

# **GREAT TEAMS: 16 THINGS HIGH PERFORMING ORGANIZATIONS DO DIFFERENTLY**

**By Don Yaeger**

## **Pillar One: Targeting Purpose**

### **Great Teams Understand Their “Why”**

The better an organization understands whom it serves, the more effective it will be in weathering challenges along the way. For that reason, a Great Team will constantly remind its players and employees that they are involved in something larger than themselves and their individual goals.

Growth of Olympic Men’s basketball; 1988-1992-2000 (won by 1)-2004 (Bronze)-2008  
-Continuity under Coach K → “It is important that every team member *feel* what the team values together.”

St. Louis Cardinals have utilized this lesson and condensed it into the principled lifestyle and harmonious playing style they call the Cardinal Way

“Culture must be reminded every day.”  
-Kevin Eastman

“If you have a bad history or no history-frame it. Frame it to your advantage. If you have a great record of success, stress it. If you don’t, tell your team that they get to go out and make it. Whatever it is, use your history to create energy for your team.”  
-Eastman

Declaration of Independence: Starts with a belief or deeper purpose as to why the colonies justified creating a new country

Companies that understand the purpose and philosophy behind the “why” are usually astute, high-performing organizations that tap directly into the pulse of those they benefit the most.

Millennials want to be engaged in doing something good for others in their jobs. Providing employees with a culture that emphasizes charity and purpose is an exceptional way for them to feel the meaningfulness of what they are doing and give them a sense of job satisfaction beyond simply hitting sales figures, client counts or other basic metrics of performance.

Instead of a “why” to motivate and unite team members, companies that fail often have only a set of performance goals and targets, which is not enough to motivate a team to greatness.

If a good team desires to become a Great Team, it must consistently communicate its “why”.

## **Pillar Two: Effective Management**

### **Great Teams Have and Develop Great Leaders**

Great teams that sustain success place a high value on developing leadership. All leaders should know where they- and their teams- stand on skills, strengths, weaknesses and latent talents.

5 common leadership styles:

1. Command and Control: Bob Knight, George S. Patton. Autocratic in nature; excel in reinforcing strong team cultures.
2. Relational: Good at building relationships, trust, respect and employee buy-in as a result of allowing employees to have a say in the decisions of the company. Joe Torre, Anson Dorrance. “Part of being a leader is getting to know your players.”
3. Expert: visionary leaders who are sponges for information and knowledge and who depend on their high level of knowledge or specialized sets of skills to guide their teams. Bill Gates, Phil Jackson.
4. Charismatic: Tend to be incredibly skilled at reading an environment, scanning and processing the moods and concerns of both individuals and larger audiences and honing their actions and words to suit any situation. Can have a down-side, especially if practiced by a selfish or short-sighted person. Have to build trust. John F. Kennedy, Pete Carroll.
5. Synergetic: Combination of all four leadership styles; has the best chance to create a Great Team culture
  - a. John Wooden: Solid Command and Control (simple rules and consistent), Relational (getting to know his players and tailoring his style to their talents, strengths and weaknesses), Expert (sold the vision through phrases), Charismatic (willing to share thoughts and ideas with anyone)

### **Great Teams Allow Their Culture to Shape Recruiting**

Purpose and leadership are essential to building a team culture. Great Teams recruit players who fit, who will thrive within the established team culture and add value to it.

In order to assemble an A-caliber team, you must recruit A-caliber players; people who are on the rise, who have high potential but not necessarily extensive experience, and who show promise to achieve superior performance early in their tenure with your organization.

Unfortunately, leaders who evaluate candidates from a limited perspective often make critical mistakes, such as viewing high performance in an employee's current or past job as a guarantee for future high performance in a new role

-Isiah Thomas and Wayne Gretzkey as coaches

Chris Peterson, Boise State football coach

-OKG's: Our Kind of Guys

- "You couldn't be the normal college student. We needed that special, humble player who is going to sacrifice and make their life simple."

-Have to really dig deep on someone to find out who they truly are

-Great recruiting of A-caliber talent can create championship teams, but only if the players who are recruited match the existing culture or help it grow in a desired direction

Jerry Tarkanian: Tough minded, inner city kids from single parent families who have an edge

Coach K: Kids that fit Duke

-Both won!

Be ready to make short term sacrifices if you believe that the long term benefits are worth it

Target, America's second largest retailer, keeps ahead of the highly competitive retail market by deliberately recruiting employees who value diversity and thrive on overcoming challenges.

Two key components of the Target culture are inclusion and celebration.

**According to data collected by the Intelligence Group, 64% of surveyed millennials desire to make the world a better place, 79% want a boss who will be a mentor, 88% value collaboration over competition in a work culture and 88% seek "work-life integration."**

Prospective recruits may be supremely talented, but if they don't fit within the culture of the organization, their talents may never have a chance to flourish.

Stephen Covey: "If you can hire people whose passion intersects with the job, they won't require any supervision at all. They will manage themselves better than anyone could ever manage them. Their fire comes from within, not from without. Their motivation is internal, not external."

“The right recruiting strategy brings in people who, over time, strengthen and build their culture. But the wrong employee does more damage, and inevitably creates more friction.”

## **Great Teams Create and Maintain Their Depth**

The top performing sports and business organizations all operate on the principles that 1) no team player is irreplaceable and 2) talent must be shaped in order to build a deep bench at all levels of the organization.

Additionally, Great Team cultures develop strategies for improving the quality of depth at various positions within the organization.

“If you have someone on your team that’s capable replacement, then you’re going to have a hole in the picture of your puzzle.”

-Jerry West

“One of the most difficult tasks is finding players who are willing to accept who they are and that they are not going to be a starter.”

-Jerry West

Kurt Warner for Trent Green/ Brady for Bledsoe

Shula and the 1972 Miami Dolphins; Morrall replaced by Bob Griese

Anson Dorrance “Competitive Cauldron”

“What I love about our competitive cauldron is the immediate feedback and also what it projected back into the practice.”

Dayton Moore rebuilding the Kansas City Royals

-Driven by the simple philosophy of caring for everyone in the organization as if he or she were family.

-Evaluated players on their moral principles with a unique qualifier; positive relationships with their fathers or other male role models

-These individuals were more likely to respect authority, show discipline and thrive on competition

Brenton Hayden, CEO of Renter’s Warehouse

-Identified employees within his organization who were his key backups and then exposed them to all areas of the business. He was transparent about his plan and encouraged these individuals to take additional responsibilities in the business.

One of the first and more important strategies is to be alert to signs of employee dissatisfaction that could lead to turnover. According to Fortune magazine, employees may signal dissatisfaction by disengaging from their work, being absent more frequently, and making more mistakes . . . all red flags that can result in turnover.

Even better, however, is to encourage retention from the beginning by building in opportunities for team members to grow, learn and advance within the organization instead of leaving it.

Embracing internal competition can also be a driving force in employee retention, upward mobility and innovation within the company.

“Our people are our culture.”

Leaders must take time to analyze whether their teams have the depth they need for success no matter the circumstances.

Team leaders should measure and possibly even display the results of their employees in order to keep track of performance.

Competitions provide an excellent opportunity for team leaders to promote a desire to get better.

## **Great Teams Have A Road Map**

A road map guides a team in its pursuit of greatness and forms a culture in which individuals can identify their long-term roles. No team can achieve long-term success without one.

Nick Saban “The Process”

Wooden “Pyramid of Success”

Bill Snyder’s “16 Goals for Success”

Jerry Reese, New York Giants GM first question for potential head coaches: Tell me about your off-season plans?

Great Teams adapt to change and update their road map to compensate for the growing needs of their organization

A good road map increases efficiency and streamlines organizational focus through clarity. It outlines team members' responsibilities and provides an opportunity to ingrain the organization's culture into its workforce.

You also plan for detours; obstacles will happen, and management should plan for ways to continue to move forward.

## **Great Teams Promote Camaraderie And A Sense of Collective Direction**

Camaraderie doesn't happen by accident; developing a strong sense of trust, accountability and togetherness around team goals requires intentional effort. They know the direction the team is heading and trust that their teammates are willing to work hard to accomplish their respective goals.

2013 Boston Red Sox after the bombing

San Antonio Spurs

- Developing camaraderie through open communication
- "There is an expectation to be prepared when you come in to our organization to have a voice." → RC Buford
- Poppovich: Each player gives a presentation on something that means a lot to them outside of basketball

Sylvia Hatchell: Tongue depressors/ popsicle sticks

"Organizations with multiple departments should desire to push themselves to be the best that they can be."

### **Great Teams are "connection cultures"**

"Humans have a biological need to feel connected. Furthermore, an employee's feelings of connection, community and unity are the most powerful and least understood aspects of successful organizations."

**"A leader can create a connection culture by sharing vision, value and voice. When that leader communicates an inspiring vision and lives it, values others and gives them a voice, they feel connected. If all three are recognized, then the byproduct is a great organizational culture."**

Leadership teams have to declare what they are trying to build by having honest conversations and alerting everyone of their roles.

Camaraderie is often overlooked, but it can be the greatest asset in unifying a team.

## **Pillar Three: Activating Efficiency**

### **Great Teams Manage Dysfunction, Friction and Strong Personalities**

Great team leaders know how to manage friction and personality conflicts to keep challenges from derailing the team's success.

Karpman Drama Triangle: Reveals the way that people involved in an interpersonal conflict tend to cast themselves in one of three basic roles; victims, persecutors or rescuers.

- Victims: People who feel forced to give in or give up when faced with conflict
- Persecutors: Individuals who force their own agendas and pressure the victim types to give in to demands or ideas
- Rescuers: Likely to intervene on behalf of the victims, arguing against the persecutors ideas

Kobe vs. Shaq

- Phil and Jerry West knew how to handle their strong personalities enough to keep the team from faltering
- In retrospect, both Kobe and Shaq were partially right. Each one was more than capable of leading a championship team. Unfortunately, the drive to lead was more personal for the two players, and with each refusing to bend to the others' will, the entire team suffered.

Mike Ditka vs. Buddy Ryan

Internal friction is one of the greatest expense items for companies

- 25% of employees were so upset by the idea of facing a workplace conflict that they called in sick or were absent from work.
- 10% reported the a project failed as a result of negative conflict
- 33% of employees said conflict resulted in someone leaving the company

Competing: Those that rely on their rank and title to force their way through conflict

Accommodating: Playing nice and giving into demands for the sake of peace

Avoiding: Not even confronting the issue and pretending its not there

Compromising: Finding a middle ground

Collaborating: Listening to all options actively and openly, consider all points of view and stress the common purpose and shared values of the organization

To avoid conflict, it's important that values not only be shared but also acknowledged

Once a month, IBM's management, sales teams and frontline employees would connect over a conference call to discuss and resolve issues so that workplace friction would not hinder customer support or sales. UNITY COUNCIL

## **Great Teams Build a Mentoring Culture**

Mentoring requires a large time commitment and is often neglected in organizations that fail to grasp its value and don't understand how it works.

The challenge for leaders is to clearly define each role and especially to establish a team-first culture in which individual players support each other for the good of the team

“Two Knucklehead Theory”: Jeff Van Gundy

-You can have one knucklehead but you can't have two

Bulls w/ Rodman

Spurs w/ Stephen Jackson

The ASTD researchers also discover that 75% of corporate ad executives credit their rise in leadership directly to their relationships with mentors.

In the SEAL teams we figured out very, very early on that specific mentorship of connecting a senior officer to a junior officer has a tremendous value.

Intel has three rules for its mentoring relationships:

- Partners govern the relationship, create meeting dates and ultimately decide what they would like to work on
- Mentors and partners draw up a contract that contains the details of the mentoring relationship
- Terms and limitations are left to be discussed and decided upon by the mentor and the partner, not Intel

Steps to create an effective, high-performing culture of mentorship

1. Be intentional about setting up mentoring relationships
2. Train employees at all levels to recognize every moment as a mentoring moment



3. Encourage team members at all levels to ask for mentoring opportunities
4. Foster a team-first mentality throughout the company, and engage team members at all levels with the purpose of their work
5. Remember that “team-first” applies to everyone, including the mentors
6. Combat jealousy and fear of mentoring by making roles and outcomes clear at the outset
7. Remind everyone that what goes around comes around

Mentors gain something from these relationships too, such as receiving a differing perspective about a common area of interest

## **Great Teams Adjust Quickly to Leadership Transitions**

Great teams adjust more quickly than their opponents and do not allow leadership to change to derail their missions. Great teams step up to the plate      GRADUATION

Pippen replacing Jordan when Jordan retired

The grooming model may work best for organizations expecting a change in leadership in the coming months or years, typically with a retirement on the horizon or a shift in executive leadership. Sometimes this works, and other times it doesn't.

Build A Bear's management identified five behavior-based actions that they, as leaders, could do to ease the discomfort of a change:

1. Be visibly passionate about the vision; keep frustrations private
2. Reiterate the long-term vision and specific goals as often as possible
3. Monitor the corporate mind-set regularly and informally
4. Identify progress and negativity quickly
5. Frequently remind the organization that is being asked to act differently in order to achieve different results

**“You are asking your organization to do something in a new way, every day, until it is a habit.”**

Always remember the importance of employee buy-in for a new leadership regime. Employ effective, creative strategies to build goodwill within the organization.

## **Great Teams Adapt and Embrace Change**

Charles Darwin has been quoted as saying, “It is not the strongest or the most intelligent who will survive, but those who can best manage change.”

Duke's Core Principles: Trust/ Honesty/ Teamwork/ Loyalty/ Care/ Collective Responsibility

Don't oversell and underdeliver, undersell and overdeliver

Blockbuster Video didn't adjust      ADAPTATION IS KEY

Verizon: Desired a critical place in cybersecurity and information technology solutions, so it acquired cell phone operator Alltel Corporation

“If you fight change, you fight the future. If you fight the future, you fight your success.”

### **Great Teams Run Successful Huddles**

But the Great Teams in sports and business use these gatherings in the conference room and on the field-huddles are meetings too!- to inspire confidence, encourage productivity and create a competitive advantage

Such leaders have the ability to control each meeting, not just because of position but also because they can identify what needs to be heard, what needs to be said, and the best way to say it. Leaders must ensure that meetings work to the benefit of all involved, that each meeting addresses the important issues and disregards the irrelevant ones.

Bill Walsh analyzed and even recorded meetings to spot potential lulls and weaknesses in their process.

The huddle was a place where everyone needed to be engaged and headed in the same direction

Joe Montana leading a huddle

37% of meetings begin late by an average of fifteen minutes. The studies, which surveyed 480 workers, also found that meeting delays disrupted creativity and hurt job performance.

A great team, therefore, will be intentional about how meetings are conducted.

G.J. Hart, CEO of California Pizza Kitchen, considers meetings to be opportunities for leaders to build a “block of trust” by listening to the perspectives of their employees.

Apple lists a DRI (Directly Responsible Individual) beside all items on a meeting agenda in order to clearly determine who does what task.      ASSIGN PLAYERS TASKS IFO TEAM

**“A well run meeting is a great thing; it empowers people to make decisions, solve problems and share information.”**

How to create great meetings:

1. Begin and end on time
2. Schedule meetings wisely
3. Begin with a shared or pre-read agenda
4. Engage employees with strong, emotion-driving content
5. Make the meeting’s objectives clear from the beginning
6. Don’t waste time with off-topic discussions
7. Allot enough time to necessary discussion points
8. Calculate the cost of all in the meeting and make the appointment count
9. Tailor the meetings for all participants
10. End the meeting by reviewing objectives met or decisions made

## **Pillar Four: Mutual Direction**

### **Great Teams Improve Through Scouting**

Having a clear understanding of how competitors do things can set up a company to do the same things better. The Great Teams in sports and business keep themselves keenly aware of their teams’ potentials and limitations by aggressively studying their own performances and tendencies.

Peyton Manning

-Pop quizzes for teammates

Herb Brooks, 1980 Olympic Ice Hockey Team

-Need the right players

-Grueling practices aimed at improving endurance

-Kept attacking the Soviets even when they were ahead, knowing that it would tire out the Soviets even more

The Great Teams understand not only how to scout but also how to exploit the weaknesses of a competitor. Successful coaches or managers have learned the value of utilizing an outside opinion to give them a fresh look at their personnel.

SWOT: Strengths/ Weaknesses/ Opportunities/ Threats

-Amazon has used this since its founding in 1995

Xerox leadership instituted a process of internal and external review that would eventually be called benchmarking

Leaders must understand the importance of scouting plays within their organizations as well as knowing their teams strengths and struggles

## **Great Teams See Value Others Miss**

The Great Teams collect that data and analyze it to recognize trends others might miss

2000's Detroit Pistons

Kevin Kelley: Football coach that never punts and always inside kicks

Billy Beane and "Moneyball"

Bob Ladouceur: Head FB Coach at De La Salle (CA.) undefeated from 1992-2004

-Each week during his tenure, Ladouceur would pair up his players and have them write down their conditioning, practice and game goals on cards and have them recite them to their commitment partners. The goals have to be specific and measurable, so that the team could evaluate as a whole whether or not each member had delivered on his commitment. Players who failed to live up to their commitments would have to explain to the team why they were not successful.

- "The idea behind the commitment cards was that I wanted my players to be responsible to each other and understand that their contributions impact the team as a whole . . . One or two players not pulling their weight can bring the whole team down . . . We really didn't care about visual acknowledgements of achievement, because it was secondary to the humility and commitment of personal excellence that our team stood for . . . I think the voice of a peer has more power than any authority figure or coach, and when our players started challenging each other to be better, the discipline and character of our team grew stronger."

Big data drives accurate decision making

Predictive stats can be highly profitable

Statistics help teams relate more with customers

Team leaders must be patient with their groundbreaking strategies take root and develop within your team culture.

## **Great Teams Win In Critical Situations**

The Great Teams in sports and business have developed cultures that emphasize the need to finish strong

Tom Coughlin → “Finish” in 2011-12

Grayson Allen for Duke in 2015 Title Game

Curt Schilling in 2004 → “Why Not Us?”

Tylenol in 1982 murder crisis flipped the script and talked about how they are making themselves better rather than losing business.

75% of those surveyed said incentives in pay were needed to get people to work hard, and 66% reported that their peers would not take on additional work tasks unless they were paid to do so

Leaders must realize that their employees want meaning from their work, not just money.

Only 30% of teams hit their goals when they received unique tasks in pressurized situations

Five keys that will help an organization prepare to win in the most critical situations:

1. Practice and conditioning
2. Prioritize
3. Evaluate status with clients
4. Play to your strengths
5. Create and celebrate mini-goals

## **Great Teams Speak a Different Language**

Many teams undervalue the art of properly framing communication, especially in times of struggle. Positive communication is not only a habit for high-performance teams but also a tool used to reinforce and enhance the values of organization.

“As a leader, you have to be precise with your language, so we try to be real specific with our language and knowing the power of talk, the positives and negatives of self talk too. If you’re unclear, they have unclear thoughts.”

-Pete Carroll

Coach Carroll made the point that he's never met a professional who wanted to make a mistake. But at that moment, a player is at the most important part of the learning curve. Great leaders take advantage of that moment, and a player's willingness to be taught, to speak a different coaching language.

When talking with players, work backwards from the end to try and figure out how you want to get there.

Flip the script; make the player speak first.

Bob Clark, Cal-Berkley Rugby

- Neuroscience, specifically positive reinforcement, revolutionized his program and teaching and his communication with his players

- Clark used this approach to revamp his one on one player evaluations, where he would make a point of communicating the strengths of each rugby player to that player in person

"I'm not interested in what people don't do well anymore. Truly, leaders should always put some work plans together to acquire skill in areas wherever there is deficiency, but ultimately you have to build on an approach or blueprint for individuals based on what their strengths are."

-Bob Clark

Spend 70% of your conversations discussing the players positives

Greg Kampe, Oakland University → "Wizard of Oz" and the yellow brick road

- The bricks are a daily reminder to our players that they are warriors, members of a team, and serve Oakland University and its nation of fans . . .

Whenever Disney management (or any fellow employee) notices a Cast Member truly living and expressing the company's service values of safety, courtesy, show and efficiency, they are given a card that makes them eligible for drawings. The cards have been beneficial to Disney because 1) leaders are expected to be on alert for employees who are living the values and 2) Cast members are recognized for doing their jobs well and reinforcing the culture.

On February 26, 2008, Starbucks closed all their stores in North America and took a three-hour "learning break" so that every employee could be reimmersed in the practices of making an ideal cup of coffee.

How to speak a different (business) language

1. Be an example for others to follow

2. Ask the right questions
3. Use effective verbal praise
4. Affirm character
5. Know how and where to affirm

Language matters. Additionally, verbal praise can directly impact the sense of “why” or deeper purpose for everyone on the team.

## **Great Teams Avoid the Pitfalls of Success**

A team that does not know how to navigate success will ultimately be thrown off track in its attempt to succeed further. The Great Teams maintain success by not falling victim to the pitfalls of human nature; they overcome common temptations, resist complacency and nurture a culture that wins consistently

“Winning takes talent; to repeat takes character.”

-The bulls-eye effect: Natural symptom of success. Any team that has reached the top automatically becomes the giant everyone else wants to slay.

-Complacency: Most common pitfall. Overcelebration can easily consume the mood of an entire organization, stifle improvement efforts, rot work ethic, and create laziness

-Fear of breaking the streak

-Staff turnover

“I told my layers that the only way we would win another championship was for us to develop the ability to be a lunch-pail team. We need to be workers . . . Every day when our girls arrived, they’d punch into the time clock and take their ticket. This was a symbolic way of saying and nothing else matters beyond this point, so check your baggage at the door because you are here to work.”

-Florida softball coach Tim Walton

“How you respond to a mistake is more important than the mistake itself.”

-Walton

Victory brings trophies and praise, but it also brings challenges and obstacles that are harder to identify because they are not dipped in gold or handed out as bonus checks.

Ironically, the fear of underperforming can actually create an underperforming team, especially if it’s members play “not to lose” instead of to win.

“It’s easier to get to the top than it is to stay there.”

-Bobby Bowden

91% of the top 1200 senior executives of the world's highest-performing companies reported that culture is an important component of success and sustenance. Another Bain study found that 81% of corporate executives agreed that an organization without a winning culture will never surpass mediocrity.

Southwest Airlines priorities → Employees/ Customers/ Shareholders

“We believe that if you treat your employees right, they will in turn then treat our customers right, and in turn that results in increased business and profits that make everyone happy.”

By maintaining a fun, open environment, Southwest reminds its employees to always enjoy their work.

Southwest Airlines is a Great Team because of its culture, its relentless pursuit of customer satisfaction, and its investment in its employees consistently place it leagues ahead of the competition.

What brings your success won't keep it.

“How do we respond after a record year? In what ways can we defy the natural human tendency to coast?”