



5 Steps to Being a Star Team Member

Advice From The CHRO—White Paper Series

Guest Authored by Bryan L. Olson, CHCO Columbia Care



BRYAN OLSON

*Chief Human
Capital Officer*

Introduction

It's relatively easy to find articles and training materials on building and leading effective teams. It is considerably more challenging to find content about being an effective team member. This article provides a five step approach to not only being an effective team member, but to being a star team member.

Why Teamwork Matters

Simply put, it's virtually impossible for organizations to be successful without teams. Most products and services that companies provide are a result of the seen and unseen work of teams of people. That's why there are very few successful organizations that have only one employee. Even the delivery of professional services is a team sport, rather than an individual effort. Think about it this way, when you last visited your doctor, was he or she the only person you interacted with in the office?

How important is teamwork to the success of teams and the individual members of those teams? There aren't many quantitative studies on the topic, but one of the more noteworthy found that "teamwork" is by far the most significant difference between high and low performing teams.¹ The study found that teamwork is the most significant factor in team effectiveness, accounting for 44% of the variance between high and low performing teams. The second highest factor accounted for only 4%.

For those of you more interested in qualitative reasoning, a Forbes Tech article included the following outcomes when explaining why teamwork is important:

- *Increases quality of output*
- *Increases learning*
- *Increases accountability*
- *More momentum*
- *Lows are less demoralizing*
- *Highs are more motivating²*

¹P Cantu, C. (2007). *Evaluating Team Effectiveness: Examination of the TEAM Assessment Tool.*

²Lau, E. (2013). *Why and Where Is Teamwork Important? Forbes Tech.*



Step 1: Communicate Constructively

The first step to being a star team member is effectively communicating with other members of the team. In today's environment of often globally dispersed teams, cultural differences in communications can sometimes make effective communication difficult. However, there is a simple approach that will generally do the trick to ease communication between team members. Every team member has valuable thoughts and ideas to contribute, and as a team member, you should step up and do so. However, you should do it in the most effective possible way – in a positive, confident, and respectful manner. This approach tends to work across different cultures.

Constructive team communication also requires effective listening. By this I mean not just hearing what your fellow teammates have to say, but actually listening. You don't have all of the best ideas. Your team members have important contributions to make. Listen to understand – not just to find an opening to make your own point.



Step 2: Choose to Share Information and Experiences

Strong team members keep their colleagues in the loop. Sharing information and experiences prevents surprises. A fully informed team is a more effective team and star team members do their part to help ensure that the team is all working with the same information.

→ **TIP:** *Don't wait for your team members to ask for an update, proactively keep them informed when something significant happens.*

It doesn't require a meeting to share information with your team. Much of a team's communication is informal. Take advantage of the many communication methods that are at your disposal to keep team members informed. Examples include:

- *Check in with a team member using internal social media channels*
- *A quick call to a colleague to ask for their opinion*
- *A short e-mail to co-worker to provide an update on your part of a project*
- *Stop by a team member's office to see how things are going*

Step 3: Check Your Biases

Star team members embrace the concept of diversity and understand that the best ideas and results tend not to come from individuals, but rather from a group of diverse, smart and hard-working team members. The challenge is that we all have biases that tend to get in the way.

Allow me to demonstrate this by sharing a couple of examples. One of the ways in which I drive my firm's employment brand is the effective use of social media. For example, using my Twitter account I share key initiatives that my firm has led and awards that we have won. I also tweet articles on leadership and diversity, and I share the occasional motivational quote. I have several thousand Twitter followers and thus when I share a quote it tends to get a few retweets and a handful of favorites.

The following popular quote is generally attributed to John Quincy Adams on social media, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader." Learning from the wisdom of one of the founding fathers of the United States can be motivating. The challenge is that it seems that he wasn't the person who said it. Rather, it appears that Dolly Parton was the source. When I tweeted the quote I attributed it correctly to Parton. The result was zero retweets or favorites.

Parton's long list of accolades include: 25 number one songs, eight Grammy awards, and two Academy Award nominations. She is co-owner of one of the 25 most popular U.S. theme parks and a film and television production company. In addition, she has invested in many charitable causes through her Dollywood Foundation. The evidence suggests that she knows more than a few things about being a leader. Did your perception of the quote change when I told you that she was the source? If so, that's an example of bias coming into play.

Another example is a Stanford University study that found the number of women musicians in orchestras went up from 5% to 25% since the 1970s – a shift that happened when judges began auditioning musicians behind screens so that they could not see them.

→ **TIP:** Check your implicit biases by honestly asking yourself whether you are discounting the idea of a team member because it's a different idea than you would have come up with on your own.

Perhaps Malcom Gladwell described it best, "all of us have implicit biases to some degree. This does not necessarily mean we will act in an inappropriate or discriminatory manner, only that our first "blink" sends us certain information. Acknowledging and understanding this implicit response and its value and role is critical to informed decision-making. . ." We all have these biases. The key is to be aware of them, challenge them, and keep them in check when you are working on a team.



³Porter, J. (2014). *You're More Biased Than You Think*. Fast Company.

Step 4: Collaborate

The most effective team members collaborate with their colleagues. Teamwork and collaboration are often used synonymously. So for clarity, here's what I mean by collaboration: to work jointly on an activity, especially to produce or create something. This seems to be the way the modern world works. Examples of mass collaborations (like hack-a-thons, crowd sourcing, and Wikipedia) abound, but the concept is also important on the smaller team-based scale.

There are a number of reasons that collaboration leads to teams being more successful, but perhaps the most important is that collaboration builds trust within the team. Collaborating with others causes them to need to rely on you and to trust you to get your part of the project done. If you deliver your part and work with team members to help them get their part done, trust will begin to form. Numerous studies have identified trust as a key component to the success of teams. If you are leading the way in creating that trust by fostering collaboration among the team, you will be taking a big step towards becoming a star team member.

Step 5: Commit to the Team's Success

Vince Lombardi won five NFL Championships, including Super Bowls I and II. In his honor, the NFL renamed "The Super Bowl Trophy" to the "Vince Lombardi Super Bowl Trophy." Here's what he had to say about committing to the team's success. "Individual commitment to a group effort - that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work."

Many high performing individuals are hard-wired to focus on excelling as individuals. In my experience, the leaders I have worked with who are most highly regarded are those who focus on the results and success of the teams that they are apart of. I understand that my experience is just one data point. For another point of view on how you can become a star team member, let's look to John Wooden, an American college basketball player and coach who as head coach at UCLA. John won seven national championships in a row, no other team has yet to replicate his success. In his words, "*The main ingredient of stardom is the rest of the team.*"

"The main ingredient of stardom is the rest of the team." — John Wooden



About GetFive

For three decades, GetFive has been applying a proven, targeted, strategic, research-driven approach to career development.

Ask around. Do your homework. You'll find we provide unmatched support, resources, coaching and insights for individuals, whether they're outbound or looking for new ground.

We power the success and growth of individuals and their careers.

800-538-6645 | [GETFIVE.COM](https://www.getfive.com)

45 West 34th St, Suite 1111 | New York, NY 10001



BRYAN OLSON

*Chief Human
Capital Officer*

About the Author

Bryan Olson is the Chief Human Capital Officer for Columbia Care, the country's first and largest medical marijuana cultivation and dispensary company. Prior to Columbia Care, Bryan was CHRO for global law firm K&L Gates, where he was responsible for the firm's overall human capital and talent strategy, as well as the delivery of human resources services to colleagues worldwide.

With over 25 years of professional experience, Bryan previously held HR senior executive positions at Aetna and United Technologies Corporation (UTC). In those roles he gained substantial experience in international HR operations, employee relations, human capital management, M&A, HR consulting, HR information systems, talent development, total rewards, organizational design, HR policy, employment law compliance and process improvement. Prior to joining UTC, he was an executive compensation and employee benefits attorney at Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meager and Flom, and he also held several positions with Fidelity Investments.