

CHAMPION TEAM VS TEAM OF CHAMPIONS

IF it is possible for you to build a champion team full of champion people, then do it! This is the realm of total domination in the market and the aspirational "gold standard".

But for most organisations, the top talent, the superstars and the rainmakers are not in abundant supply. Let's be honest, there aren't many of them in the first place. That's what makes them exceptional.

For the vast majority of organisations, creating a champion team full of the right mix of people, who can then be developed into high performers, is the next best approach.

There are two other scenarios worth mentioning. Firstly, a dysfunctional team full of the wrong people. Surely this needs no explanation, but you may well have one of these. This scenario is a sure-fire way of creating mediocre performance and significant management drain.

Also, beware of a functional team full of champions. On the surface this looks pretty handy. The people are strong and the team culture isn't broken.

However, my theory suggests that a team of champions not working together in an optimal manner is less effective than a team of good players who are working together in an optimal manner.

So given that most companies won't have superstars in abundance, this is surely the goal. How can you create a champion team?

HERE ARE SOME GUIDELINES.

» VISION

A winning vision, which is more than just words written on the wall of conference room, can coalesce a group of 'lone wolves' into a highly collaborative team. The essence here though is that the vision must permeate the DNA of the organisation.

The leader lives and breathes it, communicates it relentlessly and reinforces it until it sticks. Getting the right vision is a critical piece, of course, but people gel around a common identity to follow.

» LEADERSHIP

Leadership is not a fancy title or a position of authority. Leadership is the ability for a person to rally the troops for battle, to inspire and empower people to be and do more.

Leaders not only lead but are willingly followed, whereas managers may merely be tolerated but not followed. Leadership creates a champion team, where all of the players are pulling in the same direction.

» CULTURE

This is probably one of the most important aspects of creating a champion team. Culture is so important that it pulls all of the other variables together.

Getting clear on exactly what the right culture needs to be and then working out how to drive this through the team is time well invested.

There are some factors that are important to consider. Firstly, the culture must be aligned to the attainment of business objectives and revenue targets.

Secondly, every person on the team must contribute to the culture and thrive from being a part of the culture, including the leaders.

There is no place on the team for people who don't meet those two criteria. People who can't contribute to the culture will end up diluting it, and those who are not thriving from the culture are not the right fit.

Both of these scenarios will create fractures. Once the culture is clear, recruit people who fit into the culture, as this makes personnel selection easier.

» VALUES

Having a set of values that the champion team upholds gives each team member a compass to navigate. While culture can be quite intangible, values are highly tangible.

They offer a roadmap for people to follow and a sanity check against which to base decision-making. Values can be reinforced and communicated. They also provide a bearing to drive behaviours.

» BEHAVIOURS

Ultimately, action is the precursor for execution and results. Define the behaviours and actions that create optimal results and that are aligned to the culture.

Ensure that these behaviours are understood and weaved into the fabric of the salesperson's role. Behaviours that create optimal results benefit the organisation just as they benefit the individual.

However, not all teams have taken the time to define these and implement them into their organisation. Don't miss this; behaviours become habitual and reinforcing strong habits creates a strong culture of success. This is a nice feedback loop.

However, behaviours and skills, while desirable, are not necessarily easy to do and people need equipping to succeed.

» SALES DEVELOPMENT AND EQUIPPING

Developing, empowering and upskilling your sales force is a relentless pursuit. It doesn't stop. Unfortunately, for some organisations it doesn't even start!

Champion teams constantly refine and improve their skills. It is the same in sports. A sports club wouldn't dream of fielding their team without adequate preparation – so why should your sales team be any different?

Champion teams win, and winning teams prepare and practise until high performance is the norm.

PARTING THOUGHTS

This is an intricate balance of talent, capability and culture, which, when fine-tuned within your unique organisation, can create a self-perpetuating cycle.

Well-developed and managed talent creates strong execution capability that positively impacts on culture. In turn, strong culture attracts great talent and great talent enables strong capability.

THE MODERN RULES OF SELLING

LET'S TALK SALES



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THIS is an era of disruption. The social and mobile explosion has changed the customer landscape forever. For some sectors their ecosystem is migrating through a rapid transformation.

Our (retail) customers will still need banking, but they won't need banks. Now that's a shift in environment!

Here are the modern rules of selling. You can ignore them if you like but your customers won't.



RULE NO 1:
Your business model is outdated. Your customers want something different. Understand what that is, have the foresight and courage to change (quickly) and equip your sales staff with the tools to take that to market.



RULE NO 2:
Your customers know about your offerings and your competitors' offerings more than you do. Or at least they think they do – which is even worse! They have made a judgment of you before you even had a chance to influence them.
Your sales force must be skilled in the art of reframing, re-engineering and challenging your customers' thinking.



RULE NO 3:
Your market is becoming commoditised. You look and sound the same as your competitors. You don't stand out. "Disruptive innovation" will or has already jostled its way into your sector. Work out how you can disrupt the status quo in your space.
What's your micro-niche? What's your edge? How do your customer team position that in the minds of your buyers?



RULE NO 4:
The rules have changed. In fact, the rules need to be re-written – by you. Leave the safe shoreline and venture out into the sea of innovation.
Re-write the rules. Change the customer offering. Change the value proposition.



RULE NO 5:
Your customers demand content, not just advertisement. Your customers hang out on social platforms. Are your salespeople there too?
Every company has a social strategy these days but what's the social strategy of your sales team? Are they unified across social platforms? Is their content consistent? Are they even using it to engage, generate and influence?

THAT'S ENOUGH TO GET YOU STARTED

The next thing that I would like to share on is the alternative points of view in sales and business.

Sometimes, what you read in the manual really only works in the manual. My experience has taught me that in real life, things work differently.

Here are five alternative perspectives.

1 THE CUSTOMER IS ALWAYS RIGHT

Apart from when they are wrong. In business and sales it's not only okay to challenge your prospect's thinking.

It's actually very effective in winning a business, if done correctly, elegantly and in the right circumstances. Don't just disagree for the sake of it!

2 YOUR JOB IS NOT TO MAKE A SALE; IT'S TO DELIVER VALUE

Too many salespeople get this confused. Their raison d'être is to close the sale at all costs, regardless of whether it's of benefit to the customer.

I say explore if there is, genuinely, any value in the transaction taking place (partnership, sales, merger, exchange, etc). If there is, proceed. If there isn't any value, then it's your call.

3 SALES LEADERS SHOULD BE THE BEST AT SELLING

No, not necessarily. They must be proficient of course, but not the best. They should, however, be accomplished at leading salespeople. Different skillset, different role. Don't blur them.

4 A CHAMPION TEAM TENDS TO BEAT A TEAM OF CHAMPIONS

A cohesive culture with teamwork and collaboration at its core tends to produce better outcomes than a group of lone assassins.

While leading high-performing sales floors, I have sacrificed strong salesmanship for cultural fit with new hires on many occasions; and I have never regretted that decision.

5 YOU ARE BUYING AND SELLING

Some clients are actually not worth doing business with. Controversial? Maybe. But it's true.

You don't have to do business with everyone. You can "buy" as well as sell. Try being more selective and picking only the right opportunities to sink resources into.

Remember, some rules can stay in the rulebook. You decide if they apply in your business or not.

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SCALING YOUR COMPANY? 3 ISSUES TO AVOID

SCALABILITY is high on the agenda for many CEOs (chief executive officers), and rightly so. From a sales and revenue perspective, the premise is a simple one: Scale the sales force and scale the revenue (with a bit of luck, the profitability too).

Of course scaling the business is not isolated to just the sales force. All other core and supporting functions typically get the same treatment.

However, with scale come potential problems. Let's look at the revenue generation engine of the organisation, the sales department, and explore some common scenarios that can play out.

Clearly this is not an exhaustive list, but here are three situations to avoid:

1 SCALING WITHOUT SALES CAPABILITY

Often, the decision to scale is driven by decent revenue being generated from an existing or small sales force. The numbers are strong, the profit is solid and therefore, increasing the headcount should result in the requisite growth factor.

The issue is that capability doesn't scale at a proportional rate with headcount. It lags. Increasing headcount is not a particularly difficult or lengthy task, but finding and developing capable talent can be.

While the capability lags, so does the revenue. But where pain is really felt, is the impact on profits as the business is carrying the costs without the returns.

2 SCALING WITHOUT LEADERSHIP CAPABILITY

This is a big one. Finding capable sales talent is one thing, finding effective sales leadership is another thing altogether. Often, salespeople are moved into management positions prematurely, purely as the management requirement increases.

Sales leadership during times of scale reaches far beyond just process and day-to-day management. Given the sales capability gaps, sales leaders must be able to:

- increase sales capability rapidly
- compensate for weakness or decline in revenue during the lag time.

3 THE MANAGEMENT FOCUS DILUTES/SHIFTS

Managers are often either great at managing or great at selling, but rarely able to effectively do both. It is not that they can't sell; it's just that it's

difficult to be able to achieve both concurrently. Strong "selling" managers often manage their people poorly – and during a scaling process this is a train wreck waiting to happen.

Strong "people" managers normally miss their numbers – and at a time where revenue compensation is needed (because of poor sales capability) this isn't ideal either.

There is another issue; salespeople failing to deliver don't stay in businesses for long. As a result, sales staff turnover increases placing a higher recruitment demand on the managers.

Now the already "ineffective" management team is buried in relentless recruitment, when they actually need to be equipping and selling. The team's focus has shifted.

This all sounds rather glum. But of course it doesn't need to be.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Effective CEOs and senior leaders have the ability to 'see around corners' – the perspective to spot the train wrecks before they occur and action the right intervention to avoid the crash. Perhaps these three issues are worth putting on the CEO's radar.

We all love to scale, but scaling while eroding profit is really not a good look.



SPARK

IGNITE YOUR POTENTIAL

SPARK LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME IS BACK!

CALLING all youths between the ages of 13–16! You are invited to join a leadership programme at the state-of-the-art premises of Epsom College in Malaysia. The adventure starts from December 13–19, 2015.

For a chance at winning a "Golden Ticket" to SPARK, do join the auditions on September 19, 2015 at the Leaderonomics Office.

For more details and to register, please go to leaderonomics.org/reg/spark today!

HOW I LEARNT TO BE A LEADER

"SPARK was a real adventure to me. I learnt about myself and also about how to be a better person and leader. I realised my potential, my strengths and my flaws. I'm better at time management and working together with new people. It was a pleasure to get to know and work with other youths from all over Malaysia. Plus, I discovered all the great qualities of a leader and how to apply them in my daily life. For example, I improved my communication skills by interacting with all the participants.

Now I'm better at connecting with people around me. Carrying out a project to help the community made me feel like I could really inspire people one day."

– Wong Ai Ling, 15, SPARK 2014

