Teamwork

Ken Stevens

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Who is this team?

In 1972 a crack commando unit was sent to prison by a military court for a crime they didn’t commit. These four men promptly escaped from a maximum security stockade to the Los Angeles underground. Today, still wanted by the government, they survive as soldiers of fortune.

Who is this crack team?

Hints:

- This is a Hollywood invention
- The series ended in 1987
The A-Team

The *A-Team* went off the air in 1987 – still wanted by the government.

Interestingly, there have been few better blueprints for team building than this Hollywood invention.

The A-Team’s key elements of effectiveness:

- a cigar chomping master of disguise
- an ace pilot
- a devilishly handsome con man
- a mechanic with a mohawk
- an amazingly sweet van
The A-Team

A-Team elements may not be what you need directly for an engineering project, but the blueprint is perfect.

Almost all successful teams have these in common:

- clear definition of roles: the hallmark of effective collaboration
- small team size
- presence of an outside threat
Teamwork

Most of what you read about teamwork is bunk.
What have you heard?
Teamwork

Most of what you read about teamwork is bunk.

- rowers rowing
- John Madden’s report of NFL “team players”
- “no ‘I’ in teamwork”

Truth is:

- One can only create an environment where teamwork can flourish
- Like striking it rich or falling in love:
  teamwork cannot be willed into existence
An “I” in team???

Teamwork is an individual skill

Title of Christopher Avery’s book, in which he says:

“Becoming skilled at doing more with others may be the single most important thing you can do” to increase our value, regardless of your level of authority.

Avery argues that blaming a “bad team” for problems is, by his definition, a personal failure because the very notion of teamwork implies a shared responsibility.

- You cannot control others, but you can control your own behavior.
- There *definitely is* an “I” in team (not the selfish “me”)
- *Example*: Neil Armstrong didn’t get to the moon through rugged individualism
Individual Team Accountability

We are not hard-wired to succeed at teamwork. *teamwork is something we must learn.*

Stanford research put children in teams to solve a task:

- The “alpha male” dominating and others disengaged
- Given individual roles and goals
  - Each person takes on shared success and failure
  - Children “*not only will behave according to the new norms, but they will enforce rules on other group members*”

Stanford sociologist Elizabeth Cohen
Team Responsibility

What encourages team responsibility?

- Economist’s view: based on personal incentives.
  - Cooperate when in self interest – a cost-benefit analysis
    - Lions cooperate to bring down large prey like wildebeest yet hunt small prey like warthogs alone
    - Free-loading: rampant in the wild, as in the office park
      - Impalas take turns grooming
      - Monkeys of Tai forest in West Africa divide spoils based on contribution (they work on commission)
      - All have memory of contributions: the “oversight committee”
  - ⇒ Mercenary mentality?
Team Responsibility

What encourages team responsibility?

- People will cooperate without any incentives
  Linda Caporael
  - “Group welfare” most often cited
  - Volunteer to church, club, sport team or organization
- Life’s richest experiences happen in concert with others
Key Lesson: Your Role in a Team

Research from Carnegie Institute of Technology:

“Even in such technical lines as engineering, about 15 percent of one’s financial success is due to one’s technical knowledge and about 85 percent is due to skill in human engineering – to personality and the ability to lead people.”
Key Lesson: Your Role in a Team

Dale Carnegie regarding courses taught for IEE New York chapter:

“They came to me because they finally realized, after years of observation and experience, that the highest-paid men in the engineering field are frequently not the men who know most about engineering. One can, for example, hire mere technical ability in engineering, accountancy, architecture or any other profession at fifty to seventy-five dollars a week. The market is always glutted with it. But the man who has technical knowledge plus the ability to express his ideas, to assume leadership, and to arouse enthusiasm among men – that man is headed for higher earning power.”
Key Lesson: Your Role in a Team

Observations:

- Teamwork is an individual skill that we must learn.
- It brings great personal satisfaction as well as mercenary success.

So how do we pick the best team to work with?
The Dream Team Concept

Is it even conceivable that the best don’t win?

- Pick the best performers in any field and bring them together
The Dream Team Concept

Is it even conceivable that the best don’t win?

- In 2006, the US Baseball Team
  - Players included Roger Clemens, Derek Jeter, Alex Rodriguez, Johnny Damon, . . .
  - They lost to Mexico, South Korea, Canada, . . .
  - Failed to reach the *semifinals* of the World Baseball Classic

- *Ocean’s Twelve*
  - Starring Brad Pitt, George Clooney, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Julia Roberts, directed by Steven Soderbergh
  - Tepid reviews
  - Grossed less than the star-less *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*
The Dream Team Concept

Is it even conceivable that the best don’t win?

- Enron
  - Fortune 500 company
  - Run by brilliant former McKinsey consultant
  - Paying fat salaries to graduates of America’s elite business schools
  - Dissolved into fraud and bankruptcy

- 2004 U.S. Olympic Basketball Team
  - Consisted entirely of NBA stars
  - Finished third and lost to Lithuania
Dream Teams

Does top talent imply team success?

- Can you assemble a group of stars or “silver-bullets” and sit back and watch them conquer the world?

The basic theory of the “dream team” is flawed.

- *If you assemble the top talent, you can’t even count on them to avoid embarrassment.*

So why is this the case?

- Why do so many dream teams fail?

- Why do so many of the most successful teams consist of individuals you have never heard of?
Anti-Dream Team Philosophy

Contrast the 1980 U.S. Hockey Team that beat the Soviet Union in the Lake Placid Olympics.

- Coached by Herb Brooks (who is he?)
- Picked players based on personal chemistry
- Assistant coaches complained that best talent was not included.

“I’m not looking for the best players. I’m looking for the right players.”
Signing too many all-stars

...Competition vs Cooperation...

“Some of the worst teams I’ve ever seen have been those where everybody was a potential CEO”

David Nadler, chief of the Mercer Delta consulting firm

“If there is a zero sum game called succession going on, it’s very difficult to have an effective team.”
Chemistry and Culture are Key

Worthington Industries, an Ohio based steel processor

“Give us people who are dedicated to making the team work, as opposed to a bunch of talented people with big egos, and we’ll win every time.”

John McConnell, CEO Worthington Industries

● Team’s pay is based on performance

● When hired to plant team floor, put on 90 day probation

● Floor team votes to determine if new hire stays

● Team members are frank and unsparing in evaluating contributions
Chemistry and Culture are Key

HP’s management culture under Bill and Dave – pre Carly era

- Employees highly valued – family feel
- “Management by walking around”

Intel’s management culture

- Only the paranoid survive
- Focus on third key element of team: “presence of outside threat”
  - My software company in times of threat and domination
Chemistry and Culture

Glencoe Ski Team

- No-one had ever been in gates before joining
- Some had never skied before!

Jesuit

- No boundaries like public schools, sports scholarships
- Collected best talent from whole area – the “dream team”
- *All* are current or past USSA racers

Glencoe was league champions for three consecutive years
Chemistry and Culture

Professional Sports Teams

- New England Patriots
  - Won three of five super bowls
  - Few stars and a $199^{th}$ draft pick quarterback: Tom Brady

- Oakland A’s
  - Near lowest MLB payroll
  - Nearly always at top of AL
  - Miguel Tejada offered to forego large free-agent salary to stay with team...
Build a Culture of Trust

Trust is the most fundamental element of a winning team

Can a team succeed if team mates think other members are:

- Withholding information
- Taking the credit for contributions they didn’t make
- Plotting to stab them in the back
- Lying
- Incompetent

Trust builds “synergy”

Lack of trust creates “dysergy”, where you’re lucky if $2 + 2 = 3$
The Culture of Trust

Dream teams produce lack of trust:
Belief that others have selfish, antagonistic, dysergistic motives

Trust may never extend very far in a top-level team.

“Building a really high-performing executive team at the highest level is a mirage. When such teams do exist, they’ll consist mostly of two people, maybe three.”

Management consultant who requested anonymity…
Trust

- Trust is extremely fragile and laboriously created.
- Takes time to earn

“A major problem is that people are transient” “there’s a constant tug to have people pulled out of the team. Instability is a major issue.”

Ram Charan
The Fast Track to Trust?

Can the trust-building process be sped up?

- 80’s epidemic of woodsly corporate off-sites
  - People falling backwards off tables into the arms of co-workers
- Today – reciprocal vulnerability
  - Share personal stories or revealing personality types
- Does this help?
  - Martin Griss, UofU professor, fellow HP employee and manager broke his arm in one of these trust sessions...
Trust

Required for a successful team.

No fast track, it must be earned.

There are a few techniques that help achieve trust.
Tolerating Competing Agendas

Team leaders must keep the inevitable personal agendas from becoming destructive

- In 1990’s Ameritech had an all-star team of top executives
- They ran competing businesses including Tellabs, Qwest, Cable & Wireless, EDS.
- CEO Bill Weiss told the team bluntly every week that if he caught anyone trying to undermine the others, the guilty party would be fired.

It worked.
Competing Agendas

Michael Eisner: on one of the best and worst corporate teams ever:

- With COO Frank Wells
  - They revived Disney to its glorious animation tradition
  - The movie business thrived
  - Partnership ended suddenly and terribly when Wells died in a 1994 helicopter crash

- With Michael Ovitz as president
  - Ovitz wanted stake in Yahoo, expand book and record business, buy NFL franchise
  - Eisner dismissed all that as off-strategy
  - Ovitz fired after 14 months due to conflicting business and personal agendas, Disney tanked.
Competing Agendas

Family Businesses

- Care to separate personal from corporate
Letting Conflicts Fester

Must bring tensions out in open and resolve them.

Col. Stas Preczewski coach of Army rowers at West Point

- Developed objective criteria to rank rowers
- Put top 8 in varsity boat, next in JV boat
- JV boat won two-thirds of the time!
Letting Conflicts Fester

Varsity rowers were full of pride over who contributed most

- Lined varsity crew into four pairs
- To wrestle – without punching – for 90 seconds
  - No clear winners
- Change combatants and wrestle again
- Third round rower’s could pick opponents
- One rower then started laughing, and it turned into all out brawl
- Humble realization: opponents are as strong as self
- Finally one asked “Coach, can we go row now?”

The varsity boat flew from then on...
Tempting though it might be, I can’t order you to wrestle...
Letting Conflicts Fester

Cubs Joe Tinker and Johnny Evers personally loathed each other. No better model of insight and cooperation on the field.

National Baseball Hall of Fame Library
Hiding From the Real Issues

George Kohlrieser’s approach:

- “Put the fish on the table”
- You’ve gotta go through the “smelly, bloody process of cleaning it”
- Rewarded with “a great fish dinner at the end of the day.”

Reluctance to be the one to put the proverbial fish on the table
Discussing the Key Issues

Jack Welch a great champion of this

- Corporate Executive Council team
- When met at headquarters:
  - Formal atmosphere, well rehearsed presentations
  - Little real discussion
- Welch moved meetings to off-site
  - Forbade prepared presentations, jackets, and ties
  - Lengthened coffee breaks to encourage discussion
- This “social architecture” considered a critical element to Welch’s success
Discussing the Key Issues

Prof. Graham Birtwistle (my PhD advisor)

- Series of “boondoggle” conferences at Banff
- Bring in the best in a field
- Formal meetings in morning, evening
- Day spent hiking (summer) or skiing (winter) with participants
- Best interaction and value of *any* conference I have attended
- Relaxed atmosphere to interact with the best
Dream Team Dream

Don’t be seduced into the false security of a dream team

- Only been one successful Dream Team?
  - 1992 U.S. Olympic Basketball team

- It was a one-time event with veteran or retired players
Teamwork Example: The Marines

“Throughout my career, “I” had to do with almost everything. Though I considered myself a pretty good team player, personal success and achievement were my real benchmarks. Yet everything I thought I knew about working with other people was about to change.”  

Jim Vesterman

Michael O’Neill
Two sheets and a blanket

- Three minutes to make the bed – hospital corners with quarter bounce
- Every bed in platoon must be made
- Proud that he was among top ten to finish “ahead of pack”
- Rip off sheets and do it again, “we’ve got all day to get this right”
- “Your bunkmate isn’t done, what are you doing”?
- Jointly made bed, then helped others

You can’t survive in the Marines (a team) without helping the guy next to you.
The other “I”

“Until recon school, I don’t think I was man enough to say “Hey, I can’t do this” or “You’re stronger than I am at this. I need help.””

Telephone pole drill:

- Race with team (6 men) to carry telephone pole without touching the ground.
- Come up with strategy on the fly, without time to organize
- Four carry pole, two ran alongside
- Guys hurting the most decide to switch themselves out
  - NOT the guys who had carried the pole the longest

You can’t survive thinking that you can do it on your own…

Put team success ahead of your own ego.
Leader and Follower

- Be both a leader and a follower
- Tremendous level of trust
- Strongest teams have members who transition between roles
- Think about team first – “me first” drilled out of them
- Moving as one - need binoculars from pack - guy behind you gets them.

“The strength of the pack is the wolf, and the strength of the wolf is the pack.”

Kipling
Team Size

- Two is a dyad, not a team
- 1972 Ivan Steiner studied team size inductively from 1
  - Potential productivity increased
  - Inefficiencies increased
    - Less motivation
    - Coordination more difficult
  - Productivity peaks at about five
- 1970 J. Richard Hackman and Neil Vidmar
  - The optimal team size: 4.6
- Jeff Bezos of Amazon: “Two pizza rule”
  - If a team can’t be fed by two pizzas, it’s too large

Keep groups small enough so everyone gets a piece of the action
Team Size

From a team of five to “the fab four”
Examples of Good Teams

“Team Edison”
Examples of Good Teams

Museum of Flight – Corbis

Boeing Skunk Works
Examples of Good Teams

The Macintosh Team

John Harding
Team Summary

Team Characteristics

- Clear definition of roles
- Small team size
- Presence of an outside threat
Personal Contributions

- Teamwork is an individual skill
- Your interpersonal skills as valuable as technical ones
- Chemistry and culture
- Trustworthiness – and trust in others
  - Resolving conflict
  - Competing agendas
  - Resolving key issues
- Team versus ego
- Lead and follow
- Team size
The A-Team

- Public appearance in 2000
- Fan question to Mr. T:
  Who is your favorite co-star?
- Mr. T’s response:
  “Listen, That’s wrong for me to pick a favorite, because I’m a team player and we were a team. Remember they say “there’s no ‘I’ in Team.”

...but there is a big, individual “T”