport among teammates can lead to more substantive dialogue down the line. Strangers soon become friends—or at least colleagues who exhibit mutual respect. Your leadership should bring a team closer to understanding its purpose.

Build Unity From Day 1

The big day is here. As the team members file into the conference room for their first meeting, you greet them enthusiastically while trying to hide your nervousness. Soon everyone’s seated, and all eyes turn to you. What do you say?

Welcome the group. Explain its mission in clear, concrete terms. Resist the urge to lecture. Establish sustained eye contact with each individual.

To ensure that you make a great first impression, take the quiz shown in Exercise 5 (page 24). The quiz shows you what to say and how to say it so that you bring people together.
Secrets of Fast-Start Teams

You want to motivate your new team from the outset. But if you go overboard, you may lose credibility and appear canned or phony. Playing a fist-pumping cheerleader may leave your audience skeptical. Before your first team meeting, take this multiple-choice test to determine if you’re ready to lead them the right way.

1. I intend to get the team to trust each other by:
   A. Giving a stirring speech on the importance of trust.
   B. Warning of the dangers of mistrust among a team; telling lots of cautionary tales of what can go wrong.
   C. Explaining that I want teammates to trust each other and remain open to working together.
   D. Staging a “trust fall” in which a volunteer plunges helplessly into the arms of everyone else.

2. I want to make each person feel special, as though part of an elite team. I’ll do that by:
   A. Lavishing praise on everyone with phrases such as “You’re the cream of the crop” and “I chose you because you’re winners.”
   B. Going around the room and giving each team member an endearing nickname.
   C. Comparing this team to past teams I’ve managed and declaring, “You’re by far the best.”
   D. Sharing the specific criteria I’ve used to select the team.

3. I want to send a message that everyone’s equal on this team. I’ll do that by:
   A. Announcing a series of incentives that will be awarded to each member based solely on team results.
   B. Insisting that when an individual speaks, everyone else must listen at all times.
   C. Requiring that a different team spokesperson represent the group each month when updating management.
   D. Arranging the seats at the first meeting in a circle so that no one’s “at the head of the class.”

4. I want the team to realize this isn’t business as usual—that their work can really affect the bottom line. I’ll do that by:
   A. Reading a memo from the company president on the team’s vital mission.
   B. Sharing the latest quarterly and year-over-year budgetary numbers, and tying the team’s role to improving those numbers in the future.
   C. Declaring that the company is at a crossroads, and the team will set its direction for the next few years.
   D. Giving examples of past teams that have made a positive impact on the firm’s bottom-line performance.

5. To establish a few ground rules for team interaction, I will:
   A. Distribute a list of do’s and don’ts.
   B. Write three of the most important rules on a flip chart during the first meeting and refer to them often.
   C. Ask the team, “What rules should we set up to govern how you interact with each other?”
   D. Announce the rules in the first few minutes to lay the groundwork for everything that follows.
Exercise 5

Answers:

1. C. Simply and briefly explaining the need for trust and openness is enough—for now. Carry on too much and you may overdo it.
   A is unnecessary at this early juncture; there will be times for stirring speeches later. Plus, if you give a long-winded speech with the “just trust each other” theme, it may sound eloquent but will leave little lasting impact. Trust is built from feelings; you can’t tell your audience how to feel. B is too negative and sets the wrong tone. D might work if you’re training an Outward Bound hiking group, but in most corporate settings such theatrical touches tend to fall flat.

2. D. By letting people know how they qualified to join the team, they can conclude for themselves that they’re special. For example, share the objective measurements you applied in selecting them (“I considered only individuals with superior performance reviews over the last three years, a history of launching bold initiatives and at least one proven area of technical expertise.”).
   A will ring too hollow. If you speak in superlatives, most listeners will know you’re just spouting generalities. B risks alienating team members while making you appear childish. Like A, C is somewhat meaningless: Suggesting that this team is “the best” is probably not true, and everyone will know that.

3. A. To enforce equality, dangle a carrot. Explain that individuals will win or lose as a unit—not at the expense of each other.
   B is harmless blather. Team members have heard it all before, and you won’t gain compliance just because you preach it. C is an artificial attempt to impose equality on the team. Just because they rotate spokespersons doesn’t mean that one or two dominant personalities won’t try to hog all the credit. D can’t hurt, but it won’t necessarily help. Classroom-style seating can work just as well; you can still make everyone feel equal while subtly reinforcing your authority as the manager in charge.

4. B. Use “open-book management” to drill home the importance of the team’s potential contribution. Your audience is less apt to turn away from hard numbers than soft appeals.
   Unless your company is run by a charismatic, beloved charmer, A won’t matter much. C may motivate a few old-timers—the historians on your team—but no one else. D may lead individuals to think, “That’s nice, but what do past teams have to do with my being on this one?”

5. C. Whenever you want employees to comply with rules, give them a say. By throwing the floor open to their input, you can draft rules that they deem important—and that raise the odds they’ll pay attention to them.
   A won’t work because team members may disregard a handout or treat its contents lightly. B will have only a limited effect; while you’ll drill home the rules by posting them in plain sight and referring to them repeatedly, they may fade from everyone’s memory in the weeks after the initial meeting. D is the worst choice: You don’t want to devote the opening minutes of the first meeting to telling them what they can and cannot do.
To encourage more teamwork, make it easy for participants to collaborate. Help them feel comfortable speaking their mind and lending a hand. Stoke their desire to lift the group to a higher level; this can prove contagious and make everyone care more about the team’s success. The team’s enthusiasm plays an especially big role in the early going. 

Realize that new teams don’t gel instantly. Expect some rockiness at the outset. In a study by the National Transportation Safety Board, 73 percent of airline accidents and reportable incidents occurred on a new crew’s first day of working together. Of those accidents, 44 percent occurred on the first leg of that first day.

As team members grow more familiar with each other, they rely on mutual trust more readily and reduce the odds of miscommunication.

**Lead the Team to Early Victories**

A team’s first few meetings can serve either to build momentum or squander it. It all depends on how you orchestrate the interaction.

Momentum is built on faith. Teammates who believe they can achieve something special and who respect and admire their colleagues are more apt to produce exceptional results. If they see that they’re off to a fast start, this will reinforce their faith in themselves to overcome obstacles and try even harder.

How can you contribute to this momentum? Lead the team to pursue short- and long-term goals. Give the group a chance to score an escalating string of victories, from solving relatively simple problems to grappling with larger issues that historically afflict the organization. By framing each challenge as an opportunity to “win” or “achieve” something, you motivate teammates to think like athletes engaged in an exciting contest.

Here are some practical ways to establish momentum:

- **Give “quickie assignments.”** Although you shouldn’t run the team’s first meeting, don’t sit out entirely. Keep a low profile so you allow the team to bond on its own. Before time runs out, however, give the group some homework. Ask them to complete a short assignment before their next meeting.

  Examples: calling three customers and conducting a short phone survey or writing a 100-word personal mission statement describing their role on the team.

  At the second meeting, praise their efforts. Draw conclusions from their completed assignments, such as “Your findings help us lay the foundation for what’s ahead” or “Thanks to your early progress, we’re off to a good start.”

- **Create positive buzz.** In Hollywood, movie studios try to build excitement for their new releases by planting lots of anticipatory “buzz” so that movers and shakers will talk up a new picture as a sure-fire hit. You can borrow the same marketing technique for your team. Plan to unveil bits of good news during the first few weeks of the team’s existence.

  Examples: “We got budget approval for more resources,” “The CEO wants to meet with you,” “We’ve got permission to use the executive conference room from now on.”

  Get in the habit of sharing at least one exciting news tidbit every time you meet with the team. It can be as simple as a promising development in your organization or a comment you heard from a senior officer about the team’s potential to make a difference.
■ Identify a beaten foe. Teams gel and gain momentum more easily if they see themselves as fighting a formidable rival. If you can cast a competitor as the team’s foe—and show how the group possesses the brains to outshine its opponent—you’ll inject a dose of energy into the mix. Team members may feel more accountable for their actions and strive to score some early victories against the “enemy.”

Example: When a product development team at Komatsu Utility Corp. was formed, the team leader’s rallying cry from Day 1 was “Encircle Caterpillar”—the firm’s No. 1 rival in the construction equipment market.

Emphasize Listening Over Talking

Imagine a team that bickers a half-hour into its first gathering. Individuals interrupt, contradict and eventually start raising their voices. With this kind of start, you figure things can only get worse. And you’re right.

To launch a team in the right direction, you need to get every participant, right from the start, to buy into this motto: Listen before you speak. If everyone abides by this basic principle of communication, the group will likely get off to a fast start. You may even want to post one of Stephen Covey’s favorite maxims on the wall whenever the team meets: Seek first to understand, then to be understood.

To assess your team’s listening skills, ask them to do Exercise 6 (page 28).

Make Everyone Feel Included

In a team’s first month, you want to ensure that everyone participates in the group’s activities. Individuals should freely interact, respect one another’s differences and debate ideas with openness. Inevitably, there will be interpersonal conflicts, but the team should address those issues head-on and respond positively to healthy disagreements.

If just one member feels excluded, though, a team can start to falter. An individual who is ignored or overlooked may begin to shut down—and you might lose the benefit of this person’s contributions.

At the same time, other team members will start to think it’s OK to disregard or even ostracize certain folks who are perhaps just quiet, eccentric or standoffish by nature. That sends a destructive message: If you don’t fit in, we’ll cast you aside.

Look for signs that teammates are banding together to exclude someone. Some obvious indicators: withholding information from a team member or not recognizing him during a meeting, thus squeezing him out of the proceedings. But there are often more subtle clues of exclusion, such as:

• Leaving an individual seated alone in the back of the room while everyone else grabs a seat around the conference table.

• Going around the room to get each team member’s input but skipping a certain individual.

• “Forgetting” to include the person on breakout groups or subcommittees.

• Taking lunch or breaks without inviting the person to join the group.

(Continued on page 29)
Exercise 6

Grade Their Listening Skills

Ask each team member to complete the following confidential exercise. Explain that there are no right or wrong answers, and they will not be graded on it. Its purpose is to raise awareness of each individual’s communication style and isolate areas that need improvement.

After reading each opening phrase, choose the answer that most accurately captures how you would act most of the time:

If I’m in a meeting and eager to make a point, I will:
A. Jump in at the earliest opportunity.
B. Wait for a natural lull in the conversation and then speak up.
C. Whisper my point to a more assertive co-worker, who will raise the issue.
D. Write it down and put it in a memo later.

If a teammate explains something and I can’t hear clearly, I will:
A. Think to myself, “Oh, well, I can’t hear what’s being said. I guess I’ll tune out.”
B. Prod the speaker by gently interjecting, “Would you speak up, please?”
C. Pretend to listen by nodding and maintaining eye contact, even though I can’t really hear a word.
D. Wait for a pause and ask my neighbor, “Can you hear this?”

If a teammate says something that I find a bit offensive, I will:
A. Respond right away: “I don’t appreciate that comment!”
B. Continue to listen without letting the comment derail my concentration.
C. Keep quiet, but dream up different ways to express my disapproval.
D. Say to myself, “I’ll let this pass, but the next time I’ll speak up.”

If a speaker babbles aimlessly and wastes the team’s time, I will:
A. Use the time to daydream.
B. Restate the speaker’s main point and add, “Based on what you’ve said, let’s move on . . .”
C. Check in mentally every minute or so that I’m generally aware of the speaker’s point, while grumbling and shifting restlessly the rest of the time.
D. Start jotting reminders on my to-do list—or simply doodle on a note pad.

If a colleague criticizes me somewhat harshly in a team meeting, I will:
A. Defend myself instantly and justify my actions.
B. Allow the speaker to finish, and then ask a follow-up question, such as: “Can you give me an example?” or “When did you first notice this?”
C. Stew in resentment but not say a word, figuring I’ll get back at this person later.
D. Try to listen while thinking of a criticism I can make against the speaker to even the score.
If you answered A to any of these statements, consider this a red flag: Your listening skills need to take a higher priority. In your rush to speak, you may miss what others say or overlook subtle nuances—nonverbal cues such as shrugs or embarrassed smiles—that can help you understand their message more accurately.

If you answered B to any of the above, you’re a patient, attentive listener. You possess the discipline to hold off speaking your mind until the timing’s right and your remarks will do the most good.

Any C responses? If so, they show that while you may be attempting to listen, you’re not giving it 100 percent. In fact, you may face a separate skills challenge: lack of confidence in your ability to communicate. If you’re hampered by self-doubt or prefer not to make waves, you may be unwilling to make your voice heard.

Finally, D answers indicate that you like to keep busy, mentally and physically. That’s not necessarily bad, but it doesn’t make you a rapt listener. For example, trying to listen while thinking of what you want to say later will prevent you from retaining the full message. And jotting notes may help you remember a speaker’s key points, but don’t go overboard; you may get too wrapped up in your writing and sever any eye contact or other connection with the speaker.

(Continued from page 27)

• Failing to refer to an individual by name but doing so for everyone else.

• Refusing to follow up on his ideas, while everyone else’s get serious attention.

• Saving a few moments at the end of a meeting for the person to speak, when others are gathering their belongings and preparing to leave.

Cures for exclusion

If you notice any of the above warning signs, take this three-step approach:

1. **Give team pep talks** emphasizing the need to listen impartially to every team member. Tell participants to judge the substance of a message, not the messenger. Explain that the team’s success hinges on its ability to develop into a cohesive unit, wherein everyone plays an important role.

2. **Meet privately with the individual** you think is being excluded. Ask questions to determine if the person bears some fault. Is she refusing to help the team? Is she unwilling to make the same sacrifices that others must make for the good of the team? Has she behaved inappropriately or intentionally hurt or alienated others? Based on the answers, you can evaluate to what extent the team’s behavior is justified. Assuming that it’s not, proceed to the third step.

3. **Ask a team leader to befriend** this individual. If visible, influential members of the team go out of their way to enlist this person’s help, heed her advice and invite her to lunch and other outside events, others may reconsider their cold-shoulder treatment.
**Warning:** Don’t assume that if you pay extra attention to the excluded person, you’ll solve the problem. Modeling the behavior you want from others can’t hurt, but it won’t necessarily produce the desired change. In fact, if you try too hard to include the individual in the team’s activities, you might make that person feel self-conscious. And since you can’t be around all the time, the situation can worsen the minute you leave the room.

It’s smarter to hold everyone accountable for welcoming all their teammates. Praise members who look beyond the messenger to assess a message on its own merits. Recognize team leaders who make sure everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute.

Discipline employees who brush aside “outsiders” on the team (in most cases an oral warning should be sufficient). When groups start excluding one member, they often wind up excluding more and more. That’s why you must put a stop to this practice sooner, not later.

Teams accomplish more when everyone feels welcome. Members treat each other with respect and listen with an open mind. They may not always agree, but at least they’re willing to share ideas in a supportive, inclusive environment.
At first, Brad loved running team meetings. The air seemed charged with excitement as he encouraged the group to share ideas, stage experiments and challenge each other to excel.

But after two months of heady progress, Brad noticed that participants were slacking off. They were arriving late to meetings, leaving early and not contributing as much. He tried to fire them up, but his entreaties no longer seemed to work. His team seemed drained of energy and on the verge of falling apart.

Raise the Bar on Team Expectations

A few months have passed since the team’s inception. You’ve noticed that while the group appears to be making headway, complacency has set in. Teammates don’t push themselves or one another. They’re progressing at a slower pace than you’d like, and they don’t seem to grasp the importance or urgency of their mission.

Sound familiar?

Most teams eventually settle into a comfortable routine. When team members cut each other lots of slack for missing deadlines, complain about their ever-mounting workload and joke about all the organizational changes they’ve “survived,” that indicates they’re giving themselves excuses to fail.

You may figure it’s just a temporary phase. A seasonal surge in business or a pending reorganization within your company can lead you to conclude that the team will meet its potential when disruptions subside. But that view tends to perpetuate itself, as new obstacles always seem to prevent the team from thriving.

To maximize the benefit of teams, you must expect excellence and continually raise the bar on their performance. If you allow teams to convince themselves that a 75 percent effort will suffice, they will get soft around the edges and produce mediocre results.

Refuel a Sputtering Team

To determine whether your team needs to push itself harder, look for solid evidence. What has it accomplished so far?

Here’s a good exercise to measure your team’s progress to date: At its next meeting, ask each team member to list “what you see as the team’s top five achievements so far.” Give them no more than five minutes to write down their responses, and then collect
them. Explain that they need not include their names; you’re not grading their answers as much as using them as a learning tool.

Share the results with the group. Rank the “consensus achievements,” the ones that appear in the most responses. Write these items on a flip chart. Then ask the group whether they’re satisfied with their work thus far. Encourage them to discuss the significance of their achievements. Prod them to explore whether they’re capable of making a more substantive, lasting contribution to the bottom line.

Another way to tell whether you’re managing a sputtering team is to sit in on a few meetings and observe the group’s interaction. Then, for each meeting, complete the survey shown in Exercise 7 (below).

---

**Take a Team Diagnostic Exam**

**Does your team need a push? Sit in on a few of its meetings, then complete this exercise.**

Read each statement and answer Yes or No:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The team leader distributed an agenda or action items before the meeting.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the team members show up for the meeting.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team meetings begin promptly at the scheduled time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the team members complete their assignments (present research, provide facts and so forth).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone participates in the meeting.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The team reviews goals from its last meeting, and members give progress reports.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team members take notes, especially when they promise to do a special assignment.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team members take responsibility for their work rather than giving excuses.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team members linger after the formal meeting ends, discussing issues with enthusiasm.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you checked **Yes** for all nine statements, odds are your team is in fine shape. But each **No** answer raises a red flag. If you notice the number of **No** responses increasing from meeting to meeting, you need to intervene and take steps to lift the collective spirit and performance level of the group.
To refuel a sputtering team, redirect the group’s focus away from easy, safe tasks to more ambitious stretch goals. Motivate them to “think big” by dangling fresh, meaningful rewards for stellar effort. Offer to give each team member a choice of three prizes if the group attains specific, measurable objectives.

Example: Three months after you formed a team to study high employee turnover, the group hasn’t come up with any useful research or solid recommendations. It started out strong but has since sputtered. You present the group with this challenge: “If you were the head of human resources, what steps would you take to reduce turnover?” Tell them they have two weeks to devise a practical, doable, cost-effective answer. Promise to give team members a paid day off, a gift certificate to the local mall or a chance to spend a day shadowing a senior executive of their choice—as long as they come up with an action plan that cuts turnover by 10 percent over the next six months.

Another way to awaken a lethargic team is to instruct them to draft a list of the group’s top five goals for the upcoming month or quarter. This can serve as a road map directing their efforts, and it lets you track their progress.

Here’s how one cross-departmental team devoted to human resources issues defined its top five goals:

1. **Recommend ways** to rewrite the company’s employee handbook.
2. **Launch an outreach campaign** to recruit support-level personnel.
3. **Sharpen the focus** of the company’s orientation program for new hires.
4. **Solicit feedback** from representatives of different departments on employee recruiting and retention.
5. **Analyze the speed** with which job openings were filled.

Lead the team to revisit this list every quarter, updating it as goals are reached and other priorities develop. Don’t tell them (or hint) which goals they should set; instead, give the team a general direction and let them grapple with how to get there.

### Use Conflict to Arouse Passion

If you manage a low-performing team, it may have nothing to do with the drive and talent of the participants. They all may want to succeed and give 100 percent, but the results can still disappoint.

When new managers assemble teams for the first time, they often assume that too much dissension within a group may rip it apart. They might plead with the members to “be courteous to each other” or “don’t argue.” They figure that if everyone smiles and plays nice, great results will follow.

In fact, underachieving teams tend to avoid making tough decisions. They may “go along to get along,” nodding politely and seconding everyone else’s opinion without exercising much independent thought. The group adopts a “make no waves” mentality, whereby disagreements are brushed aside and harmony rules.

To light a fire under your team, banish any signs of excessive conflict-avoidance. Open the floodgates so that individuals may speak freely and clash openly. Firm but civil disagreements indicate a vibrant, ambitious team, not a disaster in the making.
As you observe the team’s interaction, use Exercise 8 (below) to evaluate its tolerance for conflict.

### Measure a Team’s Energy Level

*Does your team tend to avoid conflict, thus producing mediocre results? Use this exercise to assess your team’s tolerance for conflict.*

Answer each question below with Always, Sometimes or Never:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When someone makes a rosy prediction, does a teammate inject a dose of reality?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before a team makes a decision, do skeptics or naysayers speak up?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When two teammates disagree, does this seem to energize the room?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When someone makes a bold comment, do at least some listeners shake their heads?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do team members express their views passionately with emphatic gestures?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do arguing teammates substantiate their views with solid evidence?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the team leader prompt people who may disagree to speak up?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there time at the end of meetings for participants to raise objections?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The more **Always** boxes you checked off, the more likely your team cares about its mission and clashes freely to reach more effective decisions.

If you chose a mix of **Always** and **Sometimes**, that also indicates at least some capacity for healthy conflict among the team.

But if your answers are mostly **Never**, the best way to boost your team’s results is by prodding participants to take more forceful stands and be willing to fight for acceptance of their views.
Keep in mind, too, that you may be contributing to a sputtering team’s decline. You may be withholding information they need or overdirecting them—to the point where they’re scared to think independently or voice objections. Or, if they conclude you frown on conflict and seek blind obedience, they’ll roll over rather than take risks. They’ll see the team’s role as rubber-stamping rather than working toward consensus.

Unlock the Team’s Potential

When a team drifts into complacency, all eyes should turn to their leader. As the manager in charge, you bear ultimate responsibility for the team’s performance. That’s why you should continually check in with the group and monitor its progress. Don’t assume that you can just round up a dozen or so competent employees, reserve a conference room every week or two and expect them to show up and produce miracles.

Even if you pick a dynamic team leader, that won’t guarantee success. You must also know when to leave the team on its own and when to intervene for its own good.

Here’s a quick test: When you sit in on a team meeting, do you quietly plant yourself in the back of the room? Or is your presence felt by everyone? A manager who interrupts frequently, volunteers opinions and sends strong hints of what the team “should” do or think can sap a group of its initiative.

Beware of these other overzealous ways to manage a team:

- **Dishing out directives.** If you tell a team what to do, how to do it and when, you’ll turn them into mindless drones. Instead, set broad goals or establish a vision for the future. Let the team develop an action plan to get there.

- **Delegating “dummy jobs.”** A manager who assigns busywork to a team but leaves the challenging or meaningful research to higher-ups almost ensures the group’s demise. Team members may comply, to a point, before bowing out or rebelling. In either case, the team won’t deliver top results or push itself to exceed management’s expectations. You need to show trust in your team to lift its performance.

- **Rushing to correct errors.** If you spotted an employee handling equipment in an unsafe manner, it would be your job to step in and say, “Here’s a better way to do that.” But when managing a team, you don’t want to get too involved in telling them the “right” or “wrong” way to operate. The danger is you might condition them to think and act like you, rather than bringing their own unique strengths, attitudes and ideas to the table.

To lead a team to reach its full potential, give it space. Keep your door open and invite team members to drop by, but don’t suffocate their attempts to forge their own group identity.

Fight Off Complacency

Soon after a team forms, the excitement often peaks. Teammates dream of big accomplishments and set grandiose goals. Individuals promise to collaborate and congratulate each other’s inclusion on the team.
But when the initial enthusiasm dies down, the spirited atmosphere fades and a more solemn routine emerges. Senior executives who attended the first few team meetings no longer show up. New developments (or crises!) within the organization redirect management’s focus away from the group’s activities. Some team members start slacking off or immersing themselves in other projects, leaving less time to devote to the group.

If this pattern unfolds at your workplace, step in and breathe new life into your team. Here’s how:

■ **Inject new blood.** Invite a few high-energy types to join the team. Don’t put them in charge or they’ll threaten the team leader and informal hierarchy that’s already formed. Instead, just ask them to lend their talents and revitalize the group.

■ **Tape the team.** When a lethargic public speaker needs to liven up, a smart speech coach will videotape the individual’s presentation and play it back. By raising the speaker’s self-awareness, the tape serves as a training tool. The same goes when you want to jolt a team to rise to a higher level. Lecturing a team to improve might fall upon deaf ears, but a videotape of their meetings can show them just how listless they’ve become.

■ **Turn your team into trainers.** Form a new team, and ask your current group to serve as an “advisory board” to it. Arrange for the veterans to coach the rookies. Encourage them to share their experiences about teamwork and isolate the kind of behaviors that facilitate more effective collaboration. You may want to create a buddy system, whereby each seasoned team member mentors someone in the new group.

■ **Strip away routine.** Study how a tired team got that way. Disrupt predictable patterns by having the group meet in new places (a nearby park, a client’s facility, your home) and work together in new ways. Instead of having them break into the same small cliques, for instance, juggle the mix so that team members who normally don’t work closely together will get a chance to know each other better. Or, instead of having them sit in the same places, rearrange the seating configuration so that everyone’s in a circle.

■ **Host an outing.** Invite the team to join you on a weekend hike or family picnic. Schedule fun activities so that participants get to know each other with their guard down. Even if you already tried this early on, do it again now that the team has aged a bit. When the group returns to work, they’ll have a newfound camaraderie, which will translate into more trust and teamwork.

If all else fails, you can always hire a team-building consultant. But treat that option as a last resort. This booming niche has expanded to include former HR managers, ex-executives, longtime academics and trainers who’ve found a new market to pursue. Most of them provide a useful service. But in most cases, you’ll get a limited bang for your buck. That’s because the initial benefit of training tends to fade over time. Teamwork might temporarily improve, but the group may soon lapse into its bad habits again.

**Tip:** Before hiring a team-building consultant, contact at least three clients who used the consultant’s services at least six months ago. Ask if they have experienced any long-term gains as a result of the consultant’s work. This way, you can measure to what extent the training will pay lasting dividends.
Breed a Can-Do Team Spirit

Raise the bar for a sputtering team by ensuring that it remains vibrant, driven and open to debate. You want participants to experiment with different ideas and check their assumptions the way scientists test various hypotheses. Their motivation should flow primarily from their goal-oriented stampede to uncover key facts and make breakthrough recommendations.

To gauge their progress, learn to spot subtle changes in their behavior. If a critical thinker who often plays devil’s advocate seems reluctant to raise objections, that’s a bad sign. The same is true if a conciliator who usually brings dueling teammates together begins to withdraw from the action.

Here are some other hints of trouble:

- An open, responsive and relentlessly curious team member turns dogmatic and self-righteous.
- A decisive, take-charge person acts more hesitant and seems reluctant to volunteer or accept more responsibility in any way.
- The team leader gives guarded or political answers rather than providing information to the group promptly and forthrightly.

Creative ways to rally the team

When you notice the team’s drive starting to fizzle, take action. Level with the group about your concern. Rather than give rah-rah speeches or plead with them to “go back to Day 1″ and adopt the same attitudes again, take more creative steps to recharge their batteries. For example:

- **Define the urgency.** Update the team on new developments that make their mission that much more vital to the organization’s interests. Set more ambitious goals for the group based on a competitive threat, a change in upper management’s priorities or the scheduled installation of technology throughout your company. When individuals realize they’re suddenly under the gun, they may strengthen their commitment to the team’s success and break out of their funk.

- **Bring in a VIP.** If you and your team leader have tried to motivate the team to no avail, arrange for your CEO, a high-profile customer or a guest speaker to rally the team. Having your firm’s president stare team members in the eye and say, “We need you to come through,” can leave a lasting impact. Regardless of the speaker, the message should emphasize the need for teammates to resist taking the easy way out and instead push themselves to produce outstanding results.

- **Enlist dynamos.** To pump more energy into the group, recognize individuals who are going beyond the call of duty to excel. Enlist your most driven, resourceful and supportive team members as allies by instructing them to “clone” themselves.

  “Even though my 10-person customer service team was losing its focus after a few months, I knew there were two or three dynamos who didn’t want to be part of a sinking ship,” said a vice president of marketing at a financial services firm. “So I met
privately with them and asked, ‘What can any of us do to get this team back on track?’

The ideas came fast and furious: There were proposals to replace a certain negative
team member; distribute more precise, measurable monthly goals to the team; and edu-
cate the group on how important its work was to the company’s bottom line.

When managing a group that’s losing its edge, capitalize on those stars on the team
who remain as driven as ever. Solicit their ideas and follow up with them. Give them
the opportunity to implement steps that they think will re-ignite their teammates. Just
as complacency and negativity are contagious, so is the enthusiasm that comes from
charismatic, well-liked peers who accept nothing less than 100 percent effort.
After a few months as a new manager, Ron decided to assemble a team to explore new procedures for quality control. He chose talented, driven employees who wanted to contribute. He communicated frequently with the group to inform them of corporate developments.

Whenever Ron ran into a team member, he’d ask how the group was doing. He always heard enthusiastic answers: “Great,” “We’re really coming up with some good ideas,” “I’m pleased with our progress.” Everything seemed rosy.

There was just one problem. The team didn’t accomplish anything.

Hold the Team Accountable for Results

Many well-intentioned managers form a team with high hopes. They assume that with a bunch of knowledgeable, motivated members, the group will make concrete suggestions in a timely manner. But it doesn’t always work out that way.

Ron’s experience above may sound familiar: All the happy talk and boisterous meetings didn’t translate into any tangible results. Ron’s group kept revising its recommendations. Despite the fact that its meetings ran long and participants returned to their desks much later than planned, their time was mostly wasted on process-oriented matters: how much time they should devote to certain agenda items, how many subcommittees were necessary, who would run each subcommittee and so on.

To manage a team successfully, you must hold it accountable for measurable results, such as:

• Designing and implementing an action plan to solve an organizational problem.
• Weighing a range of given options and choosing the best one.
• Collecting and analyzing data and then drawing a list of conclusions or recommendations from the data.
• Reviewing a specific area of the organization, such as customer service delivery or personnel administration, and evaluating what works and what needs improvement.
• Interviewing and recommending vendors to supply a certain product or service.

In all these cases, the team should produce results within a certain time frame. Each participant must understand the group’s objectives and work toward achieving them in
the most efficient way. If there’s any ambiguity about the team’s mission, it’s your job to clarify what they need to do. They can figure out how to proceed, but you must ensure they understand the big picture.

Create a Team Scorecard

The best way to foster teamwork is to let individuals forge their own bonds. The more you allow the group to work independently, the better. But there’s one big exception: You should not let a team decide how to hold itself accountable. They’re not in the best position to identify the best yardstick to use to measure their success. That’s your job as manager.

To track a team’s performance, try to qualify and quantify what the group needs to accomplish. Reduce generalities to specifics. Ask yourself, “How will I decide if this team deserves an A, a B or some lower grade? What criteria will I use to evaluate its work product?” The worksheet in Exercise 9 (page 41) will help you decide your criteria.

After you decide how you’ll hold a team accountable, explain your criteria to the group. Invite questions and comments, and show a willingness to modify your approach based on the feedback they provide.

For example, if your company tends to frown on bureaucracy, team members may decry any kind of written reports as needless busywork. Prepare to suggest other, less intrusive options for monitoring their progress, such as comparing survey results before and after the team implements certain reforms.

Agree to a yardstick for measuring team performance by compromising and demonstrating flexibility in finalizing how you will judge their work.

Give Feedback via Performance Appraisals

“You get what you measure.” That’s the mantra of top managers, from sales directors to CEOs who base the bonuses of their management team on bottom-line numbers, such as revenue growth, employee turnover rates or efficiency ratios. If the numbers are clear and easy to understand, everyone knows at any given point how a sales team or executive committee is performing. The hard numbers remove the guesswork and subjectivity from the equation.

When you oversee a team, a smart way to boost teamwork is to conduct regular performance appraisals of individuals’ contributions to the group. Shower your team members with critical but supportive feedback, and they’ll know exactly where they stand. Your feedback will help them harness their strengths and polish their weaknesses. By giving them the chance to sharpen their performance, you make everyone a more valuable, confident contributor.

Team performance reviews should not double as the standard performance appraisals you administer to all your employees on an annual or (hopefully) semiannual basis. The purpose of the classic performance review is not only to rate an employee on a variety of factors, but also to make salary adjustments, discuss career advancement opportunities and changing job duties.

By contrast, a team performance review focuses on guiding participants to work together more seamlessly. It’s not meant to replace the standard appraisal but to supplement it.
Track Performance Benchmarks

*Fill out this worksheet to determine how you’re going to hold your team accountable:*

1. **What are the team’s top three performance goals?**
   
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

2. **Are all the above performance goals measurable?**  ____ Yes  ____ No

   If **Yes**, go to Question 3.
   If **No**, how can you rework the goal(s) to ensure a fair, accurate measurement of the team’s progress? __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

3. **How will I know to what extent the team has attained each of the above goals?**
   (Check all that apply.)

   ____ The team will have a deadline for turning in reports that contain specific information, such as the percentage of on-time deliveries or the number of customer returns for a certain product.
   ____ The team will submit written, actionable steps the company can take to solve a specific problem.
   ____ The team will train or educate others (such as employees, suppliers or customers), who will adopt certain practices or follow specific procedures as a result.
   ____ I’ll ask employees who aren’t on the team or consultants to audit or assess the team’s work in reaching its performance goals, based on its preset benchmarks.
   ____ I’ll meet regularly with a team representative to see whether the team has met specific standards (such as producing work that meets or exceeds a checklist of quality criteria).

   ____ Other: ___________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

4. **How will I monitor the team’s effort in pursuing its goals?**

   ____ I’ll ask a team representative to write up “minutes” describing how the team spends its time in meetings.
   ____ I’ll sit in on parts of team meetings and rate the group in key areas, such as diligence, determination and resilience when facing setbacks.
   ____ I’ll ask each team member to send me a short memo on a regular basis summarizing his involvement and overall assessment of the group’s performance.
   ____ I’ll set up checkpoints every week, month or quarter when the team must complete short-term assignments.

   ____ Other: ___________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
Here are some other ways a team review differs from a typical performance appraisal:

- It’s given more frequently, say monthly or quarterly (depending on how often the team meets).
- It’s simpler. You don’t have to complete a long form with dozens of rating criteria.
- It’s more interactive. You’re more of a coach than a manager sitting in judgment.
- It’s less formal, in that the team member doesn’t expect the results to affect her pay or long-term career prospects in the same way as a more sweeping, “official” appraisal.

When introducing the appraisal concept to the team, emphasize that your intent is to provide input on their performance and learn about their experiences in the group. Explain that the reviews are designed to make individuals more aware of their performance—both strengths and weaknesses—and hold them accountable for their contributions.

**Go one-on-one**

To hold team performance reviews, schedule a private meeting with each team member. You may want to block out a half-day to arrange six 30-minute sessions; if the team has 12 people, two half-days should allow enough time to meet with everyone.

Open each meeting the same way. Rather than dive right in and comment on the individual’s performance to date, ask the team member, “What do you want to contribute to the team?”

Give the person ample time to respond. Listen carefully to the answer, and encourage him to elaborate by asking, “Would you like to add anything else?” or “Does that cover everything?”

The answer to this question will be revealing. The most ambitious, driven team members will provide substantive, thoughtful responses. They should have already explored how they can best contribute to the group by lending their expertise, providing vital information or simply collaborating effectively for the team’s greater good.

Follow up that first question with another one: “How have you been able to show that you can contribute in this way?” This guides them to think in terms of measuring their performance. You want to train them to devise concrete ways to demonstrate their value as team members. Examples might include serving as team spokesperson, training the group to analyze technical reports or use software programs, supplying them with updated financial exhibits and unclogging communication lines among participants.

Also, listen for complaints. Before giving your critique of the individual’s performance, hear about any obstacles she’s faced. This might include personal problems, such as a backlog of other, nonteam work, personality clashes with teammates or her sense of a lack of cohesion within the group.

By listening to the person first, you make it easier for her to absorb your feedback later. Why? Because when you listen, you increase mutual understanding. Employees will trust what you say if you show interest and are attentive to their feelings and observations.
Here are some other guidelines for conducting team performance reviews:

- **When giving input**, apply previously established, explicit goals that you and the team members have acknowledged are paramount to the group’s success. Don’t improvise or volunteer feedback in areas that employees didn’t know were relevant.

- **In expressing your feedback**, assess how well the individual tapped his skills or abilities toward attaining the team’s goals. You may want to list his top two or three strengths (with his input, of course), and then examine to what extent these strengths contributed to the team’s progress. A useful question: “Do you feel you worked at your full potential to help the team meet its goals?”

- **Whenever you praise or criticize**, come prepared. The employee will instantly demand examples or evidence to support your assertion. So come armed with such information, based on your own observations or other reliable information.

- **If you’re going to give negative feedback** or chastise a team member—and you know you’re treading on sensitive ground—write out a definition of the problem before the meeting. Then during the performance review, work with the individual to restate it so that you agree on what’s at stake and what specific behavior needs to improve. Take notes so that you commit to paper the revised, clarified issue. Use that mutually defined description of the problem as the basis for your criticism.

End every review by encouraging team members to write their own summary of their performance. Have them list what they’re doing well in one column, including examples of how they’ve gone beyond the call of duty to assist the team.

In another column, let them specify the areas where they need to improve. Don’t tell them exactly what to write; allow them to complete their own evaluation based on your discussion. That way, you’ll get a better idea of how they perceive their own weak spots.

Review each written performance review, and make sure it accurately depicts the person’s contribution to the team. Only suggest corrections if you notice any blatantly false statements. Keep a copy of the review, and give the original to the employee. This document will provide a base for the next meeting and will help you both track performance in a fair, balanced manner.

**Show Teams How to Grade Themselves**

Just as you should ask individual team members to write their own performance summary at the close of your private meeting, you can expand their self-evaluation role in a more public way. How? Every month, distribute “team report cards” to be filled out by everyone in the group.

Coupled with the private appraisals discussed above, the results of team report cards can help you assess a group’s performance more accurately. While you should customize the criteria for the report cards, there is a template provided on page 44 that you can use to distribute to your team.
Sample Team Report Card

Here’s a sample report card you can customize and distribute to your team:

The purpose of this report card is to examine the group’s overall performance by collecting input from every team member. All responses are anonymous. Please allow time to provide your comments at the end after completing the first part of the report card.

Using a 1-to-10 scale, with 1 as “Absolutely disagree” and 10 as “Absolutely agree,” please respond to each statement:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My skills are being fully used for the team’s benefit.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teammates’ skills are being put to maximum use.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My team collaborates well as a unit.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone on the team clearly understands our goals.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone on the team accepts our goals and cares about attaining them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When we disagree, we treat each other with respect.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team members support each other.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone on the team makes a valuable contribution.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone on the team participates equally in advancing the team’s progress.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When we meet, we work efficiently and don’t waste time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We reach consensus in a fair, productive manner.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m fully motivated to give 100 percent to this team.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teammates are fully motivated to give 100 percent to this team.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The team’s performance is as good as it can possibly be.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments:

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Collect the report cards and tabulate the results. Share your findings with the team so that everyone will know how the group scored for each statement. Low numbers will direct you to performance issues that may need attention. If most teammates strongly disagreed with the statement “My teammates are fully motivated to give 100 percent to this team,” you can brainstorm with the group to develop more effective motivational tools. They might propose a different set of incentives, a change in the team’s makeup or better communication to update the team on corporate developments affecting its mission.
Report cards work best when you have the group complete them regularly, such as every month. This allows you to compare results over time and spot trends.

**Change Can Affect the Team’s Yardstick**

You’ve laid out how you’re going to hold the team accountable, and they all understand what’s expected of them. You’ve planted responsibility squarely in their laps. But you’re not totally home free.

There’s one more piece of the puzzle left: responding to change.

Few teams remain static over time. As an organization matures, so does a group’s mission. Objectives can and often do change midstream. This can occur when:

- A team must respond to an urgent competitive threat.
- A management shakeup can lead the team in a different direction.
- A new technology enables a team to grapple with new challenges.
- Some members of the group leave, and newcomers bring in different skills or backgrounds.

Change can prove especially disruptive if it deflates or defeats the team’s performance to date. Teammates who were held accountable for producing results may now complain: “It was all for nothing,” “We don’t want to start from scratch” or “This new setup just isn’t fair—the goals aren’t realistic.”

Managing a team’s disenchantment will test your leadership skills. Unless you take the easy way out and disband the group, you’ll need to achieve three quick goals:

1. **Convince the team** that the changes will ultimately benefit them and/or the organization.
2. **Urge the team to work** with you to revise its mission.
3. **Settle on a new set** of accountabilities so that all the members know how they’ll be measured from this point on.

The key to managing change is not to overfacilitate. Events can unfold rapidly and unpredictably. Trying to control the team’s actions or rushing to reassure the group when you’re still unsure what will happen next can backfire. A wiser strategy is to unclog the lines of communication. Alert the team as to what the changes will mean to its purpose and goals. Promptly inform them of new developments.

**Tip:** Provide e-mail alerts to team members whenever there’s news to report. If you need them to refocus their efforts and deliver “stretch goals” within a tight time frame, explain in the e-mail the circumstances and context so that they see how their contribution affects the big picture. Sending a group e-mail ensures that every team member will receive the same information.

One benefit of weathering change is that you buy some time to establish a new yardstick to measure the team’s performance. Don’t rush to impose a detailed list of accountabilities. Evaluate team members on their flexibility and overall attitude as much as on their actual work product. See Exercise 10 (page 46).
Check Performance During Organizational Change

Use these questions as the basis for assessing each team member’s performance as the old and new collide. Answer Yes or No:

Does [name of employee]:

_____ want to remain on the team in view of the changes?
_____ show a willingness to accept new challenges?
_____ suggest ways the team can regroup in view of the changes?
_____ propose specific ways that the team can adjust how it measures its performance?
_____ complain frequently or make cynical comments about the changes?
_____ point out problems with the changes without offering solutions?
_____ express pessimism about the team’s ability to stay focused?
_____ slack off in terms of effort or show less interest in helping the team?

If you answered Yes to the first four questions and No to the last four, that speaks well of this employee. This person deserves accolades for responding professionally to change.

But if there are any No answers in the top four questions or Yes responses for the final four, each one represents a possible red flag in evaluating performance.

When running a team, you may find other reasons to replace the yardstick beyond responding to organizational change. You may realize you’re measuring the wrong items or charting them in the wrong way.

If you’re a respectful, forthright communicator, your team members will probably feel comfortable telling you if they think they’re being measured inappropriately. Invite their input and treat it seriously. While you may not agree with everything they say, the team’s insights can help you refine how you hold them accountable.
From her years of experience in running teams, Teresa knew that her group was about to enter its toughest phase. After its first few meetings, team members had come to know one another’s strengths and weaknesses. They collaborated on some preliminary projects, but the real nose-to-the-grindstone work lay ahead. Teresa wanted to help the team focus and persevere, even though some members were already thinking of quitting while others wanted to move faster and take on more responsibility.

Keeping a Team Together

When you jog 30 minutes on a treadmill, it’s often the last five minutes that give your heart the best workout. That follows a general rule of aerobic exercise: The longer you keep it going, the greater the gain. The same applies when you want to build teamwork.

A team can meet a few times and show great promise. Individuals collaborate well and begin to make progress on a variety of projects. But if circumstances change and the team soon disbands—or too many of the players come and go—that lack of stability will limit the team’s effectiveness.

That’s why you need to take steps to keep a team together for more than two or three meetings. Even if the group pounces on a problem and solves it quickly, don’t assume the team no longer serves a purpose. Capitalize on its early triumph by throwing another, even tougher challenge its way.

You’ll see many payoffs in preserving a successful team. For starters, employees who work together over the long haul will forge more lasting bonds. As they experience highs and lows and everything in between, they’ll learn how to feed off one another’s strengths to persevere. They’ll begin to see the team as an extension of themselves and sacrifice their own narrow ambitions for the greater good of the group.

Better yet, if you give a team plenty of time to gel, their trust level will increase. No manager can teach teamwork to a group that meets only a few times and barely has a chance to experiment and learn from its mistakes. With each subsequent meeting, a team grows more resilient and applies new tools to accomplish its mission.

Build Long-Term Commitment

Teamwork and commitment go hand in hand. While any employee working in isolation can stick with a job until it’s properly done, odds are that person will stay committed for a longer period if he collaborates with his peers.

As a manager, you can build an employee’s commitment by dangling incentives, such as more pay, prestige or power, in exchange for diligent follow-through. But that
strategy won’t work indefinitely. There are only so many carrots that will entice an individual who’s fighting off a range of distracting temptations.

A better approach to increasing an employee’s commitment is to form teams. Teammates will expend more effort over a longer time frame if they’re determined not to let down their colleagues. They will care far more about pleasing and impressing their cohorts in the same room than demonstrating commitment to a large, faceless organization with dozens of offices scattered across the state or country.

As Peter Cappelli wrote in the *Harvard Business Review* (Jan.-Feb. 2000): “People who would hardly think twice about abandoning a company find it very difficult to walk out on their teammates.”

There are several steps you can take to help a team commit to long-term success:

- **Provide proper perspective.** When addressing the team, tie its future to the present. Say, “In six months, I’d like to see this group working on . . .” or “The team should prepare to reinvent itself after we complete this stage of our corporate reorganization.” By taking a big-picture view, you remind everyone that not only does their current work count, but also they’ll have opportunities to embrace new, exciting projects later.

  **Tip:** At team meetings, post a timeline for the next three or six months that is broken up by weeks. Insert checkpoints along the way so the team can see where it’s heading and what you expect of it.

- **Talk up commitment.** Emphasize that you value your team’s commitment. Don’t just pay lip service to the notion of “sticking with it” or “hanging in there.” Overuse these terms, and they’ll soon ring hollow. Instead, state clearly that you want the team to commit to results over the long haul.

  Formalize their willingness to do so by having them sign “contracts” describing their responsibilities to the team. Even though these papers aren’t meant as legal documents, they can reinforce your intent to gain the team’s commitment.

- **Focus on improvement.** If teammates see that their commitment enables them to sharpen their skills, they’ll continue to knuckle down and deliver results. Give them the tools and training to grow on the job. Don’t front-load the best learning experiences for the team’s early meetings. Arrange for the group to receive specialized coaching only after they’ve worked together for a few months.

### Give Self-Starters Room to Thrive

If a team grows too dependent on you as its scoutmaster, it probably won’t last over the long haul. That’s why you should not get into the habit of dropping all your other duties to baby-sit the team. You may inhibit the team’s natural growth with your constant hands-on leadership.

Avoid this outcome by encouraging self-sufficiency. That doesn’t mean espousing “empowerment” to your team. Words won’t matter as much as actions. Instead, give team members a stake in the organization’s goals. Provide general direction and answer any questions. Then step out of the team’s way and let the most motivated self-starters blossom into leaders.
For a team to stay together, its members need to believe that they’re accomplishing more as a unit than they would on their own. Independent-minded employees must be able to thrive in the team environment—lending their expertise without lots of rules or restrictions. If they perceive a direct benefit from teamwork, they’ll choose to keep collaborating and make the group stronger over a longer period of time.

By giving self-starters room to exercise their judgment and take risks, they’ll become more motivated, dedicated team members. That will infuse energy into your group, enabling it to survive and prosper over time.

Welcome even the most stubborn or nonconformist team members with wide arms of acceptance. By encouraging individuals to think freely, you increase the team’s vibrancy and willingness to propose bold, creative solutions.

Do you give self-starters room to thrive? To find out, complete Exercise 11 (below).

Test Your Team’s Self-Starter Quotient

You want to assemble a team of self-reliant employees who can still work as a unit. Too many mavericks can lead to anarchy, but too many followers will guarantee mediocrity.

Answer these questions Yes or No to determine whether your team strikes the right balance:

___ Do team members frequently propose bold, original ideas without much prodding?
___ Do your most independent-minded employees welcome a chance to serve on the team?
___ Do self-starters positively influence other, more reactive teammates?
___ Does the team as a whole show an eagerness to produce results, as opposed to discussing process-oriented matters?
___ Do team members gain resources via the group that they couldn’t otherwise get?
___ Do you think your self-starters make a better contribution by being on the team than they would on their own?
___ Are there opportunities on the team for more apathetic employees to “step up” and take more responsibility?

Add the number of Yes answers to the above questions. If the Yes responses total five or more, that shows you’re allowing self-starters to make a valuable contribution to the group. Every No response indicates areas for improvement. The team’s chances of long-term success increase if individuals don’t grow too reliant on one another to think and act independently.
Keep Teams Small to Strengthen Bonds

When assembling a team, it’s often hard to limit its size. Every time you add someone else, you wind up thinking, “If Chris is going to be on it, then it’s only fair that I add Cameron too.” This plays itself out again and again until your team has ballooned into an unwieldy mess.

With teams, bigger does not always mean better. Research shows that when too many people try to work together, it’s almost impossible for them to produce excellent results over the long haul. In one study, a Harvard University professor, J. Richard Hackman, concluded that a team should have no more than six or eight members to be truly effective. When membership expands beyond a small, core group that’s moving toward a clear goal, the group becomes vulnerable to various forms of derailment.

Don’t assume that loading up your team with bright people will increase the group’s collective intelligence. In fact, bringing more minds to bear on a problem can prove immobilizing. Consensus becomes impossible when dozens of employees champion their own views and clash. Plus, on a 20- or 30-person team, it soon becomes clear that most of the members sit, watch and wait. They’re not engaged or connected to the group’s mission.

As a rule, breaking existing groups into smaller practice units will increase their effectiveness as well as prolong the life of the team. That’s because it’s easier for a handful of participants to listen for points of agreement and express their concerns in a more forthright, earnest tone. With too many people in the room, speakers might adopt a fake formality or “play to the audience” by overdramatizing their comments.

To ensure your teams are small enough to succeed, narrow their focus so that the splinter groups become fully functional units in their own right. For example, take a 15-person “information technology working group” and relaunch it with only eight people as your “expert systems group,” which will assess the cost-effectiveness of

### A Working Example of ‘Big Team Blues’

An insurance company was ramping up its hiring, so its human resources director formed a 24-person “recruitment team.” Its mission: to attract top candidates, read their résumés and select the most promising individuals for interviews. The 24 members were drawn from the firm’s 12 departments, with two representatives chosen from each unit.

Their first order of business was to isolate the qualities and credentials they wanted in the new hires. Disagreement erupted almost immediately. With so many team members gathered around a table, everyone had a different view on the “ideal” candidate. They also bickered over recruitment strategies, salary ranges and other matters.

Finally, the HR director decided to disband the team and replace it with four smaller, more focused groups. Each group of six employees read the top candidates’ résumés and discussed each applicant’s pros and cons. This led to a more in-depth analysis of the most serious candidates while sticking to a fast, efficient pace.
artificial intelligence programs that apply to your business. Or take your 18-person, wide-ranging “litigation team” and subdivide it into a six-person securities litigation group, a product liability group and a professional malpractice group.

If you find it difficult to limit a team’s size to a handful of core members, consider naming “expert consultants” to advise the group. These individuals can offer technical expertise to the team on demand, without having to attend each meeting or chime in on matters outside their specialty. They can become a kind of advisory board, giving input or providing guidance on complex issues.

Ideally, you should announce your “expert consultants” at the same time you are assembling the team. If you mistakenly include all these technicians in the core group from the outset, you may need to remove some of them later to slim down the team. That can lead to bruised egos.

Nevertheless, the best teams must be limited to only those employees who can make a substantial, ongoing contribution. Your panel of outside experts can participate on an as-needed basis, allowing them to swoop in and spread their wisdom whenever necessary.

**Frequent Meetings Accomplish More**

You may figure it’s not up to you to decide how often your team should meet. You think, “I’ll give them the freedom to meet as much or as little as they want, as long as they get the work done.”

Big mistake.

The most successful teams almost always meet frequently, usually once a week in intensive 30-minute or one-hour sessions. They prepare detailed written agendas that are distributed in advance. Designated members may have assignments for each meeting, which they include in the advance mailing to their teammates. That way, everyone has the information they need when they enter the meeting room (or log onto their PC for a “virtual meeting”).

Team leaders don’t hog the spotlight at these meetings. The facilitator often rotates within the group; the most skilled or knowledgeable person is charged with leading the discussion on a particular topic.

With frequent meetings, teammates treat their work more intently. They’re held more accountable for results and stay more attuned to the group’s development. Plus, with weekly assignments and deadlines, the members become more actively engaged in the team’s progress.

There are additional advantages to holding frequent meetings. For example:

- **Frequent meetings keep the creative juices flowing.** An essential part of brainstorming occurs when teammates agree that a novel idea merits more attention. This involves “convergent thinking,” or the ability of individuals to come together and raise their collective creativity. If a team meets only occasionally, its chances of pouncing on ideas and experimenting with them will fade. By contrast, a group that meets regularly becomes more comfortable taking risks and thinking “outside the box” to uncover new ways to solve problems.

- **There’s a bigger training payoff.** When you need to teach your team a new skill, it’s easier for them to apply what they’ve learned if they’re meeting every week. They can get quick feedback and correct any errors before any bad habits become ingrained.
Your training concepts stay fresh in their minds because there’s not much lag time between meetings.

- **The team’s importance is reinforced.** If your team meets only during business slowdowns, that sends a message that the group’s mission is a low priority. But if they gather faithfully every week to test solutions, conduct post-mortems or chart their latest progress, the members will come to realize how much the organization benefits from their vital work.

  *Note:* That doesn’t mean you should schedule weekly meetings that clash with other business needs. For instance, Mondays are heavy reporting days for retailers, when employees collect and analyze their weekend sales data. As a result, retailing teams shouldn’t plan to meet at the beginning of the week.

The biggest downside of having a team meet frequently is that it will burn out over time. You can sidestep this danger by ensuring that the group will face tough but exciting challenges on an ongoing basis. If participants are motivated to maintain their focus and build on their success, there’s no reason why a team cannot thrive over the long term.

**Seek Incremental Goals, Not Instant Victory**

A team will thrive for a long time if it takes incremental steps toward a series of goals. Members tend to operate as a more cohesive, durable unit when they experience continuous improvement and always have another challenge ahead.

It’s your job as manager to lay out a grand plan of how the team will progress over the coming weeks and months. Give them short-term objectives and clear, measurable benchmarks to reach along the way. Show how their day-by-day efforts relate to larger, more ambitious goals that affect the organization’s bottom line.

When presenting projects to your team, emphasize that you want them to proceed at their own pace. Give them the flexibility to decide how to problem-solve and divvy up duties. Explain that you’re not going to overwhelm them by asking too much, too soon, but you would like them to set their sights on conquering one challenge at a time under set time frames.

For example, if you want a team to monitor customer service, don’t expect them to “fix” the call center, the billing system and the product support materials in one fell swoop. Instead, isolate each of these areas in sequence, and guide the group to focus on them one at a time. Let them take baby steps to address each aspect of service, testing and experimenting with possible solutions. When they’ve successfully implemented processes to revamp your call center, direct them to move on to reforming the billing procedures.

Without concrete gains to show for its hard work, even the most driven team can serve as little more than a social club or therapy group. But by allowing each teammate to choose a specific job that’s relatively small and doable—and that contributes to the team’s overriding short-term goal—you help define each individual’s contribution from the start.

Make sure that each member’s task is manageable. Ask yourself, “What can this person reasonably accomplish in the next week?” Also consider how that worker will...
be able to make more progress in Week 2 and beyond by scoring incremental gains and chipping away at a larger problem.

The most enlightened managers nurture teamwork by setting the stage for participants to return to the next meeting with reports of small wins rather than excuses or diversions. When teammates listen to one another discussing their latest successes, they feed off this input in a motivating, positive way.
Doug dreaded tomorrow’s team meeting. He knew that getting his strong-willed, opinionated group to settle on a course of action would be nearly impossible. But they had reached the point where they had to speak in one voice—or risk failing in their mission.

In recent meetings Doug had pleaded with them to work together on a list of recommendations they all could buy into. But they refused to compromise, and opposing alliances had formed.

Doug had to figure out a way to get everyone to make collective decisions.

Arrive at Team Decisions

Enroll in any intensive team-building seminar and you’ll probably get a chance to play some version of “The Prisoner’s Dilemma,” a favorite game of management trainers. In this exercise, a “prisoner” must trust that an “accomplice” who is absent will not betray him.

As the game unfolds, both players (or teams of players) learn about making collective decisions. They come to realize that win-win behaviors can prove ethical and practical. When either side pursues a win-lose strategy by “squealing,” they both end up in jail and thus lose the chance to help each other.

It’s a sobering lesson in reaching consensus and arriving at the most sensible decision for everyone. When participants debrief after playing the game, they’re often chastened by the experience and willing to commit to major changes in how they work in teams.

When Carl Sagan, the late scientist, analyzed “The Prisoner’s Dilemma,” he pinpointed some useful lessons from the game:

✔ **First impressions count.** Treat teammates with warmth and respect from the first meeting. Get them to see you as a genial ally who wants to collaborate rather than as an arrogant, standoffish or reluctant team player. Decision making as a group becomes easier when others like you—or at least don’t detest you—from the start.

✔ **Turn envy into admiration.** If you’re jealous of a teammate, restrain yourself. Reframe your attitude so that you seek to learn from others rather than covet their strengths. Otherwise, you may wind up trying to undermine them. Follow Dale Carnegie’s advice: Try to say something genuine and positive about your colleagues. That way, when the team struggles to reach consensus, you won’t let negative thoughts like envy block you from compromising.

✔ **Forgive and forget.** If you make enemies on the team, don’t demonize them. Take the initiative to forgive adversaries. Even if they don’t show much interest in
forging a peace, take the high road; treat them with respect and listen to their opinions. If you feel you were wronged by someone’s intentional acts and you must retaliate, do so proportionately. Don’t overreact or break any rules just to settle a score or react to a perceived slight.

When managing a team, the best way to help the group make prudent, intelligent decisions is to encourage them to trust each other. That’s the core lesson of “The Prisoner’s Dilemma.” When individuals see the best in their peers and maintain the proper perspective if personality conflicts arise, they’re better equipped to grapple with problems and arrive at the best solutions—together.

4 Paths to Wise Decision Making

You can guide a team to collaborate more effectively by defining how they should approach an issue. Just telling them, “Go figure this out and let me know your final decision,” may leave them unsure of how to proceed. But if you coach them to think a certain way, they’ll know what you expect and how to put their heads together for maximum effect.

In the following section we discuss four ways to teach your team to make decisions.

**Conceptual**

In the first few team meetings, you may want the group to decide on some big-picture issues that will affect their subsequent work. For example, the team’s first order of business might be to agree on some general ideas about its mission or a set of underlying premises for what follows.

You might lead off the meeting by telling the group, “Now’s the time to think big, to hash out some of your basic goals as a team and the two or three concepts or beliefs that you all agree will serve as the foundation for what you do next.”

Beware of dropping too many hints of what you think is the proper conceptual framework for the team to embrace. Let them decide. Once they all have a say in formulating their fundamental objectives or overriding vision, you can step in and—if you deem necessary—tweak their conclusions before they plunge into the details.

**Logical**

Most team decisions must flow from rational, evidence-based analysis. Alert team members that they should support their opinions with reliable data, ranging from industry statistics to quarterly financial results. They should also cite their experience or technical expertise when appropriate.

If you want team members to apply rigorous logic to their decisions, ask them to submit information that justifies their most critical conclusions. For example, ask them to prepare an outline or flowchart, which will provide a road map for you to follow their thought process. Or request that they submit a brief, written summary of their decisions along with the three best supporting points for each one.

By emphasizing your intent to evaluate the supporting material they use, you prompt the team to think logically and apply a dose of reason to its decisions.
Chronological

Some teams need to impose order on chaos. They may have to plot a timetable for fixing a companywide systems problem or handle a public relations disaster on multiple fronts at once. In such situations, they may not have the time or inclination to think logically and amass supporting data that neatly illustrate the soundness of their decisions.

Taking a chronological approach to team decision making can work wonders when the group confronts a crisis. Your job is to show them how to think in sequence and agree on what steps to take to move incrementally toward a solution. Using a daily planner or monthly calendar as a visual aid can help; establish checkpoints and deadlines for each week so that everyone will know how to prioritize.

Remind the group not to jump ahead of itself and rush to decide on matters prematurely. Explain which tasks come first, second and third. Then let the team move from a well-defined starting point toward a long-term goal.

Impulsive

In rare cases, you may want your team to make a snap decision. Imposing spontaneity on an otherwise-deliberate group may loosen them up and lead to surprising results. Say you give a normally conservative team just five minutes to choose from among several options to handle a customer service snafu. You may find that they’re willing to take more risks or enact bolder, more ambitious steps to fix what’s broken.

Another advantage to insisting on an instant decision: The team may not have time to think of everything that can go wrong or bicker over relatively minor or tangential issues. As long as the stakes of the team’s decision aren’t too high, such a point-and-shoot approach can promote camaraderie and reinforce the group’s call to action.

The Best Way to Reach Consensus

Teamwork feeds on itself. When participants see the benefits of working together and reaching a satisfying consensus, they will want to repeat the process and make it work even better the next time.

You may assume that consensus results from a survival-of-the-fittest contest within the team. In this scenario, the most persuasive, outspoken team leaders take center stage and win over their more passive colleagues. Fence-sitting teammates rise to make their best case—and eventually the most dynamic voices drown out everyone else. But that’s not necessarily the best recipe for reaching true consensus.

High-performing teams tend to encourage participants to ask questions rather than make statements. Through rounds of intense inquiry, team members wind up collaborating more enthusiastically because they’re learning from one another. They’re open-minded, curious and respectful of the skills and knowledge their teammates possess. In short, they prefer to listen and learn rather than lecture.

Consider how a professional golfer competes in a tournament. While the golfer is the center of attention, in truth the caddy plays a critical role as a valued teammate. The caddy is not just carrying the player’s clubs from hole to hole; he’s giving the golfer advice on which clubs to use, how to play a tricky shot out of the rough or where a green might break. The golfer and the caddy usually pelt each other with questions: “How’s the wind right now?” “What’s the condition of the green?” “Will a driver work
to get us over the water?” Only one person actually swings the club, but it’s the result of a two-person team effort to agree on a course of action.

You can guide a team to build consensus by leading them to ask one another the right questions. Complete Exercise 12 *below* to diagnose how much your team seeks to learn from one another.

### Does Your Team Ask Questions to Forge Agreement?

Take this quiz to diagnose how well team members seek to learn from one another in arriving at group decisions. Complete the test soon after you have sat in on a meeting and listened for 30 minutes as your team attempted to make a collective decision.

*Choose the best answer:*

1. **As you observe your team trying to make a decision, do they:**
   A. Take turns expressing their opinions about the topic at hand?
   B. Keep repeating themselves or seconding each other’s views?
   C. Ask each other questions to clarify ambiguities or ensure they understand what was said?
   D. Go off on tangents and debate other issues?

2. **When team members question each other, do they:**
   A. Answer their own questions before allowing the respondent to chime in?
   B. Listen attentively without interrupting?
   C. Bury their question in a long lecture or diatribe, so others are unclear what they’re being asked?
   D. Keep rephrasing a single question or ask a string of questions all at once?

3. **After hearing their questions answered, do the original questioners:**
   A. Ask appropriate follow-up questions?
   B. Move on by asserting their views without acknowledging the answer they just heard?
   C. Dismiss the answer or disagree with it in an effort to shut down further discussion?
   D. Exhibit negative body language indicating impatience or disapproval with what they hear?

4. **Note how team members phrase their questions. Are they:**
   A. Choosing neutral words that do not reflect their own biases?
   B. Lacing their questions with loaded terms that detract from the core information they seek?
   C. Assuming a negative or worst-case answer?
   D. Speaking in a cynical, smug or know-it-all tone?
5. **After about 30 minutes, count how many team members posed questions. Do you conclude that:**

A. Team members were falling into roles, where a few “teachers” drove the discussion while everyone else played the “students”?

B. Some participants apparently gave up because other, more vocal teammates monopolized the discussion?

C. Based on their lack of interest in the proceedings, most team members were apathetic about reaching consensus?

D. Everyone who wanted to speak up did so?

**Answers:**

1. C. If teammates are asking questions, that’s a strong signal they’re going to arrive at a more meaningful, sound decision. It shows they prefer to extract knowledge from each other rather than pelt the team with opinions, as in A.

   In terms of B, if they’re merely seconding each other or rehashing obvious truths, they probably won’t reach a breakthrough consensus. And if they seem more interested in other issues and sink their teeth into tangential concerns (D), they may not feel qualified to discuss what matters most or may not be engaged in their primary mission.

2. B. Questions don’t serve much purpose if the answers get ignored. You want to see teammates truly wanting to hear the answers.

   A reveals that they’re probably asking rhetorical questions just to make a point; they’re pontificating rather than willingly turning over the floor. The same goes with C. But if they’re reeling off a string of questions or needlessly rephrasing the same inquiry (D), they may need coaching on how to slow down and give others a chance to respond.

3. A. Nonthreatening, clarifying follow-up questions indicate that questioners are earnestly seeking to understand their teammates’ views. That raises the odds the group will reach a solid, sensible consensus.

   B is worrisome: Questioners who show little or no interest in the answers may be putting on an act. Their inquiries may be a sham when all they really want is to argue and assert their own views. C is just as dangerous: When questioners hear something they don’t want to hear, they should have the maturity to digest it gracefully and open the floor for further discussion. And if questioners’ negative nonverbal cues intimidate others (D), then fence-sitting teammates may clam up and refuse to share less popular findings that could benefit the team’s decision making.

4. A. How a question is worded can largely influence how it gets answered. You want to see team members asking fair, balanced questions that do not come disguised as opinions.

   B indicates the questioners are engaging in a bit of arm twisting rather than a sincere desire to learn something. C shows a pessimism that can bring down the team and foreclose possible avenues to consensus. D can polarize teammates and delay any compromise that could lead to group decisions.

5. D. Ideally, all the team members should feel comfortable making their voices heard. But in many cases a group breaks up into leaders and followers, where the followers hesitate to speak up and ask questions. That’s the problem with A and B. Apathy can also drag down a team (C), so it’s important that you motivate the group to care about its decision and perceive the importance and consequences of its work.
Take the Right ACTION

Teams make the best decisions when they embody the following ACTION elements:

- **Analysis.** Team members must ground themselves in the facts, figures and trends affecting their decision. Make sure they’re all given the proper tools to evaluate, from financial exhibits—such as year-over-year comparisons of quarterly earnings—to data gleaned from customer surveys or marketing studies.

- **Creativity.** Encourage participants to think “outside the box” and propose innovative ideas. Let them speak freely without fear of embarrassment or reprisal. If loudmouths try to silence a shy team member and keep her from taking a bold, contrary or counterintuitive stance, step in and allow the person to be heard. The wisest decisions often start as “crazy” or “half-baked” notions that evolve into visionary action plans.

- **Tenacity.** Don’t let a team give up when alliances crack, deadlines loom or tempers flare. You’ll promote teamwork more effectively by taking setbacks in stride and calling on everyone to persevere. While you can’t insist on mental toughness, you can set an example of the kind of steely leadership you want the group to emulate.

- **Initiative.** Give the team the power to make decisions without lots of distractions or intrusions. Don’t spoon-feed teams by overfacilitating or impose too many rules restricting their ability to stage experiments and collaborate freely—that may squash their initiative. They will become passive order-takers rather than self-starting doers. Resist authority-hogging moves, such as lecturing the group needlessly or undermining the role of the team spokesperson.

- **Openness.** Teamwork thrives in an atmosphere of open, earnest debate. Make it easy for individuals to present different views and play devil’s advocate in a supportive, nonthreatening environment. How? Don’t rush to judge what you hear, and urge team members to listen for understanding, not agreement. Remind the team that when people hear something they agree with, they’ll listen to about 50 percent of it. But if they disagree with the message, they’ll hear only 25 percent. Challenge everyone to listen at 100 percent capacity, whether or not they buy into what they’re hearing.

- **Necessity.** Team members need to sense at least some urgency or importance for arriving at a decision. Without a clear, compelling reason for all their effort, they may grow cynical and apathetic. As the manager, you should provide a big-picture backdrop for their work; help them see where their recommendations will fit into the organization’s success.

Be a Calm, Cool Mediator

Reaching consensus rarely comes easily to any strong-willed, successful team. Sparks can fly whenever a diverse group hashes out a tough, controversial or risky decision.

Your role as the boss is to channel disagreements into positive discussions. You must look beyond personality clashes. When attempting to persuade bickering teammates to overcome their differences, use empathy to find common ground. Identify a belief, idea or goal that you’re sure both individuals share. Use that premise to establish a base of agreement.
Get both parties to nod in unison, and you’re on the road to effective mediation. For example, you might say:

- “Can we all agree that the success of this company’s reorganization depends on everyone making some adjustments?”
- “Would you both like to look back on your work on this team as something productive that made a positive difference to this organization?”
- “Would you both agree that helping this team reach a sensible decision is more important than this one disagreement?”

Another key to empathizing is to observe team members’ behavior closely. As you mediate a conflict, don’t dwell too much on what you say. Instead, notice how team members act, especially their body language. If they’re habitually rubbing their eyes or cupping their chin with their hand, they may be exhausted and subject to snapping. If they’re twiddling a pen or swaying back and forth, they may have lots of nervous energy that needs a healthy outlet; you should give them a chance to unleash their pent-up feelings in a safe, nonjudgmental setting.

Above all, don’t take sides. Avoid labeling team members’ positions as “right” or “wrong.” By attempting to understand the crux of the disagreement and empathizing with both employees’ viewpoints, you can gently prod them to lighten up.
Gloria liked almost everything about her project team—except running it. Her boss had asked her to manage the group, and she reluctantly agreed.

But Gloria lacked the stomach for disciplining malcontents, and she didn’t pay much attention to how she communicated with the team.

As a result, she grew increasingly out of touch with the team’s needs and lost credibility in their eyes. She knew she had to reclaim their trust and re-establish her leadership.

Lead a Team to Victory

As you’re trying to improve teamwork, mediate disputes and keep everyone on track, you’ll soon discover just how draining it is to manage a team. With so many individuals threatening to impose their own agendas or bickering, you have to soothe hurt feelings, redirect aimless efforts and show everyone what’s to gain by persevering.

“Trying to keep the team motivated is one of the most challenging things,” said Rebecca Donovan, chief executive of Opholio, a Web-based photo service, in The Boston Globe. “I’m very much an optimist. But who’s motivating me? It’s just me. But I’m going around motivating everyone else. I’m tired. But you’ve got to keep going.”

Her comments capture some of the struggle many managers face in leading teams. You devote so much energy to rallying the team and lifting their spirits that, by day’s end, you may look in the mirror and see an exhausted wreck.

But that’s the price of strong leadership, whether you’re referred to as the head, chair, practice deputy or coordinator. Your real role is to coach, to spur people to perform better by reinforcing the need for them to work together.

5 Traits of the Ideal Coach

You may see yourself as the boss, captain or manager of the team. Yet the label you use isn’t as important as the behavior you demonstrate.

When team members are asked to describe the characteristics of a strong leader, they repeatedly focus on the skills, traits and beliefs discussed below.

Empathy

In Section 7 we discussed the importance of using empathy when you have to manage disagreements among teammates. But even when everyone gets along fine, you still need to detach yourself from your own biases or assumptions so as to appreciate the views of others.
Trying to understand the attitudes, fears and hopes of team members enables you to step into another person’s shoes. That, in turn, allows you to appeal to each one more forcefully and persuasively.

Remember: *Understanding others doesn’t mean that you’ll agree with them.*

In fact, the more you connect with the feelings of team members, the more you will expose yourself to differences in opinion or outlook. That’s par for the course, so don’t fight it.

**Concern**

You must show that you genuinely care about the team’s best interests. Individuals want a leader who is sensitive to their needs, responds to their requests and watches out for their welfare.

The best way to radiate concern is to ask lots of questions, to engage others rather than lecture them. But beware: It’s more draining to listen to others’ complaints, anxieties and demands than to preach the importance of trust and goal setting.

Many would-be leaders shift into autopilot at team meetings. They blab at will, spouting rehearsed remarks that ring hollow on the troops. Displaying sincere concern is an altogether different and more rigorous task—one that only the most determined coaches embrace.

**Curiosity**

The best leaders are superb listeners. They prefer to learn from their team rather than tell them what to do or how to do it. Like sponges, they absorb whatever team members say. By remaining accessible, genial and supportive, such leaders motivate the team indirectly by offering them a safe, nonjudgmental sounding board.

Better yet, when you’re curious, you can get the unvarnished truth from the team’s perspective.

“People aren’t afraid to tell me they don’t know how to do something or don’t know enough to make something happen,” said Lisa Simpson, president of Sony’s Online Entertainment unit, in *The Wall Street Journal*. She attributes this tendency to her willingness to listen.

**Pride**

Teammates want to believe in something larger than themselves. They’ll find it inspiring to know that they’re collaborating on a meaningful project—one that will have a direct, positive impact on the organization.

An effective leader instills pride in the team’s work. That means explaining how their efforts will affect the bottom line or enhance employees’ or customers’ lives. When team members perceive the ripple effect of their work—and agree that anything less than 100 percent is unacceptable—they begin to treat their activities more seriously.

Remember: *Expressing pride in your team need not come across as stiff or solemn.* You can communicate your admiration and reinforce the importance of the group’s efforts by displaying a sense of humor and a positive attitude.
**Fairness**

Nothing brings teammates together more quickly than fighting a tyrant. They will rebel in an instant against an unreasonable, unlikable or unfair boss.

There are three easy ways to show that you’re a fair coach:

1. **Withhold judgment** until you’ve gathered all the facts and heard all sides. Don’t let your biases make you jump to conclusions, or the team will figure you are closed-minded and aloof.

2. **Lead the group consistently.** Once you apply certain criteria to evaluate one team member’s performance, apply the same criteria to everyone else.

3. **Give both praise and criticism.** Teammates will agree that their leader is fair if they receive a balanced mix of positive and negative feedback, rather than a constant stream of criticism.

In short, the ideal team leader substitutes an earnest, straight-shooting, advisory approach for an authoritative presence. His power flows not from his position as the executive in charge but rather from the team’s acknowledgment that they can learn and grow from their coach. They know their leader wants them to improve and has their best interests at heart.

**Improve Your Leadership Skills**

To strengthen your team’s performance, you probably embrace the notion of continuous improvement. By always looking for ways to teach your team new skills and holding it accountable for steadily better results, you send a message that you will not accept complacency or a halfhearted effort.

That’s a good start. But how about your own performance?

Leading a team wisely requires a high degree of self-awareness. You should know how the group perceives you and what strengths or weaknesses influence your ability to lead. Exercise 13 (page 66) is designed to help you elicit feedback from the team about your own performance.

The advantage of applying continuous improvement to your own performance is that you can learn more about how to lead. Rather than focusing on the team’s behavior and judging it from your high perch, you can trace your development as a strong, respected coach and tie your own growth to the group’s efforts to attain its goals.

**Enforce the Ground Rules Fairly**

In Section 1 you learned about the importance of setting ground rules for your team. From the first meeting, you should define for the unit what’s acceptable behavior and where you draw the line in terms of imposing discipline or penalties for violations.

Many otherwise-fine leaders get into trouble when they ignore or bend the very rules they helped establish. Do it once, and team members may attribute it to an oversight or a rare exception. But do it repeatedly, and they’ll figure you don’t take the rules seriously.
Invite the Team to Grade Your Performance

Distribute this exercise to all your team members, and ask them to complete it. Promise anonymity: Insist that they not write their names on the form. Also, let them take the exercise with them so they can type any comments on it before returning it to you. Otherwise, some respondents may fear that you’ll recognize their handwriting, which would discourage them from providing honest feedback.

Read each statement below. Rate the team leader on a scale of 1 to 5 as follows:

1 = Never
2 = Occasionally
3 = Sometimes
4 = Somewhat often
5 = Frequently

___ She acts arrogant when talking with the team.
___ She treats team members rudely.
___ She micromanages the team.
___ She gives us too much negative feedback.
___ She lies to the team.
___ She enjoys making people sweat.
___ She treats team members disrespectfully.
___ She plays favorites on the team.
___ Her humor is inappropriate.
___ She loses her temper.
___ She doesn’t recognize the team’s efforts.
___ She keeps changing deadlines or shifting team goals.
___ She can’t keep a secret.

Comments: ___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

After collecting the forms, add up the score. Any total below 20 means that you’re an enlightened leader. Once you pass 25, however, you’re entering the danger zone. Take their input to heart, and try to improve your communication and leadership skills.
The team will begin to doubt your leadership if you don’t follow through on what you say you’re going to do. Citing a rule such as “No interrupting allowed—let speakers finish first” is fine as long as you chastise individuals who cut off others in midsentence. And if you violate your own rule, you’ll lose credibility as an enforcer.

You need a big stick to wield over uncooperative or noncompliant team members. Otherwise, your words may not carry much weight. The team may conclude that you’re waving a wet noodle rather than cracking the whip. That’s when they may disregard your leadership and even foment a rebellion. What kind of powerful sticks can you use against those who break the rules? Here’s a sampling:

- **Write disciplinary memos.** Say you’ve spoken to someone on two or three occasions and he continues to break the rules. What’s your next move? One of the safest, smartest and clearest steps in the disciplinary process is to describe the violation in writing. Send the memo to the team member, and place a copy in his personnel file. Explain that you’ve tried oral warnings to no avail, and you expect the violation(s) to stop.
  
  *Advice:* Usually makes an impact without harming morale. Also ensures that you communicate exactly what rule was broken and how the behavior must change, thus reducing the odds of subsequent misunderstandings.

- **Withhold coveted assignments.** A subtle but effective way to scold team members who are late for meetings, consistently inattentive, argumentative or not meeting project deadlines is to place them in low-glamour working groups while others get plum, high-profile assignments. Alternatively, refuse to grant their requests to work with their friends on certain subcommittees or to take on additional team duties.
  
  *Advice:* Use in moderation to send a “reciprocity message” to team members (“You follow my rules, and I’ll respect your wishes”).

- **Threaten their wallet.** A severe but potent means of getting someone’s attention is to withhold compensation from a team member who flagrantly violates the rules. It sends a clear message that such actions are unacceptable. But keep in mind that you’re playing with fire here: Money hits close to home, and penalizing people by drilling into their pocketbook can breed anger and resentment.
  
  *Advice:* Use money-based threats only as a last resort.

The best teams always adhere to at least a few non-negotiable rules that everyone willingly follows, even if they’re as simple as mandating attendance, defining team roles and dictating some basic principles about how people treat one another.

You don’t have to draft these rules in a vacuum. Invite the team to formulate “the rules they’ll live by,” and finalize them in a written bulletin. By soliciting the group’s involvement, you may find yourself relieved of part of your enforcer duties. Teammates may patrol themselves by directing constructive peer pressure on those whose behavior falls outside the group’s written parameters.

**Tailor Your Leadership to Fit the Team**

There’s no single way to guide a team to triumph. Your leadership style must complement the dynamics of the group—and all groups are different. But there are some general “team types” that will largely affect how you lead them.
The three most common types of teams are:

- **Cross-functional teams.** These groups consist of representatives from different departments who collaborate to achieve a specific business goal. Examples include overseeing a marketing campaign for a new product, creating and implementing customer retention strategies and managing cost-control processes.

- **Linchpin teams.** These groups involve a chain of command within one department or division. A senior executive is usually paired with a middle manager, who in turn selects staffers to join the unit. These teams tend to focus on immediate challenges within their unit, such as evaluating ways to boost morale or testing new workflow procedures.

- **Outside teams.** These teams consist of a mix of internal and external representatives. In some cases, an outside consultant is brought in or an industry coalition forms that combines forces with some of your employees.

**Cross-functional teams**

Leading people from different units requires diplomacy and sensitivity to internal politics. Personal jealousies can be inflamed by departmental rivalries. Representatives from two units may compete for the same slice of the company’s budget or fight over who gets better equipment or larger offices.

To keep a cross-functional team on track, direct everyone’s focus to the group’s mission. Reinforce the need for everyone to work together and make sacrifices—and reward early examples of selfless behavior during the first few meetings. Find reasons to praise everyone; don’t ignore members of departments whom you may not know well.

Beware of your own biases. If you’re predisposed to dislike members of a certain department, you must rise above it and accept each team member on his own terms. Devote equal time to listening to everyone, and encourage the group to pick each other’s brains and learn about different areas of the organization.

**Linchpin teams**

When you’re running a team that’s limited to people within the same department, the main danger lies in the improper use of authority. The highest-ranking teammates can act more like bosses—their natural role outside the group. They can dominate conversations, bark orders and insist on their views even if others disagree.

What’s worse, the lower-ranking teammates can vie for the attention of the bigwigs in their midst. Rather than concentrate on their team duties, they may plot ways to curry favor with higher-ups and use the team as a means of building relationships with influential allies.

As the manager in charge, you cannot prevent support staff from trying to impress top executives. But you can harness their desire to score points by giving them a chance to shine in the spotlight. For example, assign support-level employees to serve as spokespersons for the team. Or give them leadership duties enabling them to “boss around” their bosses!
Take every opportunity to create an egalitarian spirit. When the team meets, don’t allow senior executives to arrive late or use their cell phones while others must strictly abide by the rules. Treat everyone the same, and direct their focus to what matters most.

**Outside teams**

Your role as team leader may double as group coordinator when you’re dealing with outsiders, such as consultants, regulators and customers who join the unit. You may need to confirm schedules, arrange for convenient meeting locations and keep scattered participants in the loop about the latest team news.

It’s a different kind of management challenge with outside teams; they usually require a level of planning above and beyond what’s necessary for internal teams. Details count more than ever: who does what, which goals come first, how you’ll follow up.

To lead outside teams effectively, define everyone’s role clearly from the outset. Provide at least some opportunity for participants to mingle and build rapport, before you expect them to turn their attention to business. Employees may view some consultants with suspicion or downright hostility, so break down barriers by putting everyone “in the same boat” to combat a common enemy or solve an overriding problem.

Ultimately, your success as a team leader depends on whether teammates see the good in one another. When individuals willingly bypass their own narrow, private agenda in favor of helping a group achieve something larger and more meaningful, you can steer everyone toward a greater, more fruitful outcome.