

Leadership instalments

Teambuilding for Performance

By Dan Gaynor

A FEW YEARS AGO, I VISITED AUGUSTA NATIONAL for the Masters Golf Tournament. The golf course is amazing – I don't recall noticing a single patch of brown grass or a scarred or discoloured tree, even the folding chairs and sandwich wrappers are green. Had there been a dying tree or a patch of brown sod it would have stood out like a siren on a quiet day. Augusta is legendary because all the individual elements, although unique and different – the hole layouts, the grass, trees, shrubs, concessions, seating and many others – enhance the whole.

Clifford Roberts found the site in 1931 and recommended it to the legendary golfer Bobby Jones. Together they developed the golf course we know today. From the 61 Magnolia trees that line the main drive to the famed Amen Corner, the two men created something remarkable by channelling their love of the game into the creation of a masterpiece.

Teambuilding leaders are creating masterpiece teams the same way – one piece at a time. They know that teams are nothing more and nothing less than the individuals they are made from. To create a great team you should make sure every role is well defined and then don't accept unnecessary compromises too readily. Here we find a common mistake: Too many leaders don't make the distinction they should between roles and people. While it may make sense to adapt roles a little to fit an individual's skills, this can become a dangerous practice. Soon, we've made so many changes, and just as often compromises, that the team no longer works as it was intended and we've lost the dream. Distinguishing between roles and people is important. Teams can only be great when each role is designed with purpose and contributes what it must.

This reveals both strengths and shortcomings in people. Some are well suited to their roles. Others are lacking. When this is the case, and provided all reasonable support has been provided, we must make a change or accept that our team will never reach its potential. Resolving these questions with care is at the heart of effective leadership.



Role clarity and individual performance is essential. But I'm also not arguing for perfectionism. This can lead to impossible ideals that discourage and dishearten team members. Perfectionists as leaders can be too uncompromising and inflexible. Reasonableness is essential to healthy high performing teams. Seeking perfection is as disastrous as paying no attention all – even talented employees fall short from time to time. Let performance against objectives over time and not day-to-day ups and downs guide your assessment of individuals.

Narrowing the focus places additional responsibility on everyone. Leaders who truly believe that every role is vital, pay careful attention to the way each is performed. Employees who know their contributions are vital, must ensure their performance *is* vital. Just as the groundskeepers at Augusta notice every unhealthy tree or shrub and quickly correct it, team builders recognize each and every employee who is not contributing and do something about it. Correcting a shortfall in one role changes the entire team for the better. Like a single drop of red dye in a glass of water, individual changes may seem small, but, one drop after another they eventually change the colour in the glass completely. We should not demand perfection, but we should make sure everyone contributes.

Don't get caught staring at the forest and overlooking the trees – great teams are built by narrowing the focus to individuals. By developing each position, we develop the entire team, one person, and one position at a time.

For more on the fundamentals of building strong productive teams call for a workshop.

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