



FOR MANAGERS:

8 Steps to Building and Managing a Winning Team

Advice From The CHRO—White Paper Series

Guest Authored By Bryan L. Olson, CHCO Columbia Care



BRYAN OLSON

*Chief Human
Capital Officer*

Introduction

The primary purpose of a manager is to build and manage an effective team. Good managers do this well. Great managers build winning teams who work together to reach shared stretch goals and support each other in pursuit of those goals. I've had the good fortune in my career to have both been a member of and built several high-performing teams. I have come to believe that there is a relatively straight-forward process to building and managing a winning team, and this article outlines eight key steps to doing so.

Why It's Important

Gallup has studied workgroup performance at hundreds of companies and measured the engagement of tens of millions of employees. In doing so Gallup has determined that workgroup “performance fluctuates widely. . . [due] in no small part [to] the lack of consistency in how people are managed.” According to Gallup, managers account for at least 70% of the variance in employee engagement scores across business units. I look at it this way, a person’s manager is the factor that has the largest impact on their overall engagement at work. If you build and manage a winning team, you will have a tremendously positive impact on the work lives (and therefore, overall happiness) of your team members. That is a worthy goal and aspiration.



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: Get the Right People in the Right Positions

The first step is to get the right people on your team. To do this you must first identify the skills your team needs to possess to meet its objectives and accomplish its goals. These skills may include technical expertise, problem-solving, organizational familiarity, communication, and so on.

Then you must evaluate your existing team and determine whether, as a team, they possess the required skills. You should also assess the talent skills and abilities of your individual team members and make sure that they have the skills to be successful in their assigned roles and are capable of accomplishing their assigned tasks. Keep in mind that poor performance or low participation might stem from a poor fit of the team member to the task or role that he or she has been assigned.



Step 2: Manage Both High and Low Performers

After evaluating the abilities of your team members, you will likely determine that your team has a mix of high and low performers. Most teams start out that way and you need to manage both to build an effective team. Keep high performers engaged by giving them freedom to do things their own way. Point them in the right direction, be there to help and provide support, but give them a chance to succeed or fail on their own. Set objectives for them, not the specifics methods to accomplish those objectives. Empower them to take appropriate risks and give them stretch assignments whenever you can.

It's just as important that you do not avoid discussing performance gaps with underperformers. Take the time to explain your expectations and develop a picture of success. Coach, train, and provide frequent feedback to these employees to give them the best chance to be a successful team member.



3 Step 3: Motivate Them All Towards a Common Goal

The next step is to define your team's purpose. Involve the team in exploring and shaping a shared vision. As the leader, you can and should guide the direction of the vision. However, for the team to be fully engaged, it is important for them to have a voice in shaping the vision. In addition, no one person is smarter than the group as a whole. Each team member brings different life experiences to the conversation and the team will almost certainly come up with good ideas that you had not considered and improvements to your original vision. Once the shared vision is clear, translate your purpose into goals through shared goal setting exercises. Make sure to connect your team's goals to the bigger picture.

4 Step 4: Establish Effective Communication

As an HR leader, I often visit different locations and offices of the company for whom I work. One of the most important aspects of those visits is walking around and talking to people. I can generally tell whether a team is working well together and communicating just by watching how they interact with me and with each other.

Successful teams demonstrate two characteristics:

- Conversational turn-taking (everyone has a chance to talk and to be heard)
- Empathy (paying attention to how other team members are feeling)

These traits contribute to “psychological safety” – the shared belief and confidence that the team will not embarrass or reject someone for speaking up.

TIP: In the best teams, members listen to one another and show sensitivity to feelings. Encourage this by openly discussing its importance.

The manager plays a crucial role in establishing the team's communication cadence. Be sure to hold frequent, recurring team meetings. For larger projects you may also need to hold meetings of sub-groups within the team. Each meeting should have a clear purpose and an agenda.

Step 5: Build Trust

Trust is fundamental to the success of the team. Trust and mutual respect allow the team to embrace the constructive disagreement that can lead to innovation. As the leader of the team, you should communicate explicitly the importance of trust for the team's success. Create opportunities for team members to get to know one another personally. You can do this by encouraging informal discussion and personal updates. You might also consider using the first few minutes of calls and meetings for casual conversation or ice breaker exercises.

Step 6: Create an Environment Where They Have Each Other's Backs

Sports team coaches often talk about team chemistry, and how it raises the overall effectiveness of the team. Here are a few ways you can foster team chemistry:

- Find opportunities to get individuals within the team working together on tasks and projects
- Praise collaborative behavior – foster a sense of being dependent on one another for success
- Revisit shared goals frequently as a reminder that their work is important to the team and to the organization

Step 7: Communicate the Decision-Making Process Backs

The manager's role is often not to make decisions for the team, but to facilitate the right decision process under the circumstances. It is important that as a manager you help your team understand different approaches to decision-making and when it is best to use them. Options include:

- Majority rulee
- Consensus
- Unanimous agreement
- Delegation to designated subgroup
- Leader decides with input from the team

You may use different decision-making processes for different types of decisions. When making the determination, consider what matters most under the circumstances. Is it most important that the decision be the best possible decision, that all team members agree with the decision, or that the decision be reached promptly? Once you determine the decision-making approach in a given situation, it is important to communicate the process to the team. This helps continue the open communication and trust environment that you will have been working to create.

Step 8: Establish Accountability

The steps in this article will help you establish a culture of ownership and decision-making. You should then establish targets and hold your team accountable. Specify the tasks involved in accomplishing the team's goals and assign those tasks to appropriate team members or subgroups of members. Be sure to check



in on progress regularly according to an agreed-upon schedule to maintain accountability.

Once you've done that, empower your capable strong performers. You'll be surprised what your team can accomplish if you let them, and they may surprise themselves with what they can do. A word of caution is that when you empower your team members, you have to be comfortable that they can deliver. You need to provide them air cover, support them, and own the results with them. Thus, you need to be careful to only empower team members who are ready, willing and able to take on that level of responsibility. As Arnold Glasow put it, "a good leader takes a little more than his share of the blame, a little less than his share of the credit."





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



BRYAN OLSON

*Chief Human
Capital Officer,
Columbia Care*

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.