

5 CONDITIONS FOR AN EFFECTIVE TEAM

The Most Effective Teams Skip Prichard

Rodger Dean Duncan's latest book *LeaderSHOP: Workplace, Career, and Life Advice From Today's Top Thought Leaders* is a collection of lessons from his many leadership interviews. I reached out to Rodger to provide his perspective on world class teams.

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Tips for Building Teams

Building a world-class team is the job of a great leader. Share a few tips you've learned about building great teams.

Teamwork is more common as a buzzword than as an actual practice. Without benefit of nuance, teamwork is one of those catch-all terms often extended as the magic elixir for the moment's most pressing execution issue. In a bid to boost performance, teamwork is touted in corporate vision statements, on wall posters, T-shirts, key chains, and coffee mugs. Teamwork is the subject of banal pep talks by goofy managers in TV sitcoms (*The Office* comes to mind). Teamwork has been given a bad name by a world of bad practitioners.

But when we're strategic about putting both the team and the work into teamwork, beautiful things can happen.

Here's a helpful metaphor. The suspension bridge is one of the most impressive accomplishments of modern engineering. It begins as individual wires not much stronger than the ones you'd use to hang pictures on your living room wall. Spun together, these individual wires become strands. Then several of the larger strands are combined into giant wire rope or cable that can bear thousands of tons of weight and safely cross obstacles like canyons and rivers.

This same principle is part of the marvellous results that can be produced by genuine teamwork. Ordinary people can achieve extraordinary things when they discover strength in unity.

"Some people hesitate in speaking up to avoid being ostracized or being viewed as 'not a team player.'" – Rodger Dean Duncan

5 Conditions of an Effective Team

So what are the ingredients of an effective team?

A team is most likely to be effective when five conditions exist:

1. It's a *real team*, not just a team in name only.

A collection of people is not necessarily a team. In this context, "team" is used to describe a carefully selected group of people who work interdependently, who are mutually supportive, and who bring out the best in each other as they strive to accomplish a set of specific goals.

Composition matters and more is not necessarily better. Go for quality over quantity.

2. It has a *compelling purpose*.

Engaging people's heads, hearts, and hopes is all about rallying around a compelling purpose. The purpose must have meaning; it must connect to the values and principles that are important to the participants; it must energize, and it must be articulated in a way that clearly connects the dots between people's efforts and their accomplishment of worthy objectives.

A good way to ensure this is to draft a team charter. A good charter outlines the goals of the team, measurable expected results, team composition, empowerment, milestones and schedules, and other pertinent issues that must be clarified up front, not later.

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3. It has a *reinforcing framework* that promotes and enables rather than inhibits team achievement.

Team members must clearly understand their roles, and they must adjust to the various stages of executing a change effort. Just as the conditions of a caterpillar's metamorphosis affect the butterfly's ability to fly, the conditions of a team's evolution affect its ability to produce desired results.

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4. It enjoys a *nurturing context*.

Teams don't operate in an organizational vacuum. Just as a garden plant requires nurturing soil, water, fresh air, and sunlight, a team requires a context that enables it to thrive and produce. Mere "permission" to form a team is not enough. Appreciation is not enough. Sympathy is not enough. Even encouragement and cooperation are not enough. A team needs to be defended from the slings and arrows of the naysayers. It needs to be shielded from the grenades lobbed by those who wish to sabotage the team's mission. It needs a safe harbor from the bureaucrats who want to hamstring the team in endless procedures and paperwork. In short, the team needs explicit reinforcement from systems and processes and conspicuous sponsorship from credible leaders.

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5. Team members have ready access, individually and collectively, to *skilful coaching* on teamwork issues.

The GROW model provides a good framework for coaching. Here's a quick breakdown.

Goal—what do you want to accomplish? How will you know if and when you've reached your goal?

Reality—What is the current situation? What's the effect? What barriers to change exist? What's the distance between where you are and where you want to be?

Options—What ideas, resources, or courses of action are available to you? What are the pros and cons of each option? What alternatives may you consider?

What's Next?—what are your next steps? When will you start? What will you do to overcome barriers? How will you measure progress?

"Sometimes our best coaches are the very people we've been asked to serve." – Rodger Dean Duncan