



# Injecting Work into Teamwork

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There is no “I” in team, at least according to the motivational posters. There is, however, a great deal of work involved. Doing that work is a critical leadership responsibility if you want to build and sustain a cohesive unit that delivers consistent results.

## MULTIPLYING THE TEAM'S TALENTS

Bringing a group of people together and calling them a team is like assembling a group of individuals who can play musical instruments and calling them an orchestra. Like the legendary baseball coach Casey Stengel once said, “Gettin’ good players is easy. Gettin’ ‘em to play together is the hard part.”

A team is, by definition, a group of diverse people united by shared purpose and values to deliver results by multiplying their talents and efforts. True teamwork requires these seven factors:

1. A clear purpose and goal
2. Shared values about what the team stands for and what it believes in
3. Clear roles and responsibilities
4. An environment of trust and open communication
5. Consistent, effective processes for accomplishing work and managing team agreements
6. A sense of accountability for completing the work and maintaining team relationships
7. A willingness to continuously learn, grow and improve

Building and sustaining a team requires that leaders invest time, energy and effort to ensure that these seven factors exist. The challenge is to balance the competing realities—the need to complete the work with the need to build relationships; individual competitiveness with the desire for collaborative partnerships; an expectation of empowerment with a desire for leadership control; and the short-term quest for efficiency with a long-term promise of effectiveness.

The good news is that teamwork is a shared process that can be improved when leaders take the following actions.

**Share the vision and the goal:** Paint a broad picture of what the team needs to achieve and then share the process for turning that vision into specific measurable goals that create focus. There is a fine balance between articulating a specific vision that directs performance, and giving your team just enough information that they sense the direction and can fill in the blanks with their own ideas. The former delegates the team to completing your assigned task. The latter builds commitment, enthusiasm and support.

**Share information and skills:** Knowledge and competence engender confidence. Confidence empowers focused action. Focused action leads to the outstanding results for which successful teams are known. Be as open and transparent as possible with information and communication. Doing so maintains the focus on the goal rather than having team performance derailed by speculation and rumor. Also, be sure to invest the time to give people the skills they need to succeed. Past participation on a team does not necessarily guarantee teamwork skills.

**Share the responsibility:** People support what they help create. Engage the team members in articulating their values, creating work processes, maintaining open communication, fostering trust, and most importantly, resolving conflicts. The act of sharing responsibility fosters a sense of identity that promotes accountability. The end result is your team will be committed to working with you rather than complying while working for you.

**Share the credit:** “It was a great team win” has become a common clichéd response from star athletes when interviewed after a team victory. That is because they know that consistently great performance from an individual is impossible without a strong team behind them. Ronald Reagan said it best, “There is no limit to what you can accomplish if you don’t care who gets the credit.”

Teamwork—the type that inspires legendary effort and results—unites the unique and diverse talents of individuals into a cohesive unit where everyone is focused on success, and no one will consciously allow the team to fail. The leader’s job is to make teamwork work.

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