



The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork

Embrace Them and Empower Your Team

by John C. Maxwell
Thomas Nelson © 2001
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Take-Aways

- Teams are collections of individuals, so the leader's challenge is to find the right combination of motivating factors to make a team successful.
- Leaders can use 17 reliable "laws" to build and motivate teams.
- Everyone is part of some team, in a family, work, social, religious or national setting.
- A person can take part in a game, but it is the entire team that wins large contests.
- Everyone has strengths; when the right person is placed in the right team position, it produces the right outcome.
- As the task becomes greater, the need for teamwork increases.
- A shared vision can galvanize a team or a company and point it in a single direction.
- Bad attitudes spread faster than positive ones. Correct them as soon as possible.
- When a company fails to spend the resources to develop new ideas or buy new talent, it pays the price.
- When two teams are equal, their different achievement levels usually can be attributed to the quality of their leadership.

Rating (10 is best)

Overall	Applicability	Innovation	Style
8	8	6	8

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Relevance

What You Will Learn

In this Abstract, you will learn: 1) The 17 “laws” which managers should follow to build successful teams; 2) What responsibilities team leaders have to their teams; and 3) Why positive attitudes, inspiration and opportunity are crucial in team building.

Recommendation

Building on the successful formula of his earlier work, author John C. Maxwell (*The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*) has delineated 17 “laws” for managers who want to develop successful teams. That number may be arbitrary, but Maxwell successfully uses his laws as a springboard to weave together inspiring tales from Navy Seals, mountain climbers, Colin Powell, George Washington, Jimmy Carter, major league coaches and others into punchy chapters that any aspiring leader can use. This book provides the right mix of factoids, inspiration and leadership pointers to make it a bestseller. Even better, coaches and leaders who use these tips should be able to build better teams. *getAbstract* recommends this book to coaches, mentors and team leaders.

Abstract

The Teambuilding Process

Teamwork is essential to society. In families, factories, offices, social settings and sports, people organize into teams. What makes a team successful? There is no easy answer, because building a team is an ongoing process. Since teams are collections of individuals, the leader’s challenge is to find the right factors or “laws” to make a team function well consistently. The more of these dependable “laws” each team member follows, the greater the benefit. These laws are based on the leader’s perspective, because the leader assembles the team.

1. “The Law of Significance”

People tend to admire bold, innovative, successful individuals. But while many onlookers identify with great individuals, the reality is that people who work alone rarely accomplish great things. Look behind the great success of any individual, from Daniel Boone to Albert Einstein, and you’ll see that each one had backup from a team. Most great achievers freely acknowledged their debt to the accomplishments and discoveries of their predecessors. A person can join a game, but the entire team wins the large contests. Those who understand that a team can do more than a lone individual readily accept the power of teamwork – and they qualify to be a part of your team.

2. “The Law of the Big Picture”

When individuals become part of a team, they realize that greater issues than their individuality are at stake. The individual has to subordinate his or her selfish ambitions to help achieve the larger goal. Someone who acknowledges the overall goal also recognizes that the team is the way to achieve that objective. A former Notre Dame football coach said he would rather not print player’s names on their jerseys. Instead, he wanted to print only the initials of their positions to subordinate their egos for the team’s benefit. The goal must become more important than the individual. To get people to acknowledge the team’s

“As much as we admire solo achievement, the truth is that no lone individual has done anything of value.”

“The belief that one person can do something great is a myth.”

“People who build successful teams never forget that every person on a team has a role to play, and every role plays its part in contributing to the larger picture.”

“When you discover your place, you will say, ‘There’s no place like this place anywhere near this place, so this must be the place’.”

“Someone once said that only people who can see the invisible can do the impossible.”

“Good attitudes among players do not guarantee a team’s success, but bad attitudes guarantee its failure.”

objective, tell them what must be achieved. The leader should select the right players, tell the team how far they are from the goal and provide the right tools. Leave ego at the door.

3. “The Law of the Niche”

Every person has certain strengths. To produce the outcome you want as a leader, place the right person in the right team position. Fitting the right people exactly into appropriate positions is essential to a team’s success, and it is crucial for the individuals involved.

4. “The Law of Mount Everest”

Sherpa guide and experienced climber Tenzing Norgay understood Mount Everest. A British expedition that needed about two tons of equipment and food carried to numerous base camps hired him in 1953. The expedition sought porters and climbers of various skills to reach their camps at different stations going up the mountain. The higher the elevation, the greater the skill required. As the climbing team approached the summit, two members tried to reach it and failed. They returned to the camp and told Norgay and team member, Edmund Hillary, about the obstacles they had encountered. With their guidance, on May 29, 1953, Hillary and Norgay became the first climbers to scale the top of Mount Everest. The lesson of the law: As a task becomes greater, the need for teamwork increases. Specifically design your team for its task. The size of the team depends on the size of the challenge, but meeting a challenge requires a creative, flexible team. You also need a motivated team, particularly if the situation is unpleasant.

5. “The Law of the Chain”

Any team is dependent on its weakest member. That was the case when the Exxon Valdez tanker went aground off Alaska on March 24, 1989. The ensuing oil spill became the most expensive environmental disaster in U.S. history and cost Exxon its good reputation and about \$3.6 billion. Authorities traced the disaster to the malfeasance of the ship’s captain. The lesson: Some people are not team players. This may be because they have other priorities, prefer the status quo or are uncertain about their talents. Coaches or leaders may be able to help team members who are “weak links,” or may be able to trade them for more suitable players. As a team leader, you should fix weak links to protect your team’s synergy.

6. “The Law of the Catalyst”

Once a team is built, it has a natural tendency to slow down. It can lose its focus, vision or key people. When this happens, the team needs someone who can re-energize it, as superstar basketball player Michael Jordan revitalized the Chicago Bulls and the Washington Wizards. Teams need people with energy because they are most likely to achieve results. The path isn’t always easy. These sparkplugs may say things others do not want to hear and may have a superior understanding of what the team needs. They are often energetic, passionate and creative.

7. “The Law of the Compass”

IBM was once one of the world’s top corporations, but by the late 1980s, it had become increasingly unresponsive to new technological changes. IBM was losing \$8 billion annually by 1991. In 1993, a new CEO began to build a fresh team. The company adopted a single marketing theme: focus on e-business. It decided to use its existing hardware to meet its new purpose. The idea galvanized the company and helped point it in a single direction. Creating and assessing a vision is difficult, but you can accomplish the same thing by examining your team’s collective moral goals and the visions of your individual

“When the Law of High Morale is working at its best, the leader boosts the morale of the team, and the team boosts the morale of the leader.”

“The team will reach its potential only if you reach your potential.”

“When you know what to do, then you can do what you know.”

“If everyone doesn’t pay the price to win, then everyone will pay the price by losing.”

team members. Tradition also plays a vital role. To foster better team members, leaders must explain the vision so that everyone can participate in realizing it.

8. “The Law of the Bad Apple”

Teams need many factors in place to thrive. For instance, a good attitude is an essential component. Often, talented individuals lose ground because of bad attitudes. Members’ individual attitudes distinguish great teams from weak ones. Shared attitudes can elevate or denigrate any team, and can be either corrosive or invigorating, because people tend to reflect the prevailing attitude. When Roger Bannister became the first man to run a mile in less than four minutes in 1954, other runners quickly broke the magic barrier. Positive attitudes are inspiring, especially in the face of adversity. A San Francisco experiment illustrates the importance of attitude. Three schoolteachers were told that since they were the brightest in the district, they were getting a special class of students with high IQs to see how much the kids could learn. By year’s end, their students had achieved 20% to 30% more than other students. The principal then told the teachers that the experiment was a hoax. They were not the brightest teachers. In fact, they had been chosen at random. Likewise, their students were average, but a positive attitude and high expectations had produced real results. Unfortunately, bad attitudes spread faster than positive ones, so correct them quickly. There is no upside to pessimism or envy, since attitudes color a person’s overall outlook.

9. “The Law of Countability”

Team members have to rely on each other. Personal accountability is critical. The trait of reliability stems from a person’s character, commitment and ability to work with others, regardless of the circumstances. When a team member breaks this bond, the damage penetrates all levels of the team. In contrast, hearing that your teammates know they can rely upon you under all circumstances is one of the highest possible compliments.

10. “The Law of the Price Tag”

When a company fails to spend the money to develop new ideas or buy new talent, it suffers the consequences – right up to a penalty as dramatic as going out of business. A salesman who envisioned selling goods directly from manufacturers to rural customers founded Montgomery Ward in 1872. The company was well established by 1900. It even came to own the biggest skyscraper west of Manhattan. But, over the years, Wards failed to keep pace with changing times and new methods. By 2000, it was out of business. Afraid to pay the price of keeping up, Wards lost everything. Teams must pay a price to win.

11. “The Law of the Scoreboard”

Walt Disney and his brother, Roy, founded their company in the 1920s and it soon earned a reputation for innovation. In 1937, Disney produced “Snow White,” which some consider the most successful movie of all time. But by the mid-1980s, the company was losing money. Under the threat of a hostile takeover, it hired a new chairman and CEO, Michael Eisner, who restored Disney to its creative roots by being objective and setting new goals. Every team has goals and ways to measure success. Winning teams change their plans to manage new situations, and then they consistently monitor the results. When a team operates at a very high level, it has to make only minor adjustments to stay successful.

12. “The Law of the Bench”

Great teams are built on the backs of great players. Sports teams have strong starters and players on the bench. But having a deep bench, or a number of very qualified substitutes

“If you have a dream, you need a team to accomplish it.”

“It’s better to have a great team with a weak dream than a great dream with a weak team.”

for the starters, allows teams to do well over the long term. Alternately, a team that has great starters and no substitutes often will not last the entire game. Do not dismiss people on the bench as having limited potential. Given the right coaching, motivation and opportunity, substitutes can become key players. Developing a deep bench requires good recruiting. To build a legacy, teams have to attract very qualified new people and continue to find fresh challenges for important players.

13. “The Law of Identity”

Shared values form the common bond that makes a team cohesive. These values can stem from common priorities and a mutual vision. Teams need a bond of common beliefs or experiences. When people with mutual values unite, they attract others who feel a kinship with those values. A team must define and communicate the values that shape its identity.

14. “The Law of Communication”

Interaction is a basic component of winning teams. When leaders communicate with their team members, they build new bonds and make it easier to implement change. Share good and bad news with all of your team members. Failing to share news with each other can undermine the team’s harmony, decision-making capabilities and personal interactions.

15. “The Law of the Edge”

When two teams have equal capacity, but one achieves more, the quality of leadership usually makes the difference. Leadership provides the edge in competition. In the late 1990s the Los Angeles Lakers had good players, but they did not have a successful season. In 2000, the team hired former Chicago Bull’s coach Phil Jackson and became the NBA champions. The team was the same; new leadership made the difference. Good leaders let their team members do what they do best. Often, each person is highly trained and wants responsibility, even though people incorrectly assume that a team can have only one leader. Leadership roles should be rotated based on the situation at hand. Good leaders provide an edge by preparing the team for the future.

16. “The Law of High Morale”

When a team believes it can accomplish a goal, it can. High morale psychologically prepares teams for difficult tasks. A winning streak often is due to team members’ strong belief that they can accomplish anything, even in adversity. But morale comes in various strengths. When team morale is low, the leader often becomes responsible for the team’s work. When morale builds, the leader should get more members involved. Once morale reaches a high level, the leader should keep the team focused and build on its successes.

17. “The Law of Dividends”

A team’s successes compound over time, like well-invested dividends. Coaches invest time in their team members, and develop the talents of the best people they can find. Collectively, these team members develop into their own community. When each team member has the authority to act at the top of his or her abilities, the entire team gains power and success.

About The Author

John C. Maxwell is an expert on leadership, a leading consultant and the author of more than 25 books, including *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, *Developing the Leader Within You* and *Falling Forward*.