

# 20 tips for creating a successful team

 By [Tara Turkington](#)

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When you build a company, your team is your greatest asset. Happy, productive teams underpin great companies. Disaffected, demotivated teams can ruin them. How you mould and develop your team is essential to business success.



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## 1. Hire the cleverest people

Always spend the most you can on great staff. Hire people cleverer than you. While they may be critical and expensive and give you lots of grey hair, they will also pull your organisation forward. They will think creatively, innovate and question – qualities that will take you and your business out of your comfort zone.

## 2. Treat people how you would like to be treated

Treat people with respect and dignity. Lead with understanding and empathy. Be ready to adapt, collaborate, and share ideas and skills. Help team members to improve and become better at what they – and ultimately all of you – do. How you treat your staff is integral to their performance, and the way they, in turn, deal with your customers. Simple as it is, happy staff = happy customers = a successful business.

## 3. Model hard work

The only way to success is to work hard and smart (ie. on the right things that are going to propel you and your business forward). Being in a leadership role means having to work even harder. Don't ask your staff to do something you wouldn't. Set the example by being there till the end of challenging projects, or supporting your team with difficult conversations they need to have.

## 4. Build diversity

Research shows indisputably that diverse teams are more innovative and perform better than those that aren't. As you lead and develop your team, think about all areas of diversity, including age, race, gender, sexual orientation, experience, background, personality types and skill sets. For example, take age: any good team needs a balance of maturity and experience, as well as youthful enthusiasm and exuberance. These feed off each other to the benefit of all sides. Ask any sports coach...

It's tempting and easy to hire people like yourself (it's called affinity bias – we're drawn to others who we think are like us or share similar characteristics). Too much of something is not good; nor is too little of something – good balance within a team can make it formidable.

## 5. Hire for attitude first, skills second

Hire for attitude and culture-fit first, technical ability second – many skills can be taught, but attitude is infinitely harder, perhaps even impossible, to change.



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## 6. Hire slowly, fire fast

Related to point 5, it's worth noting the adage "hire slowly, fire fast". When hiring, do multiple interviews, using different members of your team on the interview panel to gauge feedback (people respond and come across differently to different individuals), and check references and qualifications (just look to the media to see how often even senior people fake these).

Ask personal questions as well as work-related ones. At Flow, we always ask people if they have pets and why or why not, which provides insight into whether they care about things other than themselves.

If you find someone isn't the right fit, manage them out as quickly as possible. Bad apples can infect good ones quickly, and negative energy is always more contagious than positive energy.

## 7. Have a strong vision and clearly articulated goals

Share a vision with your team that is greater than the day-to-day work you do – what can you collectively achieve as a team? This is the why? (Simon Sinek, a well-known researcher and writer on leadership, wrote a book entitled *Start with Why*, which is well worth the read.)

What is the meaning behind what you are striving for in your work? Is it to help create jobs when they are desperately needed, is it to grow a better company that everyone can be proud of working at, is it somehow to change the world to make it a better place, or is it something else?

In order to achieve your big “why”, which might take many years, you need to break this down into 'Smart' (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound) goals. Use Smart goals to drive towards the vision. Once your team can get behind the goals and can see the benefit of achieving them, it's much easier to motivate them in future.

## 8. Clearly delineate roles and responsibilities

Clearly delineate roles and responsibilities in your organisation and in projects. For example, in a marketing campaign, one person might oversee research, another ideation, another storyboarding, another drawing up the budget and yet another client liaison. Clear roles and responsibilities can also help with clearly defining and enforcing accountability, another mark of a good team.

## 9. Be positive

It's your job as a leader to be positive, even when you don't feel like it. Positivity is inspirational; negativity is demotivational. Celebrate the successes; play down the criticism.

## 10. Communicate well

No leader has ever been accused of over-communicating. Make sure you communicate frequently, and that your communications are substantive. Be transparent whenever possible and always have integrity. Transparency and integrity are key to building trust.



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## 11. Get to know people as individuals

Get to know your team members: what are their likes and dislikes, what makes them tick, what are their children's names, and their cat or dog's name, what are their strengths and weaknesses at work? Spend time talking to them about what's happening in their lives. Investing time and energy in getting to really know your team members is more important than ever, now remote working has become such a big part of our lives.

While you need to be consistent and fair in your leadership, don't try to create a one-size-fits-all management solution – remember that different people have different strengths and managing them according to their individual needs is likely to bear more fruit.

## 12. Having fun is a serious business

The team that plays together, stays together, works well together and pulls the load together. Make time for fun. Fun is an exceptionally serious business – it takes time, effort and conscious planning. People are naturally playful. Encourage this and see the strong bonds form.

## 13. Build an environment where it's safe to make mistakes

If you hardly ever see a mistake in your workplace, it probably means your team is not trying anything new or innovative,

which is crucial to keeping your business moving forward positively. It's okay for anyone to make a mistake, and your team will find it affirming and encouraging when other team members support and help them learn, with no judgment. But of course it's not okay for people to make the same mistakes over and over. Good leadership will find the balance between these.

## 14. Consciously build a strong and unique culture

People who feel a sense of belonging are more engaged and productive. Consciously forge your company or team's culture, by creating opportunities for people to get to know each other, to succeed together and to create memories together. Creating rituals and encouraging positive traditions can also help to create strong bonds. For example, you could designate a day for people to dress up in your corporate colour or a space for a daily joke from a different team member every day, or an annual awards ceremony for your team.

## 15. Don't micromanage

The following mix is essential for a first-class orchestra: teamwork, collaboration, direction, flexibility, goal-setting and performance. The same goes for any company or organisation if it wants to succeed in business today. Remember that a top orchestra can play without a conductor. A CEO must know when to step away to allow their staff to do what they do best.



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## 16. Encourage learning

Entrench a culture of learning in your team. You can do this in many ways – by getting people to showcase new trends or pieces of work for others; by having a company thread on your intranet or email of interesting new things to look out for; by having a bookshelf where people can pick up and leave books; by regularly having company-wide learning sessions; even by sponsoring team members to study further. On an individual and organisational level, you are either learning and growing or stagnating and regressing – there is no in-between state.

## 17. Listen

Listen with empathy and attention, not just to respond, but also to give time and attention to your team. Put yourself in the other person's shoes. Everyone has a story; everyone has challenges and difficulties to overcome.

## 18. Build trust

Trust is paramount in building a great team – if the manager and team members have mutual trust, they can rely on each other; and if you feel trusted, you automatically want to do your work to the best of your ability. To build trust, you have to earn it from others by keeping your word – and you must trust others, too, to win back that trust.

## 19. Keep an eye out for snags and bottlenecks

A bicycle with a broken chain is useless. Pay attention to every piece of the chain, not just the particular areas in which you are personally most interested or most experienced. If one part or section of that chain is crooked, you're guaranteed to crash.

## 20. Reward and recognise great work

People like to be acknowledged and thanked for their work. Reward and recognise your team fairly and frequently, in big and small ways – a handwritten note at the end of a tough day on someone’s desk can go a long way, as can a shout-out in a company meeting for someone who’s worked particularly hard at accomplishing something. On a bigger scale, make sure you do regular and fair performance reviews with team members and that you pay people fairly for their contribution.

## ABOUT TARA TURKINGTON

Tara Turkington is the CEO of Flow Communications ([www.flow.sa.com](http://www.flow.sa.com)), one of the country’s top communications companies. Follow her on Twitter at [@taraturk1](https://twitter.com/taraturk1).

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