



THE CASE FOR TEAMWORK

Building an effective, cohesive team is extremely hard. But it's also simple.

What I mean is that teamwork doesn't require great intellectual insights or masterful tactics. More than anything else, it comes down to courage and persistence.

And so, if you're committed to making your team a healthy one, and you can get the rest of the team to share your commitment, you're probably going to make it. And just in case you're not sure this will be worth the time and effort—and risk—let me make a case for going forward.

I honestly believe that in this day and age of informational ubiquity and nanosecond change, teamwork remains the one sustainable competitive advantage that has been largely untapped. In the course of my career as a consultant to executives and their teams, I can say confidently that teamwork is almost always lacking within organizations that fail, and often present within those that succeed.

So why don't we hear more about the competitive importance of teamwork from business scholars and journalists? And why do so many leaders focus most of their time on other topics like finance, strategy, technology, and marketing?

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Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team

First, because teamwork is hard to measure. Why? Because it impacts the outcome of an organization in such comprehensive and invasive ways that it's virtually impossible to isolate it as a single variable. Many executives prefer solutions that are more easily measurable and verifiable, and so they look elsewhere for their competitive advantages.

But even if the impact of teamwork were more easily measurable, executives probably would still look elsewhere. Why? Because teamwork is extremely hard to achieve. It can't be bought, and it can't be attained by hiring an intellectual giant from the world's best business school. It requires levels of courage and discipline—and emotional energy—that even the most driven executives don't always possess.

As difficult as teamwork is to measure and achieve, its power cannot be denied. When people come together and set aside their individual needs for the good of the whole, they can accomplish what might have looked impossible on paper. They do this by eliminating the politics and confusion that plague most organizations. As a result, they get more done in less time and with less cost. I think that's worth a lot of effort.

One more thing is worth mentioning. When it comes to helping people find fulfillment in their work, there is nothing more important than teamwork. It gives people a sense of connection and belonging, which ultimately makes them better parents, siblings, friends, and neighbors. And so building better teams at work can—

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and usually does—have an impact that goes far beyond the walls of your office or cubicle.

So what are we waiting for? Let's get started.