

PUBLICATION

Tips for Leading Successful Teams

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All successful teams have three things in common: 1. a well-defined purpose, 2. people who are committed to that purpose, and 3. a culture that nurtures and supports the purpose and the people. As a leader, you define the purpose and you choose the people. Then it is your responsibility to foster a culture that will allow your team to succeed.

1. The Well Defined Purpose

Why are we a team? A team needs a clearly defined purpose in order to be successful. Goals and purpose are not the same thing. You can only determine what your goals are after you define your team's purpose. For instance, you may decide that you need to have a team whose purpose is to develop a strategic plan for the future success of your office. You then determine what goals need to be set in order to fulfill that purpose. Those goals may include recruiting new talent, marketing to new clients, etc. Once the goals are determined, then you develop a plan to achieve those goals.

2. The People with "The Right Stuff"

Since it is the anniversary of the moon walk (and I am old enough to remember watching it), I have thought a lot about how the space program fulfilled its purpose of putting a man on the moon. First, it set goals – and very ambitious ones at that. They had to determine how to orbit the earth and get the spacecraft back to earth safely, and how to get an astronaut out of the spacecraft while it was orbiting, and so on, until they finally were able to put a man on the moon. Tom Wolfe's wonderful book, *The Right Stuff*, focuses on the team members who were astronauts. In selecting the astronauts, NASA had to determine who had the commitment, confidence and skill set to "be willing to sit up on top of an enormous Roman candle, such as a Redstone, Atlas, Titan or Saturn rocket, and wait for someone to light the fuse." You may not need team members who are as exceptional as the astronauts are, but you do need to spend some time reflecting on whether or not a particular person has the commitment and skill set to promote the purpose of your team.

Sometimes you will be asked to lead a team that is already in place. While you may not have the luxury of hand picking your team members, you do have the ability to determine who has "the right stuff" and who doesn't. While it may often be a fool's errand, you should never stop trying to engage those who may not be a good fit for the team's purpose. Try to find a way to convey to that person (or people) that even if they are not willing to embrace the team's purpose or the strategy to achieve it, the team needs and values their input. Everyone wants to be valued. Your goal should always be to never have someone on your team say that you did not listen or that their input did not matter. Every time you are asked to lead, you are developing your reputation as a leader. Demonstrating that you can manage challenges such as difficult team members, increases the confidence others have in you as a leader.

3. The Culture Club

I always thought this was a silly name for a band. But, what is a club other than a group of people with a shared culture – even if it is silly songs and bad hair? Once you clearly define your team's purpose and find the people with "the right stuff," you need to develop a culture that will fulfill your purpose successfully. In my experience, you cannot "impose" a culture on a group. To have a winning culture you need to play to similarities among your group that will foster a desire to win. Determine what makes them feel validated and

rewarded, how they like to interact with and support one another, and, most importantly, what motivates them to succeed. Your job is to make your team *want* to fulfill its purpose and you do that by understanding what makes them feel good about what they are doing so that they stay engaged in fulfilling the purpose.

There are dozens of books about team building and leadership, and I am pretty sure [Tim Lupinacci](#) has read all of them! There's no question that regardless of how many books he has read, Tim is devoted heart and soul to being an extraordinary leader. You won't get that from reading a book or reading this article. I believe that many of the greatest leaders are in fact "born" that way. However, an awful lot of them never realized they had it in them to lead until circumstances forced it upon them. I would encourage you to always be willing to move out of your comfort zone and trust your instincts when you are called upon to lead. People draw confidence and encouragement from those who do not shy away from a challenge. If you want your team to achieve great things, then you must lead by example.