



How Great Leaders Build Teams That Function Like Well-Oiled Machines

By Wayne Elsey

I know what you're thinking: "My team isn't broken. Thank you very much." You may be surprised to hear that it doesn't matter if your team is functioning well or not; everybody could benefit from a bit of team building. It's proven that a high-performing team can expand any organization and make it more competitive. Also, nonprofit leaders now face headwinds, unlike anything they've faced.

Teams are often the most critical aspect of an organization. They are responsible for creating programs, marketing them or providing valuable solutions for those you serve and your supporters. A well-organized team functioning like a well-oiled machine will be more successful than one that's not.

Build Your Team

To build a team, you must first identify a good team with people who are both competent and team players. Individuals who don't want to learn, adapt, change or work with everyone on the singular goal of making your nonprofit the best in your community are detrimental to the entire organization's success. Further, it's essential to understand that not all personalities are created equal. Sometimes people just won't get along, no matter what you do. So, it's necessary to recognize this early to avoid wasting time trying to force two people who won't work well together.

The first step is understanding that each team member has different skill sets and personalities. Some people might be great at making presentations while others are

better at numbers. Finding this balance is critical in ensuring your team can function together well. If you have one person who's excellent at technology and another who's stronger in the boardroom, you need to know how to deploy them strategically. Ultimately, it's the leader's responsibility to figure out how to bring these different personalities together to work as a cohesive unit.

The best way to get a feel for what it would be like to work in a team is to participate in a team-building exercise, like Who Am I? For example, each team member could secretly be labeled as a historical figure. Once everyone has figured out who they are, the group discusses how they think that person would react if something negative happened to them at work. This leads to a discussion about how team members should respond when their teammates go through something negative at work.

Determine Your Leadership Style

A key element to figure out when assembling a team is your leadership style. Do you have a top-down leadership style where you're in charge of everything? Or, does your leadership style have more of a bottom-up approach where the team is in charge, and you only oversee the progress?

Often, people think that their leadership style should be one way or another. However, if you're not sure what approach would work best for your team, then try experimenting with different styles to see which one works best for everyone on the team. You might find that having both top-down and bottom-up approaches can create an even more effective team.

Many people are hesitant to lead because they think they're not good enough, which is why nonprofits fail. However, many qualities make up a good leader. A leader needs to see the big picture and take everything into account. They need to be able to make decisions effectively and efficiently. They also need to delegate tasks, assign clear expectations for each project and provide adequate training for everyone.

Leaders should also have strong communication skills. They should be able to articulate an idea or explain a process in a way that's easily understood by others. They need to know when it's appropriate for certain employees to have more autonomy in their work assignments while other employees require more guidance in their tasks. Lastly, leaders should have the ability to take criticism well, learn from past mistakes and adapt when necessary.

Understand Your Strengths and Weaknesses

We are all different. No two people are alike. That's why it's essential to understand your strengths and weaknesses. You need to know what you're good at and what needs work. For example, if you're a great marketer but not so good with customer service, hire someone who excels in that area to take care of that aspect for your business.

You will need to take the time to assess yourself and be honest about what you can do well and where you need help. This will help your team function better by having more people who can take on different roles in the organization.

Have Empathy for Others

Great leaders should see their team's success from a different perspective than others, and they should be empathetic leaders. They understand that each team member is different and brings a different skill set to the table. They're able to put themselves in someone else's shoes and see the world through their lens.

This type of leader will better understand your team's needs and how they want to get treated. It will also help you know how to motivate them best and keep them engaged in the process. Doing this will lead to overall success for your team and business.

Empathy is critical in reaching goals and becoming more productive team members. If you're interested in developing this skill, get out of your comfort zone by regularly stepping into someone else's shoes or doing something outside your specialty area. This will allow you to understand better how others feel about what they're working on and how they want to be managed and motivated.

Provide Clear Direction

The final thing a leader should do is provide clear direction — always. You can do this by assigning individual responsibilities, delegating tasks or setting goals for the team to achieve. A team will be more successful if the duties get outlined, and there's a sense of how everyone fits in.

Teams need to know their purpose and what they're working toward for your nonprofit. It helps them feel like they're all working towards the same goal. Without that sense of direction, teams can quickly become frustrated or disorganized.

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