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The Value of a Team

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The Value of a Team

Chuck Olson

Flashback to the "Miracle on Ice." A day penned indelibly into the records books of athletic history. The scene was the 1980 Winter Olympics, Lake Placid, New York. The U.S. hockey team, averaging twenty-two years of age, ranks next to last in their division. It doesn't look good for Coach Herb Brooks and his twenty-man squad. Defying the odds, one by one, they conquer their opponents—Sweden, Norway, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and West Germany.

The stage is set. The eyes of the world focus. The game is for the gold: The U.S. versus the U.S.S.R. . . . David versus Goliath. A classic mismatch. But when the final second ticks, it is the Americans-4 and the Russians-3.

The U.S. hockey team pulled off the improbable. How did they do it? They did it as a team. They knew how and were committed to playing together. Sports analysts summed it up this way: as individuals, they were good; as a team, they were great.

Teams are like that. They have many advantages. They produce superior results. They amplify strengths and downplay weaknesses. They rivet themselves to the vision. They develop people. And they have more fun.

Teams Produce Superior Results

It's no secret. Teams can produce greater results than individuals. From better and more creative ideas to better and more effective decisions, teams have the edge.[1]

Take for example the benefit of teamwork as it relates to de-

cision-making:

> Although many American managers receive powerful rewards for making decisions on their own, the results of extensive research (Likert, 1961; McGregor, 1985; Argyris, 1971; Lorsch and Lawrence, 1972; Jewell and Reitz, 1981) indicate that collective decision-making is a more productive process than individual decision-making. The overall quality of decisions and the general success rate of an organization increase substantially when decisions are reached through collective or consensus processes.[2]

The improved quality of decision-making through teamwork happens because of cooperation and collaboration. The members of a team combine their best abilities with each other to create an output that exceeds their individual potential. It's called synergy. "Healthy teamwork accomplishes more than merely getting people to work together. It produces synergy: accomplishment beyond the sum of individual team member contributions. Teamwork enables people to achieve the extraordinary through cooperation."[3]

The synergy that takes place in the arena of teamwork greatly affects creativity. It cultivates a rich soil where innovative thoughts sprout freely and frequently as team members till and water the garden of ideas. Each builds on another's contribution. "Most creative ideas are 'hatched' in a group environment as the result of spontaneous brainstorming and freedom from bureaucratic constraints (chain of command, rules, paperwork, etc.). Isolation and routine are poor incubators of creativity."[4]

The collaborative process is a beautiful thing to behold. A team member lays out a proposal before the rest of the team. Figuratively speaking, the proposal is placed at the center of the walnut conference table. Each member begins to examine it—looking at it from different angles and reflecting on it from different experiences. The interaction follows. Questions are raised. Observations are made. Clarifications are given. Challenges are presented. Affirmations are offered. And right before your eyes a transformation takes place: a good proposal becomes a great proposal. Through the collaborative efforts of the team a superior result has been produced.

Teams Amplify Strengths and Downplay Weaknesses

Another advantage of a team is that strengths are maximized and weaknesses minimized. "The purpose of a team is to make the strengths of each person effective, and his or her weaknesses irrelevant."[5]

Teams fan the flames of strength. They realize that the success of the mission takes multiple talents—more talents than one person possesses. They create ample space for gifted teammates to perform at top speed. They are not threatened or envious of the capacities of someone else. And when it's their turn at the plate, they give it all they've got.

Teams also downplay weaknesses. They fill gaps. They plug holes. They not only recognize individual shortfalls and accept them as part of the package, they go one step further. They compensate. Team members willingly and gladly make up for the deficits of others. When they cover for the weaknesses of others, they do it quietly and with grace because they know it's a two-way street.

Teams that win know how to shine the spotlight on their strengths. They also know how to dim the switch on their weaknesses.

Teams Rivet Themselves to the Vision

Another benefit is that teams do a better job of living out the vision. They are more effective in translating the big picture into the daily operations. "When teams work, they represent the best proven way to convert embryonic visions and values into consistent action patterns."[6]

There is a perspective available to the team that is absent to the individual. A team can step back and see issues and directions more clearly. They can more readily see how an action done on the frontlines of the organization either reinforces or sabotages the vision.

Teams rivet themselves to the vision by the simple fact of their size. Each person brings his commitment level to the team, and through the spirit and dynamic of collaboration those individual commitments combine to create a degree of commitment that could not be known otherwise. And with that deeper level of commitment, teams police themselves. They throw their own penalty flags. If a discussion or direction is off-target, they faithfully and relentlessly pull it back to the vision.

Teams do not require outside monitoring (though at times they can certainly profit from it). They have the advantage of being permanently glued to the vision.

Teams Develop People

Another positive aspect of a team is that they develop people. They invest in human resources. Teams realize that the accomplishment of their ultimate objective hinges on the performance of each member of the team. The stronger the people, the greater the product.

A determination to grow people replaces a competitive spirit with a cooperative one. The focus is no longer on comparing oneself to another, but on a liberating journey of contributing to the maturing process of a teammate. Team members take stock of their own gifts and abilities to see what they have to offer to someone else. It could be an aptitude, an expertise, or an experience. But whatever it is, it is not selfishly clutched, but freely shared. Teams know the value of people development.

Teams Have More Fun

We couldn't resist. The local snow-capped mountains gleamed with invitation. We hurriedly made plans for a father-son day on the slopes. Mountain High, Wrightwood, California. The brilliant blue sky provided a picture-perfect setting. My son, Dusty, laced up his snowboard and I snapped on my skis. We were off! Being anxious to ski, we hopped on the first chair lift that was in operation—without paying attention to where the lift would take us. You guessed it, right to the summit!

Well, to make a long story short, I was over my head. It was a double black diamond slope. Valuing life and limb, I popped off my skis, slung them over my shoulder, and walked down the slope—trying to ignore the chorus of catcalls from the pro skiers passing overhead on the ski lift. As I clumsily made my way down, Dusty would zigzag by me and offer words of encouragement. As he would pass by, I would tell him to go on ahead knowing he could get in a few extra runs instead of waiting for me. But he wouldn't leave. Finally, in a burst of frustration, I wanted to know why he wouldn't take advantage of this opportunity to go on without me. Dusty planted his snowboard next to me and lifted my spirit with these words, "But Dad, I just want to ski with you today, even if we need to go on easier trails. We'll have more fun together." He was right! We had a fabulous

and memorable day. Together we multiplied our fun.

That is the final advantage of a team: they have more fun! Here is a test. Would you rather be by yourself in the clubhouse enjoying your victory of the U.S. Open? Or would you rather be with your hockey teammates in the electrifying locker room celebrating a gold medal? Team victories are sweeter than individual ones.

God has created us as people who want and need to connect with others. Relationships can be risky and teams can be challenging, but the payback exceeds the investment. There is an excitement that comes when a team has struggled together and emerges victorious. There is a rush that comes when you give a "high-five" to your rookie teammate who homered in the bottom half of the ninth. Celebrating with your team is an event beyond description. Teams have more fun.

No debate, teams have many advantages. But, what does a good team look like, i.e., what are the characteristics of an excellent team?

The Team's True Colors

The meeting was over. It was obvious. The agenda, though, was far from complete. But the bodies circling the conference table had checked out long ago.

Bob keeps looking at his digital watch knowing that lunch is around the corner—angel hair pasta, with a red sauce—something to look forward to. Sue leans over to Bill and whispers that she'll let him know what she really thinks about the proposal right after the meeting is over. Tim is still emotionally stuck over the proverbial hand-slap he received when he suggested an alternate approach to the team leader's plan. He's through for the day. Michelle squirms as she alleges —unconvincingly—that Larry, not she, was given that assignment. Dodge ball was a lot easier at Crestwood Elementary. And Frank, the team leader, perched at the head of the table, ignores the team's input, and ex cathedra pronounces the plan approved. Funny thing, no one's surprised. It's business as usual.

Does this sound like an overstatement? Perhaps. But there is an uneasy ring of reality. Groups of people with a powerhouse full of potential leaving the boardroom defeated—men and women wanting to be a team, but acting like a collection of individuals. They are people who lack a clear picture of a true team.

What does a team look like? Some of its dimensions are sub-

tle, some more obvious. But when all is said and done, teams possess several identifiable characteristics.

Clear Purpose

Teams have a purpose. Call it what you will—a vision, mission, objective or goal—but whatever you label it, teams have it. They have defined and agreed on where it is they are headed. And you better not get in their way. They are sold-out. The dynamic of their team emerges because of their purpose.

A demanding performance challenge tends to create a team. The hunger for performance is far more important to team success than team-building exercises, special incentives, or team leaders with ideal profiles. In fact, teams often form around such challenges without any help or support from management. Conversely, potential teams without such challenges usually fail to become teams.[7]

The importance of having a clear purpose cannot be overemphasized. It is the rallying point for all present and future action. It is the unifying point for the moment by moment efforts of each team member. Without it, you cannot attract and retain quality people. Good people want to be a part of something significant.

Collaboration

Teams know the value of collaboration. They are convinced that something bigger, better and greater can happen as they bring their efforts into harmony. They know firsthand the principle of Proverbs 15:22: "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." They've made a choice—a choice not to be a parasite or a lone ranger, but a partner. Team members are interdependent people. "Dependent people need others to get what they want. Independent people can get what they want through their own effort. Interdependent people combine their own efforts with the efforts of others to achieve their greatest success."[8]

Interdependent people have a certain attitude. It's an attitude that diligently seeks out how they can make a meaningful contribution to the whole. Their part may factor out to be a mere 5 percent of the total endeavor, but they find genuine fulfillment in doing their part. They are the consummate team player.

Open Communication

Another characteristic of a team is open communication. Information flows like a river. There are no information power brokers. Whatever data is needed for the task is delivered. Communication is clear. No hidden agendas. Most often information is presented in person, which creates the best opportunity for understanding. Team members are provided with a real-time forum for questions and clarifications. When necessary, information is followed up in written form.

Disagreement Without Dissipation

Another way to identify a team is to see if they disagree without dissipation. Teams have the capacity and commitment to allow room for a dissenting voice. When a divergent perspective is given, each member responds according to the house rules: attack issues, not personalities. Disagreement is a team issue: processed and resolved collectively.

Teams not only know how to deal with disagreement, they go looking for it. They recognize its value. "Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man's rebuke to a listening ear" (Prov. 25:12). They want their ideas challenged. They invite cross-examination.

All the first-rate decision makers I've observed, beginning with Franklin D. Roosevelt, had a very simple rule: If you have consensus on an important matter, don't make the decision. Adjourn it so that everybody has a little time to think. Important decisions are risky. They should be controversial. Acclamation means that nobody has done the homework.[9]

When you let dissent and disagreement lead to a new understanding or direction, you forge a deeper level of dedication and unity. You move forward with greater strength.

Shared Leadership

You can spot a team by its willingness to share leadership. Though there is one person who serves the group as the team leader, it is not uncommon for the leadership role to rotate between its members according to the task at hand. Leadership is not reluctantly relinquished by the team leader nor is it greedily grabbed by the team member. The team is what is important. "For effective teamwork, the success of the team must supersede individual success: that is, individuals win or lose as a team."[10]

Because the team is so committed to its mission, it allows the circumstances to dictate leadership responsibilities.

One way shared leadership happens is when the team leader recognizes that a certain team member has greater skill or experience on the pending issue than he has. At that point, he passes the baton of leadership initiative. He allows the team member to lead the discussion, to identify the issues that need addressing, and to bring resolve as appropriate. It is a beautiful display of partnership.

Constructive Atmosphere

Teams are characterized by a constructive atmosphere. There is an air of vitality and health. The environment resonates with optimism and esprit de corps. Teammates enjoy each other. They talk, smile, joke, and encourage. Words like "thanks" and "great job" ring through the hallway.

Team members accept each other. They give grace. When tension arises, they deal with it—openly, quickly and constructively. There is no stockpiling of offenses. They listen to words and they observe body language. In short, they value quality interpersonal relationships.

Noticeably absent from the team environment are negative statements or put-downs. People look for the positive. Ideas are expressed in the vernacular of possibility. The butt of the joke is never a member of the team. If it builds up, it belongs. If it cuts down, it goes. They practice Ephesians 4:29: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."

Active Participation

Another quality that teams possess is active participation. Everyone joins in. Each person is committed to make his unique contribution to the team effort. Though they respect the fact that voicing an opinion and casting a vote are two different matters, they find great contentment in having the opportunity to affect the final outcome.

This does not necessarily mean that all organizations practicing participative management are democratic. Not everyone has an equal vote. It's possible that not all decisions are voted on. What is likely is that everyone has the privilege of trying to influence the decision-making process when the decision affects

him or her. At the very least, employees in a participative envi-
ronment are confident that management does not knowingly
and arbitrarily make decisions that are contrary to the welfare of
employees.[11]

Team members realize that each person processes informa-
tion in a different way and at a different speed. They make al-
lowances for these individual nuances. They may deliberately
seek out the perspective of the member who has yet to articulate
his idea. They may table the discussion until the next meeting to
allow time for reflection. What matters is that everyone has been
given the chance to shape the outcome.

Commitment

A team can be distinguished from a collection of individuals
by its commitment. Members of a team are dedicated to each
another and to their common cause. They are not only clear
about their role on the team, they are passionate about fulfilling
that role. What they do, they do well.

> The football team of Augustana College in Rock Island,
> Illinois has an offensive playbook this is so simple it can
> be diagrammed on a napkin. It contains only six running
> plays and four passing plays! Rival coaches admit:
> "Augustana knows that you know what they've got. But
> their execution is terrific." It so terrific that, in the seven
> seasons from 1983 to 1989, Augustana built a record of
> 77-5-1 and won four NCAA Division III champion-
> ships.[12]

Teammates look for ways to help each other. They don't sit
back when their part is done, they seek ways to make someone
else's load a bit lighter. Team members also know the cost of
poor follow-through. "Like a bad tooth or a lame foot is reliance
on the unfaithful in times of trouble" (Prov. 25:19). On the con-
trary, they deliver on their promises. "No organization can oper-
ate for very long if people do not do what they say (promise)
they will do. In one sense, all management systems are based on
promise keeping."[13]

Teams meet deadlines. They fulfill goals. They can be
trusted. They are predictable. They are accountable.

At its core, team accountability is about the sincere promises
we make to ourselves and others, promises that underpin two
critical aspects of teams: commitment and trust. By promising to

hold ourselves accountable to the team's goals, we each earn the right to express our own views about all aspects of the team's effort and to have our views receive a fair and constructive hearing. By following through on such a promise, we preserve and extend the trust upon which any team must be built.[14]

Consensus Decisions

Decision-making by consensus is another way to define a team. Though some decisions may be the province of another part of the organization, the decisions that belong to the team are made by consensus. Teams know that this type of decision-making process will yield the best product. "Consensus decisions take time and patience, but the decisions that result from a consensus are usually superior to decisions made by the brightest member of the group."[15]

Consensus decisions have two dimensions. First, there is a wide-open door for each to present information, to challenge recommendations and to influence the ultimate outcome. And second, consensus decisions seek substantial but not necessarily unanimous agreement. Once a decision is reached, teams show their true colors by fully supporting whatever the team decides.

Self-Assessment

A final characteristic of a team is that it is self-assessing. First, it continuously audits the progress toward the goal. Are they closer today than yesterday? Have they allowed their energies to be channeled in off-target endeavors? Teams realize that good activities can quickly and subtlety replace the right activities.

Second, teams measure their effectiveness in working together. Are they united? Is their collaboration? Is everyone carrying their weight? They ask uncomfortable questions. Their confrontational style is not designed to crush people, but to raise the team's potential in reaching its destination.

In a word, teams are different. They display characteristics that set them apart. Just assembling a group of leaders with these characteristics does not automatically make them a good team. It takes work and direction to build a team that people are proud to belong to.

Proud To Belong

Growing up in Los Angeles, I cut my teeth on Trojan foot-

ball. As a boy, I could not conceive of a better way to spend a fall afternoon than cheering for the gridiron men uniformed in cardinal and gold. Tailback University. Student Body Right. The history impressive. The traditions deep.

Pre-game was as stirring as the game itself. The Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum rocked to the rhythm of 60,000 exuberant fans. The USC Marching Band rang out with "Conquest" as loyal alumni flashed the victory sign in cadence with the drummer's beat. Tommy Trojan, mounted on Traveler, galloped around the playing field with sword lifted skyward in triumph.

And then my favorite part. The Trojan squad would explode out of the long and wide tunnel connecting the locker room with the football field. And just before the team would sprint to the sidelines and prepare for the opening kickoff, all 70 players would form a huge huddle. This huddle, steeped in years of tradition, was the emotional crescendo for the grassy war that would soon rage. With wild enthusiasm, teammates would pound shoulder pads and smack helmets while screaming words of encouragement and challenge.

That mammoth huddle of wide-bodied college students pictured something more than players prepping for a sporting contest. It was a portrait of people pulling together. People proud to belong. People dedicated to a common destiny. People exuding with excitement. People who could hardly wait for their chance to join their talents together. The body language was convincing: "This is my team and I'm proud of it!" The evidence was overwhelming; the diagnosis convincing: they had team spirit.

That is the third and final skill of a team leader. Not only has he mastered the art of selecting and developing team players, he also knows how to build team spirit.

What Is Team Spirit?

Team spirit is one of those concepts that is easier to describe than define. But in contrast to its difficulty to define, is its ease to identify. If you have it, you know it. And if you don't have it, you know it as well. Like whale watching, spotting team spirit is energizing, captivating, and worth the wait.

Team spirit is revealed in attitudes, communicated in words, and fleshed out in actions. Whatever the media, the message is plain: people are proud to belong to the team. People want to be associated with their teammates. They consider their team special—one of a kind. They believe in and fight for their cause.

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They not only find their work fulfilling, they find it fun. They want to contribute. They share success. Their coffee-break stories are about team victories. They say "we" a lot. And though they don't smack football helmets, they do slap "high fives." The atmosphere is charged with laughter, encouragement, promise, and purpose.

How Is Team Spirit Built?

How do you create team spirit? What can a team leader do to build the bonds of camaraderie? In answering these questions, it is important to keep in mind that team spirit is the by-product, the outcome of the time, attention, and care invested in each member of the team. "Team spirit is not something that can be manufactured by manipulating staff members' emotions at a weekly pep rally a la a staff meeting. Team spirit is a fruit. It's a result of much nurturing care like a growing plant."[16]

Listed on the following pages are several ways that a team leader can create an environment that produces team spirit.

Rally around the vision and values

There is great unity to be found and celebrated in embracing the same vision and the same set of values. This is essential given the differences of individual team members—age, gender, talents, backgrounds, educations, hobbies, zip codes, and more. These gaps of difference are bridged by a central, common cause—a place where everyone agrees, and does so with passion.

Fill the airwaves with affirmation

"One of the most common sins of omission to afflict leaders is their failure to affirm their team players."[17] That's a sad commentary. It may say so on your business card, but in reality you're not a team leader unless you practice the art of affirmation. In writing or in person, the leader delivers tailor-made words of encouragement. "A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver" (Prov. 25:11). He seldom fails to acknowledge something positive. "Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act" (Prov. 3:27). He not only praises in private; he also does it in the public square.

Occasionally, public recognition of a staff member's faithfulness and work should be given. This provides the opportunity

for the whole church family to affirm the individual staff member. This helps to correct the problem some people have of idolizing their pastor and treating other staff members as handmaidens. In some churches, if the pastor does not express his affirmation of the staff member, some church members will hesitate to follow that staff person's leadership.[18]

Pursue team members as people, not producers

Team spirit is fostered as the leader develops caring and supportive relationships with his teammates. He relates to people on a friendship basis, not on the basis on what they can do to advance his agenda. He conveys interest and concern for the personal affairs of others. His care is telegraphed through the questions asked and the attention given to their responses. His warm smile and gentle grip are ready reminders that they are not just a staff members, they are team members.

Share the credit

Assuming the team is doing a good job, the leader will be the primary recipient of the credit. How he handles this credit will speak volumes to the team. The stock market of team spirit soars off the charts as the leader broadcasts that any success is the result of a collective effort.

The leaders who work most effectively, it seems to me, never say "I." And that's not because they have trained themselves not to say "I." They don't think "I." They think "we"; they think "team." They understand their job to be to make the team function. They accept the responsibility and don't sidestep it, but "we" get the credit.[19]

Say "thank you"

"The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you."[20] Team leaders know that expressing appreciation is a small seed that yields a large harvest.[21] They don't take people's efforts for granted.

The message of thanks may be simple, but it is genuine. It is also specific, not generic.

Build trust

The leader understands that team spirit comes through the gateway of trust. Trust is the relational and emotional glue that holds a team together. Without it, doubts and suspicions

abound. With it, calmness and strength reign. Team members know that they work in a context of trust when they are free to fulfill their role according to their own priorities, their own methods, and their own timetables. They also know that they are trusted when new and challenging projects or ministries are delegated to them.

Pray with and for each team member

Team spirit is multiplied as the team leader spends time in prayer with and for his teammates. Besides the potent benefits of upholding a person in prayer, a strong bond of love and encouragement forms as two people seek the Lord together. Petitioning God for the success of a team member's ministry communicates that being on the team is more than the meeting of goals and deadlines; it is about dependency on and confidence in a completely sufficient God. Additionally, as the leader prays in person and in private, he will find his heart enlarging for both the relational and ministry issues of the team member.

Open the pipeline of information

Since poor communication is a leading factor in pastoral team breakdown, it is imperative that the leader keep the channels clear and flowing. "Communicate with everyone. Don't be a fact hog. Share information with everyone who is affected, not just with the key players."[22] With the fast-track pace of ministry, it's all too easy to communicate only with those with whom you interact regularly, neglecting the wider circles of the team, and creating a dark cloud of confusion and distrust. The leader can drive the clouds away with the strong winds of information.

Treat people as individuals

Another way to build team spirit is to deal with each person as a unique expression of God's creative power (Ps 139). "Nothing stimulates enthusiastic cooperation more than the sense of individual belongingness, acceptance, and uniqueness."[23] People thirst for a leader who will accept and value their differences. One of the key ways that a leader deals with people individually is by understanding and adapting to the various personality styles of those on the team.[24] The team leader will want to consider the beneficial resources available to him that will enable him to assess and respond to a variety of personality styles.[25]

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Value opposing contributions

To fan the flames of team spirit, the leader must value the opposing opinions and perspectives of team members. This is a watershed test of pastoral team leadership. "If the pastor is not big enough in spirit and broad enough in comprehension to embrace the staff's diverse elements and deal with them creatively, he is not large enough to bring a team spirit to the staff or the congregation."[26]

The issue here, of course, is honest and constructive opposition designed to create the best ministry alternatives and directions. To value this kind of input, the leader must keep alert to the subtle temptation to feign an accepting attitude while keeping a mental score card of those who voice contrary opinions.

Celebrate milestones

The team leader creates a climate of team spirit by celebrating milestones. These celebrations provide the opportunity to put aside the pressing demands of ministry and to enjoy the camaraderie that comes with being a team. Birthdays are fun milestones to celebrate. As a team enlarges, rather than celebrating the annual birthdays, it may be more effective to remember the "big O's"—30, 40, 50, etc. Recognizing length of service is profitable. A team leader may want to consider giving a gift at five-year intervals that is of a keepsake and displayable nature. A beautiful clock, with words of appreciation engraved on it, mounted on the office wall, serves as a daily reminder of one's value to the team.

Serve in the trenches

Team spirit is a by-product of a working environment where the team leader does not exempt himself from the daily grind, but rather serves shoulder-to-shoulder with the team. He models what it means for each person to lend his best efforts for the benefit of the whole.

Everyone on a real team, including the leader, does real work in roughly equivalent amounts. Team leaders do have a certain distance from the team by virtue of their position, but they do not use that distance "just to sit back and make decisions." Team leaders must contribute in whatever way the team needs, just like any other member. Moreover, team leaders do not delegate the nasty jobs to others. Where personal risks are

high or "dirty work" is required, the team leader should step forward.[27]

Rehearse the team "rules"

A team leader can enhance team spirit by continuously reviewing the team "rules." The team rules are the constants, the givens. They comprise the "always" and the "nevers." For example, the team always maintains confidentiality. Or, the team never allows individuals to "build their own kingdom." These rules need to be renewed constantly to prevent lapsing into old habits. For instance, if a team member in a previous ministry worked in an autocratic environment, he will need the ongoing reminder that his participation is welcomed and encouraged (even when he disagrees with the leader).

Value time together

The higher the premium the leader puts on spending time with the team, the greater the team spirit. Though the forums for logging time together are varied, the point is that the leader sets the example that quality relationships are fundamental to the success of the team. Like a bank, team members build up deposits in their relational bank account with one another that they will draw on in the future. The greater the deposits of trust, respect, and friendship, the easier it will be to deal with ministry or interpersonal conflict.

Some venues for spending time together include staff meetings, prayer times, and meals. A two or three day retreat, away from the phones and schedule, is an excellent forum for building relationships. A monthly dinner in a home is a great way to pull in the spouses. A semiannual barbecue at the park provides a fun setting to include the kids. Of course, there are no limits to the ways a team can spend time together. Each team will find much delight in designing its own creative options.

Encourage personal growth

Team spirit skyrockets in an atmosphere of personal development. From weekday seminars to continuing education, high-caliber individuals seek opportunities to increase their skills and capacities. "The best and brightest people will gravitate toward those corporations that foster personal growth."[28] With his overarching commitment to people development, the team leader will back up his support of personal development with the time

and money required. The return on the investment is significant because ". . . a person who is growing rarely leaves an organization."[29]

Provide appropriate compensation

A team leader can raise the level of team spirit by providing appropriate compensation.[30] The logic is simple: adequate compensation is essential for attracting and retaining the best people, and attracting and retaining the best people is essential for the success of a team ministry.

A team member weighted down by the worries of financial strain due to inadequate compensation cannot give himself fully to the work of ministry.

Compensation items to consider include salary, insurances (medical, disability, life), retirement funding, housing assistance in expensive communities, time off (vacation, continuing education, sabbatical).[31] Networking with similarly-sized churches in comparable economic settings will furnish decision-makers with helpful benchmarks.

Insure consistency

A leader cultivates team spirit through consistency. His actions align with his message: each member of the team will be dealt with in an equitable manner. No one will receive preferential treatment. The team leader considers the cost of inequity to be too high. "One of the quickest ways to lose the respect of subordinates and to lower the morale of the work group is inconsistency in day-to-day policy and partiality in treatment of one person over another."[32] A determined consistency in the work place produces a calm and content team.

Be approachable

By being approachable, a leader can increase the capacity of team spirit. Practicing an open door policy signals that he wants to be available to his teammates. But simply being available is not enough. The leader must also be approachable. Availability has to do with face-to-face contact. Approachability has to do with heart-to-heart communication. One test of approachability is the degree of freedom a team member has to disagree with a decision made by the leader. People know quickly when their input is being sincerely solicited and when it is merely being tolerated. The confident leader opens his door and his heart to his

team.

Advocate for needs

Team spirit grows as the leader advocates for the needs of his teammates. Often in ministry (depending on the manner of church decision-making), a pastoral team member will not be a participant in a meeting that determines direction and resources for his ministry area. When this occurs, great bonds of relationship and respect are formed when the team member knows that his ideas and needs are being championed by the leader. Advocating on behalf of a teammate includes both ministry (e.g., budget, personnel, facility) as well as personal matters (e.g., salary, time off).

Be alert to workload levels

A leader can stimulate greater team spirit by keeping alert to the workload levels. By being sensitive to the times when the load is particularly heavy (e.g., the Fall ministry kickoff time frame), he will know when to take his foot off the accelerator. For example, when the leader negotiates a new, less-pressing deadline due to the fullness of ministry, the team member is reminded that he is not only alert but cares about the day-to-day concerns of his life and ministry.

Validate distinctive team roles

Another way the leader can build team spirit is by validating the distinctive roles of each member of the team. Certain roles are assumed and played out within the dynamic arena of a team. These unique roles, such as contributor, collaborator, communicator, and challenger,[33] enable the team to sustain a concentrated effort toward the fulfillment of their mission. Because each role is vital to the success of the team, it is essential for the leader on a consistent basis to validate and use them.

Recognize accomplishments

Recognizing accomplishments cultivates team spirit. From a successful launching of a new ministry to the earning of an academic degree, it is not only important but it is also great fun to acknowledge the achievements of the team. Because of the bonds of partnerships formed in a team, each person participates and enjoys the accomplishment of a fellow teammate. The team leader searches for opportunities to step off stage and to let the

spotlight of celebration fall on someone else.

View failure as a springboard to success

Another factor in the cultivation of team spirit is for the leader to view failure as a springboard to success. It is motivating to know that one's failed efforts are seen as indicators of the willingness to pursue relevance and excellence in ministry. Untold possibilities of innovative ministry exist under the umbrella of support, affirmation, and permission to take a risk.

Insure resolution of interpersonal conflict

A leader increases team spirit by making sure that any interpersonal conflict is resolved. He knows that breached relationships can quickly destroy the unity of the team. "Managing interpersonal relationships among team members is one of the most important aspects of teamwork. Interpersonal relationships act as the lubricant does in an engine. Without attention to the way people work together, teams can overheat and teamwork can break down."[34]

Within the context of a team meeting, the leader talks a great deal about the importance of strong relationships. He models it as well. And when necessary, he will mediate a resolution to an open-ended dispute between team members.

Create team-building opportunities

A final way a leader can build team spirit is by creating team-building opportunities. He realizes that team spirit is developed not only in the spontaneity of life's circumstances, but also through premeditated plans. There are many options for structuring team building. A prepared inventory of team dynamics can be used to evaluate and interact on ways to improve cooperation.[35] A book on team building can be read chapter-by-chapter and discussed at a weekly team meeting.[36] The whole team can take a personality inventory and consider the implications for more effective team functioning.[37] One other idea is for the team to participate in a physically and psychologically challenging activity (e.g., a ropes course) where team-building opportunities are emphasized and accelerated.

Building an excellent team is a valuable aspect of any healthy church. However, it takes the recruitment of leaders with the proper characteristics and a leader who will work to build strong team spirit. It takes hard work, but once the team is

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built, it will be worth the effort.

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NOTES

1. Varney, 2-3.
2. Varney, 2-3.
3. Van Auken, 157.
4. Van Auken, 12.
5. Peter F. Drucker, *Managing the Non-Profit Organization* (New York, NY: Harper Collins 1990), 152-153.
6. Katzenbach and Smith, 19.
7. Katzenbach and Smith, 3.
8. Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 49.
9. Drucker, *Managing the Non-Profit Organization*, 124.
10. Varney, 6.
11. Quick, 25.
12. Thomas A. Kayser, *Mining Group Gold* (El Segundo, CA: Serif Publishing,1990), xiii.
13. Ted W. Engstrom and Edward R. Dayton, "Management by Promise Keeping," *Christian Leadership Letter,* June 1985, 1.
14. Katzenbach and Smith, 60.
15. Quick, 76.
16. Jerry W. Brown, *Church Staff Teams that Win* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1979), 81.
17. Robert E. Logan, *Beyond Church Growth* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1989), 50.
18. Brown, *Church Staff Teams That Win*, 85.
19. Drucker, *Managing the Non-Profit Organization*, 18-19.
20. De Pree, *Leadership is an Art*, 11.
21. See Appendix R for a sample appreciation checklist.
22. Maxwell, *Developing The Leader Within You*, 168.

23. Van Auken, 161

24. See Appendix S for a summary of personality styles.

25. Helpful resources for understanding personality styles include: The Personal Profile System (commonly referred to as the DiSC) published by Carlson Learning Company; The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator published by Consulting Psychologists Press; Bob Phillips, *The Delicate Art of Dancing with Porcupines* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1989); and David Keirsey and Marilyn Bates, *Please Understand Me* (Del Mar, CA: Prometheus Nemesis Books, 1978).

26. Don B. Harbuck, "Creating a Church Staff Team," *Search*, Fall 1974, 13-14.

27. Katzenbach and Smith, 144.

28. Naisbitt and Aburdene, 52.

29. Biehl and Engstrom, 201.

30. See Appendix T for a sample philosophy of compensation.

31. See Appendix U for a sample compensation package.

32. Pollock, 44.

33. See Appendix V for more information on team roles.

34. Varney, 66.

35. See Appendix W for a sample team-building inventory.

36. Recommended resources include: Parker, Glenn M. *Team Players and Teamwork.* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1990); Quick, Thomas. *Successful Team Building*. (New York, NY: AMACOM, 1992); Van Auken, Philip M. *The Well-Managed Ministry: Discovering and Developing the Strengths of Your Team*. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989); and Varney, Glenn H. *Building Productive Teams*. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1989).

37. Recommended resources include: The Personal Profile System (commonly referred to as the DiSC) published by Carlson Learning Company and The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator published by Consulting Psychologists Press.