

# Leadership Qualities: Team Building

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Perhaps *brief* would be the best word to describe a good kettledrum solo. Even the best musicians in the world would have a difficult time coaxing variety out of the huge mother of all percussion instruments. A flute or trumpet makes for much more pleasing and melodious sounds. Still, there are few solo instruments that can sustain our interests for long periods of time. We tend to think of instruments like the guitar or the piano because they can play more than one note at a time.

The long-term attraction of a good orchestra is not its solos, but its symphony. Music is most moving when it blends and balances the voices of many individual players. Mix a melodious violin with the thunderous boom of a tuba, add the melancholy cello and the warm French horn – and the minutes turn into hours without our even noticing. Such individually diverse instruments come together to make a sound like no other and sweep us along with them into another place.

This same principle that brings success in the concert hall holds true in the kitchen as well. A good chef mixes ingredients like flour, raw eggs or lard – things that by themselves are unappealing; but properly blended, they become mouth-watering dishes.

Likewise, a great leader must know how to bring together diverse elements and create a productive group. Few skills are more important in leadership than the ability to build a team. A mark of a great leader is how many great people will join his or her lineup. The greatest king of Israel, David, had a team comprised of “mighty men”:

These are the names of David’s mighty men:

    Josheb-Basshebeth, a Tahkemonite, was chief of the Three; he raised his spear against eight hundred men, whom he killed in one encounter.

Next to him was Eleazar son of Dodai the Ahohite. As one of the three mighty men, he was with David when they taunted the Philistines gathered at Pas Dammim for battle. Then the men of Israel retreated, but he stood his ground and struck down the Philistines till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword. The Lord brought about a great victory that day. The troops returned to Eleazar, but only to strip the dead.

Next to him was Shammah son of Agee the Hararite. When the Philistines banded together at a place where there was a field full of lentils, Israel's troops fled from them. But Shammah took his stand in the middle of the field. He defended it and struck the Philistines down, and the Lord brought about a great victory.

2 Samuel 23:8-12

Because David attempted mighty things, only the mighty could keep up with him. Those who could not keep pace could not join the team.

### ***You Can't Do It Alone***

Don Bennett was on top of the world. He was wealthier than most of us will ever imagine. He owned a ranch, a ski chalet and an eight-bedroom waterfront home on Seattle's Mercer Island. And then everything changed. On a beautiful sunny day in August of 1972, Don was boating with his children when he fell overboard and the propeller of the boat ran over both of his legs. He nearly bled to death but managed to survive. His left leg took 480 stitches to close. His right leg was gone completely above the knee.

To make matters even worse, while he was in the hospital recovering, his business fell to pieces. Don felt like he had lost everything – except his determination. Amazingly, Don taught himself to ski again. Eventually, he would teach other amputees to ski on one leg. He started another business, Video Training Center, which listed such clients as Boeing and Weyerhaeuser. He started kayaking, and it was then that he began to dream of climbing mountains again.

Don had climbed Mt. Rainer in 1970. He decided to do it again, but he knew he couldn't do it alone. He hopped five miles a day on his crutches. With a team of four others, he made it

within 400 feet from the top before they were forced off by whiteout conditions and screaming winds. Four months later, he was training again with his team captain. They trained together for another year before returning to the mountain. He climbed for five days, 14 hours a day, sometimes hopping, sometimes crawling up the incline on one leg, and on July 15, 1982, Don Bennet touched the summit at 14,410 feet. He was the first amputee to climb Mt. Rainer.

When asked about the most important lesson he learned during the entire ordeal, his response was simple: “You can’t do it on your own.” He described how during one very difficult trek across an ice field his daughter stayed at his side and with each hop told him, “You can do it, Dad. You’re the best dad in the world. You can do it, Dad.” He told his interviewers that there was no way he would quit hopping to the top with his daughter yelling words of love and encouragement in his ear.<sup>1</sup>

You can’t do it alone. That makes a lot of sense! Few, if any, truly outstanding accomplishments can be achieved alone. That’s a fact that most of us are aware of. But what is not immediately obvious is that not just anyone can help. Don Bennett did not recruit his helpers in a nursing home. He built a team of people who *wanted* to climb a 14,410-foot peak and, perhaps more importantly, who *could* climb a 14,410-foot peak. One who attempts mighty feats had better be capable of recruiting a mighty team of willing and able participants.

King David did just that. His was one of the most celebrated teams in the entire Old Testament. This group was the all-star team of his battle-hardened warriors, celebrated for their valiant efforts. These men were ready, willing and able to step into the battle and lay their lives on the line for the man they knew was God’s chosen leader.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from James M. Kouzes and Barry A. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Keep Getting Extraordinary Things Done in Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995).

Several things stand out as we consider how David pulled his team together. First, he spent time with them in battle. These men were welded to David by the hot fires of battle. His inner circle consisted of those men who had fought alongside him. Men, more so than women, tend to be seriously bonded together by shared experiences. It is especially true that as men struggle together and endure fierce opposition they are most tightly knit. Men who train for battle as a unit understand that they are their brother's keeper. No one fights a battle alone; they move and succeed or fail as a unit. David knew these men and their capabilities, because he had seen what they could do with his own eyes.

Second, knowing that they were willing to make sacrifices for him, David made sure that they knew he was willing to do the same for them. When three of his mighty men risked their lives to obtain drinking water for him during a battle, David refused to drink it, choosing instead to pour it out onto the ground:

During harvest time, three of the thirty chief men came down to David at the cave of Adullam, while a band of Philistines was encamped in the Valley of Rephaim. At that time David was in the stronghold, and the Philistine garrison was at Bethlehem. David longed for water and said, "Oh, that someone would get me a drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!" So the three mighty men broke through the Philistine lines, drew water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem and carried it back to David. But he refused to drink it; instead, he poured it out before the Lord. "Far be it from me, O Lord, to do this!" he said. "Is it not the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives?" And David would not drink it.

Such were the exploits of the three mighty men.

2 Samuel 23:13-17

This was by no means intended to degrade their act. Rather, David meant to dignify it. He poured the water out before the Lord almost as a drink offering. His act of sacrifice communicated a depth of devotion and love that had to have impressed those warriors.

Third, they celebrated victory together. Time and again David and his mighty men faced seemingly insurmountable odds and saw God deliver them. Through these amazing victories, David and his mighty men began to experience the truth that the Apostle Paul would later share with the church in Rome: “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31b). Knowing that God would be faithful to deliver his anointed leader from dangerous circumstances, afforded these men great confidence in the battles they faced.

Finally, David honored his friends. These men were well known throughout the land as “David’s Mighty Men.” That phrase served as a banner that set them apart as extraordinary. They weren’t merely known as mighty men; they were *David’s* mighty men. A group’s strong sense of identity allows them to stand firm in the face of mounting pressure. As we read this account, one thing becomes clear: David knew he couldn’t do it alone.

The early church had this same mindset. In Acts 2:42-47, we read that the body of Christ viewed itself as a synergistic team:

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

There was a tangible sense of teamwork in the early church. These Christ-followers shared their possessions, met together regularly and ate “glad and sincere hearts.” Notice that Luke uses the word “devoted” to describe the early Christians. This is one of his favorite words in the book of Acts. Its roots are found in the idea of a steadfast pledge or a binding promise. Not only were these believers devoted to God, they were devoted to one another.

## ***Teamwork and the Trinity***

Strong teams functioning at their best reflect similarities to the relationship that exists within the divine Trinity. Scripture records the work of the divine trinity in the creation of the cosmos (see Genesis 1:1-2; John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-17). Thus, when a team works together in an other-centered manner, it mirrors, albeit dimly, the creativity and mutual regard that is derived from God himself. As Gilbert Bilezikian has written, “Whatever community exists as a result of God’s creation, it is only a reflection of an eternal reality that is intrinsic to the being of God.”<sup>2</sup>

The three persons of the Godhead are never independent but always work together in concert. One needn’t read very far in the Bible to discover this. In the very first verse (Genesis 1:1), we are introduced to God as the initiator and designer of all creation. The second verse describes the Spirit of God hovering over the created world. Notice that the Spirit does not construct the created world; he merely hovers over it – suggesting the role of protector or overseer. Finally, in the third verse, we find the Word of God as the executor of God’s will – the agent of creation.<sup>3</sup>

This perfect and harmonious interaction, though obvious from the beginning of the Bible, was especially evident in how God made it possible for people who were formerly alienated from him to be transformed into his beloved children (Ephesians 1:3-14). This passage, which in the original language of the Bible is actually one long run-on sentence, beautifully extols the work of each member of the Trinity in God’s scheme of redemption, work which corresponds to what we have just seen in the first three verses of Genesis 1.

Paul first spoke of the work of the Father in accomplishing our salvation:

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<sup>2</sup> Gilbert Bilezikian, *Community 101: Reclaiming the Local Church as Community of Oneness* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Bilekizian, *Community 101*, pp. 16-17.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love, he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

Ephesians 1:3-6

The Father chose us before the creation of the world and sent his Son into the world so that through him we could be adopted into his family. He planned all this out very carefully and initiated it at just the right time. God the Father is the initiator and designer of our salvation.

Second, the apostle focused on the work of the Son:

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

vv. 7-12

The Son makes the Father's plan a reality. In his incarnation, he becomes the God-man, the mediator between God and man. His blood sacrifice on our behalf paid the penalty for our sins so that we could enjoy forgiveness and lay hold of God's purpose for our lives. God the Son is the agent of our salvation.

Third, the work of the Holy Spirit seals and guarantees our spiritual inheritance:

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.

vv. 13-14

The Holy Spirit applies the righteousness of Christ to all those who are in Christ. He has anointed us, holding us as a pledge until we see Christ face-to-face. The Spirit of God is the protector of our salvation.

Thus, the Father initiated salvation, the Son accomplished it and the Holy Spirit makes it real in our lives. At the end of each of these three sections the phrase “to the praise of his glory” appears. All three are to be praised for their work in bringing us to salvation. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit perform distinct roles, but they work together in perfect harmony and agreement.

There is much talk about how to build unity among diverse people. If we go back to the analogy of an orchestra, you may recall how that orchestra tunes itself before the performance. The oboist plays the concert pitch (an A above middle C [440 Hz.]), then the first violinist plays the A, and the other instruments tune to that pitch. What follows can only be described as a bizarre cacophony at first, as you hear them make that strange sound only an orchestra can make. But once it’s calmed down, they’re all tuned to one another by tuning to the same instrument.

Jesus Christ is our guiding instrument. His incarnation sounded the concert pitch for all of us. As we yield to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, we find our own instruments coming more and more into the same key as Jesus. As a byproduct of this, we find that we are all in tune with one another as well.

### ***The Power of Synergy***

A team is capable of accomplishing things that no individual, no matter how multi-talented, could do alone. Let’s take a little quiz. Don’t worry, there is only one question: If two horses can pull 9,000 pounds, how many pounds can four horses pull?

Here's a hint: it's not 9,000 pounds. In fact, it's not 18,000 pounds. Believe it or not, four horses can pull more than 30,000 pounds! If that doesn't compute, it's because you don't understand the concept of *synergism*.

Synergy is the energy or force that is generated through the working together of various parts or processes. *Synergism* can be defined as the interaction of elements that, when combined, produce an effect that is greater than the sum of the individual parts. *Synergy* is a joint action that increases the effectiveness of each member of a team. To function well, a team must be committed to a common vision and purpose, and it must be willing to work in unity for the improvement of the whole rather than the advancement of any one member.

From a large pool of disciples who were following him, Jesus designated only 12 men who would become his apostles. This was such a significant decision that the Lord prayed all night to prepare for it: "One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles" (Luke 6:12-13). Mark 3:14 adds that Jesus appointed these 12 apostles "that they might be with him and that he might send them out."

Jesus knew that this was the team that would be with him for the rest of his ministry, and he was prepared to pour himself unreservedly into their lives. He would still teach the crowds, but in private sessions he now begins to pour out his plans and his character into these 12 men. Even in the midst of his greatest popularity, Jesus realized that the way to turn the world upside-down is to invest heavily in a few.

Nearly 2,000 years later, we are here to attest to that fact that it worked. Eleven of these 12 men became the foundation of the church, built on the cornerstone of Christ (Ephesians 2:19-20). Jesus' actions, the unshakable reality of the resurrection and the indwelling power of the

Holy Spirit turned a group of men who were characterized by confusion, infighting and self-interest into a genuinely synergistic team with (and this is perhaps the greatest miracle of all time) an authentic fondness for one another.

Today the church, the body of Christ on earth, is not an organization but an organism that manifests both unity and diversity. We're each a part of something; there are to be no spiritual loners in God's family. We are people who journey along the way with other people to whom we're called into a covenant of relationship. When we come to God, helpless and battered, nothing in our hands, and receive his gift of forgiveness and salvation, we are buying into a package deal. God says, "If you love me, you must love my people as well."

We live in an individualistic culture, but we are called to be people in relationship. We are not called to be the *persons* of God but the *people* of God.

One phrase that is easily overlooked in all this is the first part of verse 14: Jesus set these men apart "that they might be with him." Before they were sent out to engage the world in ministry, they were called to a personal experience with Jesus. Wisely, Christ never wants anyone to talk about Christianity like a salesman but as a witness, someone who has experienced firsthand what he is talking about. There is something about a person who has been with Jesus that is distinctive.

Most of us would agree: being alive when Jesus comes would be optimal. We pray, with the saints throughout the ages, "Maranatha! Even so, come Lord Jesus." However, is anyone of us willing to be presumptuous and assume that we will be alive when he comes? Can we be so certain that his return will come during our own lifetime?

It is wise for us to see how we can invest into other people so that the things we have learned, the things we value, the things we have built our lives around will live on after we are

gone. A prudent mind is always building succession. A prudent mind is always mentoring another who will rise to positions of leadership in the future. An old folk parable says that a wise man is willing to plant shade trees even though he knows he will never enjoy the shade. He's planting them for his children and his children's children.

We see a great example of the relationship between synergy, mentoring and teambuilding in sports. Many of the great coaches of our era once played for and coached under the great coaches of yesteryear. In the 2002 World Series, the Anaheim Angels squared off against the San Francisco Giants. Remarkably, both teams were managed by former teammates Mike Scioscia and Dusty Baker. Both men are among the finest managers in professional baseball, and they will tell you the wonderful experience it was to play for the legendary Tommy Lasorda. Byron Scott coached the New Jersey Nets to back-to-back NBA finals. He directly attributes much of his success to playing under the tutelage of Pat Riley. As the coach of the San Francisco Forty-Niners, Bill Walsh revolutionized the game of football with his "West Coast Offense." At least seven of those who were his assistant coaches have now been head coaches in the National Football League.

### ***A Team of Specialists***

Teams are comprised of positional specialists. These individuals have been recruited on the basis of individual ability and expected contribution. But they aren't a solid team until their individual strengths combine to produce an outcome which no single member alone could have produced. High performance teams are tough to build. So we look to the Master Teacher for a demonstration of how to recruit and mold a world-class team.

Jesus formed the most important team ever assembled. This team was developed to continue his work on earth (Acts 1:8-9). Luke recorded the continuing story of the apostles in

the book of Acts. The church they led exploded out of Jerusalem, around the world and across nearly 2,000 years of history. Mark 2:14-17 recounts a seemingly insignificant event – the calling of Matthew, also known as Levi:

As [Jesus] walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Levi may seem like an arbitrary choice, but as we saw earlier, Jesus spent all night in prayer before making his choices. In other words, he chose Matthew intentionally, because he wanted to show us something. By choosing a tax collector, Jesus demonstrated two important principles of team building.

First, he recruited specific people for specific reasons. Teams are made up of players. Players have positions. They are expected to contribute something they do well – ideally better than anyone else on the team.

Second, Jesus recruited an "odd" player. He began with a group of Galileans – working men, mostly fishermen, all with strong Jewish backgrounds. Then he inexplicably added Matthew, a tax collector and hated publican, to the mix. As far as the apostles go, this was the most unlikely candidate. As a tax collector, he would have been violently opposed by orthodox Judaism. In fact, the Hebrew word for tax collector (*mokhes*) seems to have as its root meaning "oppression" and "injustice." The Jews simply hated this oppressive system of Roman taxation. They hated the high percentage of taxes. They hated the sheer number of taxes: Polls, bridges, roads, harbors, income, town, grain, wine, fish, fruit, etc. They hated how their money was spent

on immoral and idolatrous activities. But most of all, they hated what Roman taxation represented: Roman domination of the people of God.

Consequently, any Jew who worked for the Roman “IRS” was viewed as a traitor of the worst sort. Matthew is therefore ostracized from all forms of Jewish life, especially their synagogue services. J.W. Shepard notes, “His money was considered tainted and defiled anyone who accepted it. He could not serve as a witness. The rabbis had no word of help for the publican, because they expected him by external conformity to the law to be justified before God.”<sup>4</sup>

Interestingly, as the writer of the first Gospel, we learn more from Matthew about Old Testament prophecies and Jewish traditions than from any other writer. Reading his book we would think that he was a Jew’s Jew. What are we to make of this? Perhaps Matthew longed for his Jewish roots and yet was hard-pressed by his job security. Likely in solitude he studied the Scriptures, coming to independent conclusions and an individual hope of the Messiah. We should learn from Matthew that those on the sidelines who look so antagonistic might just be the greatest members of our team.

As Jesus passed by, he looked at Levi. Most people would have tried to ignore the tax man or sneak past him. Jesus was different. He met Levi eyeball-to-eyeball and called him to immediate discipleship.

Matthew responded immediately and radically. Likely Levi was familiar with Jesus. The Sea of Galilee, especially this shore near Capernaum, is Jesus’ “headquarters.” Undoubtedly he had heard Jesus preach. He may even have witnessed Jesus’ call to the four fishermen. Certainly he had collected plenty of taxes from them, especially after the great miraculous catch (Luke 5:4-7). Though the text is a bit confusing on this point, Matthew probably closed up shop

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<sup>4</sup> J. W. Shepard, *The Christ of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), p. 143.

and then settled accounts with the Roman authorities over him. To do less would have been irresponsible and even dangerous, thus jeopardizing the ministry of Jesus.

It is one thing for four fishermen to leave their private business in the hands of their father. They always had the option to return. In fact, after the resurrection, the apostles returned to Galilee and spent their time fishing as they waited for Jesus. However, Levi's situation was different. He had not other options. He was a small member of a large corporate structure. There were eager young publicans itching to sit in his lucrative seat. When he left, he knew he was leaving for good.

In addition to Matthew the tax collector, Jesus also recruited Simon the Zealot, who was at the opposite end of the political spectrum from Matthew. Jesus taught his team of individuals to understand, appreciate and *love* each other. Jesus molded his team into a tightly-knit unit. But he recruited each of them on the basis of their individual strengths. He recruited people who would contribute to the other members of the team and to the team's overall objectives.

Teams, by their nature, require specialists. Specialists often differ in personality and views. Team members combine their strengths to help one another to grow and to change their world. Such a diversified team may be tougher to lead – but then training lions is more exciting than feeding goldfish!

### ***Trusting Your Team***

Every competent leader knows the importance of building a team. But how is this accomplished? Once again, Jesus provides us with an example:

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

Matthew 16:13-20

There’s one factor that may be more important to effective leadership than leadership qualities or extensive training. According to Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith, effective leaders, “simply need to believe in their purpose and their people.”<sup>5</sup> Katzenbach and Smith contend that the stronger this belief, the more it will enable leaders to instinctively strike the right balance between action and patience as they work to build effective teams.

Nobody illustrated this principle more effectively than Jesus. When Jesus asked Peter, “Who do you say I am?”, he wasn’t engaging the fisherman in an intellectual exercise. If Peter was to lead the church, he would have to have a grasp on the identity of Christ and his purpose. Peter didn’t blink an eyelid before answering. He boldly declared that Jesus was “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” When Peter confessed that Jesus was the “Christ,” he exhibited an understanding of the Lord’s purpose. He was the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior. He had come to save all who would trust in him.

Jesus responded not only by affirming Peter’s God-given insight, but also by expressing his confidence in the disciple’s future role in leading the church. While theologians may debate about the exact meaning of Jesus’ words, one thing is clear: Jesus entrusted Peter with a key leadership role. And that step was crucial to the future development of the team of men and women who were to storm the Roman Empire with the gospel.

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<sup>5</sup> John R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams: Creating the High-Performance Organization* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1993), pp. 138-139.