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Talent doesn't make a great team. Alignment does.

3 critical lessons on team success:

Let's start with a story. Retired U.S. Army General Stanley McChrystal knows a few things about building teams. Throughout his career, he created alignment and comradery between disparate and often antagonistic branches of the military. In a talk on teamwork to Stanford students in 2014, McChrystal cited the failure of the 2004 U.S. "dream team," a group of world-class basketball players that paired young stars such as LeBron James, Dwayne Wade, and Carmelo Anthony with veterans Tim Duncan and Allen Iverson. Believed to be unbeatable, the latest iteration of the "dream team" was ultimately knocked out by Argentina in a huge upset. They finished with a disappointing bronze medal-but why?

Simple. The lesser team that beat them played more like a "team."

1. Talent alone doesn't make a great team.

- a. You can have the best players in the world. Without faith in your team, trust in their abilities, and alignment behind a common goal, you'll never perform up to expectations. Forget about exceeding them.
- b. The convergence of these is what McChrystal calls a "shared consciousness."
- c. You might envision this idea as similar to a state of "flow," the point where you become immersed in a task or project.
- d. Now imagine applying that same flow state to your team dynamic.

2. You've got to be aligned.

- a. Shared consciousness enables you to read, anticipate, and even nonverbally communicate with your team.
- b. Even when your team isn't immediately around you, shared consciousness enables you to act as if they are. You're all on the same page. You can anticipate how they will think, approach, and react to challenges.
- c. Goals have been communicated, tasks have been assigned, the plan is in place.
- d. Your team is functioning as a single, harmonious unit rowing in sync toward a shared destination.

3. Without trust you have nothing.

- a. When you are working with people you trust, you all move more quickly because you have confidence in each other.
- b. It's a relationship of ease and freedom.
- c. Instead of burning calories looking over your shoulder, you can focus on what's in front of you.
- d. Think of a time when the opposite was true and you worked with people you didn't trust. How much time and effort did you waste just trying to prevent them from messing something up?
- e. Trust within a team means you don't have to micromanage each other. You know your teammates will either achieve success on their own or come to you if they need something.
- f. You can focus on your own objectives, and they will trust you in kind.
- g. The important idea to understand here is that trust-building is a component of every activity and action.
- h. It's not something you decide; it's something you do.

Below are four actionable ideas for increasing mutual trust, the basis for shared consciousness on your team.

1. Experience other roles.

- a. McDonald's requires new corporate hires to flip burgers at a restaurant for their first few weeks on the job.
- b. The idea is this: How can new hires drive corporate strategy, manage compliance, or market the brand if they've never worked in their stores?

2. Build cross-functional teams.

- a. Teams that consistently work together, with similar skills and overlapping tasks, are much more likely to be well coordinated.
- b. Eradicate internal silos by building teams made up of people from different functions wherever possible.

3. Develop "battle rhythms."

- a. Creating predictable, frequent rhythms allows groups to better synchronize their activities, and in turn, develop a common way of thinking.
- b. Everyone knows when tasks are scheduled to take place and nothing is left to chance.
- c. Think about your business routines. Are you falling into these traps?
 - i. Infrequent planning
 - ii. Making decisions only when necessary
 - iii. Reviewing processes after they are broken
- d. Implementing battle rhythms ensures each process is reviewed on a pre-set schedule.

4. Maximize sharing.

- a. To create an environment in which your peers can think like you, they need to know everything relevant that you know.
- b. As you seek to share consciousness, you'll first need to share information. Sounds simple, right? It should be.
- c. What often doesn't get shared is how you approach problems and make decisions.
- d. Problem-solving involves a fantastic amount of knowledge.
 - i. What you know
 - ii. What data you rely on
 - iii. What your assumptions are
 - iv. What mental models you apply.
- e. Teach your team to think like you.

Let's recap.

As with many things in life, the plan is simple, but that doesn't mean it's easy. Building a culture of faith, alignment and trust takes effort--and it takes time.

I hope you'll start now.