




LEADERSHIP

JOURNAL FOR POST-SECONDARY LEADERS VOLUME 23.2 FALL/WINTER 2017



LEADING
effective
TEAMS

THE CHAIR ACADEMY

Leadership: The Academy Journal

VOLUME 23.2 FALL/WINTER 2017

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Mesa, Arizona 85201

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP RATES

\$65 – Individual
(receives 1 copy, 2 times per year)
\$550 – Institutional
(receives 20 copies, 2 times per year)

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No matter the enterprise, there are perhaps some universal truths regarding the subject of leadership **and** teams.

The **first truth** I would offer is that leadership is **not** a solo endeavor. As has been suggested by others, **Leadership is a TEAM sport**. In writing this, I realize some will cringe at the inclusion of the word “sport.” Perhaps to them it suggests that there must be winners and losers, or that as a sport, it may be taken less seriously than need be the case. With respect to those who may harbor this opinion, I think the phrase conveys an important message; quite simply, it takes a team to get stuff done.

The larger and the more complex the organization, the more we may rely on the actions and ideas of others to get the really important stuff done. Even the most senior leaders need the support of a team, whether it’s to move their agenda forward, to provide private and quiet counsel regarding what’s working and what’s not; or simply to lend their time, talent, and energy to the work that needs doing and is often beyond the capability or capacity of a single person—any single person.

Colin Powell, former Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary of State, once intimated he needed at least three vital skill sets represented on the team of people closest to him—a “visionary, a confessor-coach, and an enforcer” (Kamensky, 2013). The “visionary” is someone who will push the envelope and scout the future for options and opportunities. The “confessor-coach” is someone who provides advice on how the leader is behaving in various situations and provides feedback on how he or she might approach them differently. Finally, the “enforcer” is someone who will ensure closure and follow through on whatever is decided during the course of the day, week, or year (Kamensky, 2013).

A **second truth**: a team functions best when those assigned to it are perceived to be pulling on the rope in the same direction. There are numerous viable engagement surveys employed by organizations around the world. When you break down the feedback and assess what frustrates most of us, regardless of country or culture, it is when we perceive that we are paddling against

the incoming tide and the source of primary resistance is coming from those around us. The tendency is to give up or give in.

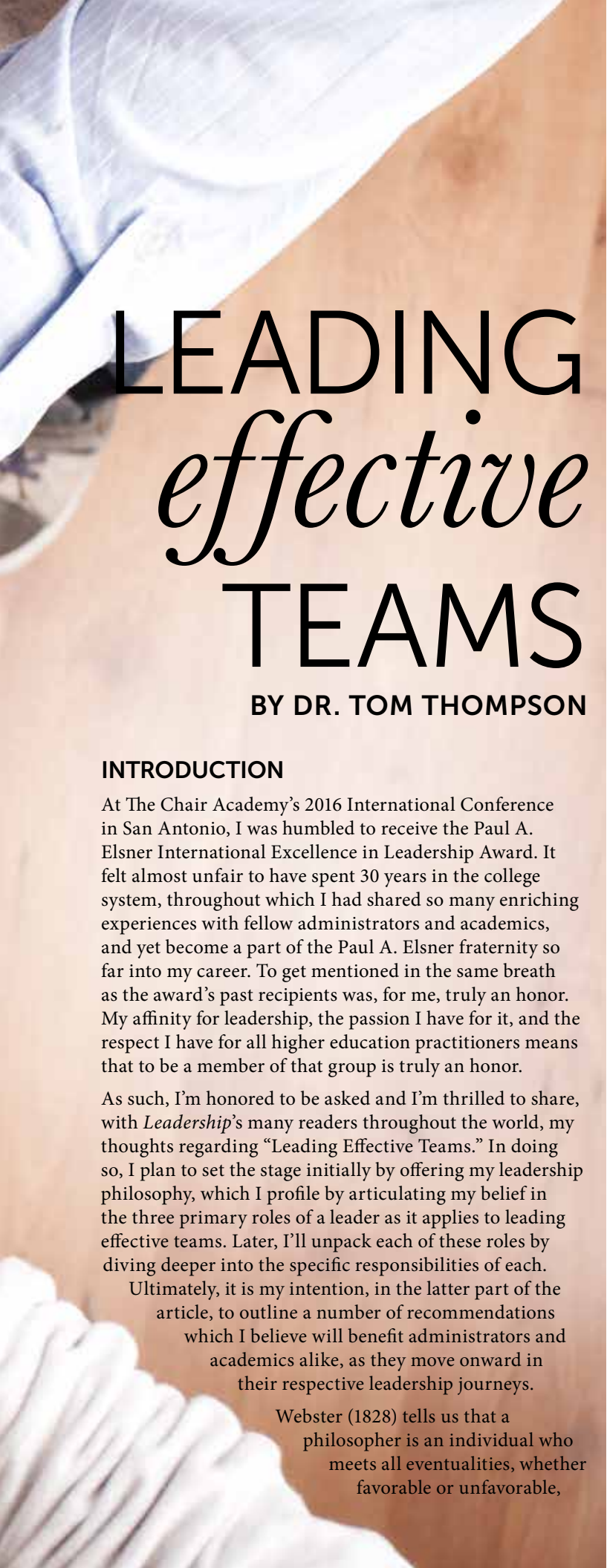
There was some insightful work done by a French agricultural engineer named Maximilian Ringelmann as far back as 1913 (Kravitz & Martin, 1986). Using rope pulling as the task, Ringelmann studied the effect of having teams of various sizes pull in either direction and then assessed the impact of team size on individual performance. It turns out the larger the team, the less invested or engaged individuals become in performing at their best. The resulting term, a condition called social loafing, is also known as the Ringelmann Effect. To overcome or compensate for this effect, the leader must learn how to effectively **motivate and coordinate**; two simple prescriptions that come from a study now over 100 years old.

The **third and final truth**: if you want to know how to **lead teams effectively**, next to doing it yourself and learning from your personal successes and failures, observe those who have done it well or, if not, at least those who have seriously studied it. Both sides are well represented in this edition of *Leadership*; from Dr. Tom Thompson, who for 16 years led Olds College; to Dr. Eduardo Padrón, who for 22 years has led Miami Dade College; to the eclectic set of leaders featured in this edition’s segment titled *Voices of Leadership*. The “team” of voices represented in this edition lend both depth and credibility to an increasingly important topic.

Finally, as this is the last edition where my voice will be featured as the Editor, I would like to salute the fine work of **our team**—those fine folks who do the real work to bring each issue to you, our readers—thank you, one and all!

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LEADING *effective* TEAMS

BY DR. TOM THOMPSON

INTRODUCTION

At The Chair Academy's 2016 International Conference in San Antonio, I was humbled to receive the Paul A. Elsner International Excellence in Leadership Award. It felt almost unfair to have spent 30 years in the college system, throughout which I had shared so many enriching experiences with fellow administrators and academics, and yet become a part of the Paul A. Elsner fraternity so far into my career. To get mentioned in the same breath as the award's past recipients was, for me, truly an honor. My affinity for leadership, the passion I have for it, and the respect I have for all higher education practitioners means that to be a member of that group is truly an honor.

As such, I'm honored to be asked and I'm thrilled to share, with *Leadership's* many readers throughout the world, my thoughts regarding "Leading Effective Teams." In doing so, I plan to set the stage initially by offering my leadership philosophy, which I profile by articulating my belief in the three primary roles of a leader as it applies to leading effective teams. Later, I'll unpack each of these roles by diving deeper into the specific responsibilities of each.

Ultimately, it is my intention, in the latter part of the article, to outline a number of recommendations which I believe will benefit administrators and academics alike, as they move onward in their respective leadership journeys.

Webster (1828) tells us that a philosopher is an individual who meets all eventualities, whether favorable or unfavorable,

with calmness and composure. Additionally, he defines philosophy using a phrase such as "the general principles or laws of a field of knowledge or activity." These definitions appear to indicate the necessity of a higher education leader or academic being somewhat of a philosopher in his or her own right if he or she is to succeed in that profession. That said, although it is a rather daunting task to explain my leadership philosophy as it applies to leading effective teams, I believe, in a general sense, the following three leadership roles constitute a large part of what I value.

To begin, a leader is a **steward** who can only do his or her best, nothing more – nothing less. Frankly, leaders owe that not only to themselves, but to the many administrators and academics who work with them and to the countless students under their supervision. Whatever success I may have had, or may have yet to realize, can be said to be in direct proportion to my abilities not only to instill this idea in those with whom I've worked, but also to live up to the concept myself.

Consequently, I consistently stress to those I work with that what I expect from them is their best effort; that is to say, to do their job exceptionally well and to leave their institution in better condition than when they found it.

I expect them to be enthusiastic and to become the very best that they are capable of becoming. Or simply stated: a better version of themselves. I want them to derive the most satisfaction from knowing that they and those with whom they work did their best in every way. I trust that their plans, conduct, and words reflect their commitment to excellence. As well, I'm thoroughly convinced that those who gain the self-satisfaction in knowing they have done their best will also become known as a good steward – one who is diligent, who seeks to do the right thing, and who is constantly looking to creatively solve the problems not only of today, but those yet to come.

Secondly, leaders must never forget that they are **servants**, and not merely individuals with managerial responsibilities, control, and authority. The higher education professionals within their scope of supervision must be able to receive appropriate guidance in all respects, and not merely in regard to their specific job description.

As such, leaders become servants to those with whom they work. And, as their servants, leaders must be able to see through the eyes of their team members. The servant leader assumes team members are working *with* him or her, not *for* him or her. The leader ensures that team members share in the rewards and understand the "power of we." As a servant, the leader exhibits faith in the team. The leader believes and trusts in each individual, and in doing so, draws out his or her best effort. As a servant, the leader is a man or woman of action, who plans cooperatively and collaboratively, and sets the sail of the team's ship into the wind.



Think about this. Next to a spouse or partner, the servant leader's direct reports spend more time with, and are more likely to be influenced by, the leader than anyone else. The servant leader in higher education is the person who will provide by far the most influence. Consequently, it is not only the duty but also the obligation of the servant leader to be fully aware of and to handle his or her managerial responsibilities with the utmost attention. The powerful influence of modeling needs to be a sacred trust for all leaders responsible for shaping the attitude and competencies of those within their charge.

Thirdly, given the nature of the ever-accelerating higher education system(s), the leader as a **teacher** role has never been more important in exemplifying the impact that is possible through a service approach to stewardship. It is unlikely that an academic of practically any discipline finds it as necessary to follow the laws of learning as diligently and judiciously as it is for the teacher of the fundamentals of leading effective teams.

The leadership fundamentals in those that you hire or those who subsequently report to you should not be assumed. These fundamentals need to be explained and demonstrated. The preferred demonstration should be modeled, practiced, and, hopefully, perfected. Often those reporting to you require constructive feedback and correction. This is provided during one-on-one meetings, and then followed by repeated proper execution under real teamwork conditions.

Ultimately, preferred leadership habits are formed to the point where your direct reports develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities to react instinctively with their respective teams. However, prior to this state being achieved, normally there is heavy lifting to be done on the part of the leader. As their teacher, you need to be there to observe and correct. As their teacher, you also need to be continuously exploring ways to improve yourself so that you may inspire others to improve. The teacher role encourages learning opportunities and welcomes any and all input that may be helpful to one's professional development.

It is my belief that the leader who makes a sincere and determined effort to assume and master the aforementioned

roles is certain to continuously improve his or her qualifications and enhance significantly the success levels in leading effective teams. Any team without leadership is like a ship without a rudder. It will float aimlessly and will likely end up sailing in circles, getting nowhere.

Leaders must accept these roles and know those within their charge to be able to provide effective leadership. The leader must realize, welcome, and assume the responsibilities for each of the aforementioned roles. Beginning with **stewarding**, and with the use of storied examples, the next section of this article unpacks each of these three aforementioned roles in relation to leading effective teams.

STEWARDING

"Lives are changed when people connect. Life is changed when everything is connected." (Qualcomm motto)

The universally recognized Community Learning Campus (CLC) at Olds College, Olds, Alberta, Canada is an innovative educational approach to high school, post-secondary, and life-long learning which is based in the community. It addresses specific rural needs, such as capacity building, by sharing resources, co-investment partnerships, and connecting a variety of institutions (higher education and secondary), community groups, and organizations.

As noted on the CLC website (www.communitylearningcampus.ca), from governance and business perspectives, the CLC is a formal joint venture between Olds College and Chinook's Edge School Division (CESD) in collaboration with the Town of Olds, Mountain View County, and the University of Alberta. Operational since 2010, the CLC guarantees seamless, high quality, accessible, and innovative education. It consists of five multi-use facilities complete with integrated academic and community programming and services.

However, in 2003 the CLC was but a dream. Had it not been for a small group of female parents from the high school council who demonstrated the courage of their conviction, the CLC idea likely would not have taken root. They protested successfully, encouraging the school division to dream bigger and not take the government money which was destined merely for renovation of an outdated high school.

Once the school division approached the college with the idea of sharing its land to build a new high school, my stewardship role as President of Olds College became one of articulating the CLC vision. Additionally, I felt compelled to be catalytic in recruiting team members and setting the terms of the social contract. It was necessary to gain the trust of various team players – one person at a time – in order to give my best regarding the design, funding, execution, and, ultimately, the building of the CLC.

The concept of "leader as steward" was embodied in the journey of the CLC from concept to construction. The original conceptual design team was founded on a culture of trust - a fundamental quality which was stewarded throughout multiple teams of trusting and optimistic individuals. This conceptual design team, and its subsequent working group teams, came to number over 300 people, involving educators, political and



corporate partners, consultants, and community members. Over the course of 18 months, many of these individuals participated in over 600 hours of meetings. Each individual enthusiastically devoted his or her very best efforts to the CLC project, and the bountiful buildings and programs are a testament to the magnificence that strong stewardship can tap.

In relation to the development of trust and its impact upon leading effective teams, Captain D. Michael Abrashoff, in *It's Your Ship* (2002) says,

"The best way to keep a ship – or any organization – on course for success is to give the troops all the responsibility they can handle and then stand back. Trust is a human marvel – it not only sustains the social contract, it's the growth hormone that turns green sailors into seasoned shipmates and troubled companies into dynamic competitors."

To this day, trust and a sense of **WE** before **I**, sustains the values, vision, mission, and outcomes of the CLC. As educators and board members from around the world visit the CLC, they marvel at the facilities and programming. They ask many questions about structure, services, and governance. However, the one thing they have the most difficulty in comprehending with this unique transformative design is "from whence comes this uncommon trust."

SERVING

"Individual commanders should act on their own initiative once the melee had developed." (The Horatio Nelson Touch – Battle of Trafalgar)

In 1995, the city of Grande Prairie, Alberta, was the smallest and most northern city to ever host the Canada Games. These Winter Games, which cost close to 25 million dollars to produce, were composed of 21 different sports involving 3,500 athletes, coaches, managers, and officials. They were directed by a Host Organizing Committee (HOC) comprised of 18 volunteer members who provided oversight to a volunteer force of 8,000 people. The total staff complement was 125, led by a General Manager who reported to the HOC.

At the time, I was the Chairperson of the Department of Business Administration at Grande Prairie Regional College and, additionally, the (volunteer) HOC President. It should be noted that the college encouraged and recognized my community service as a part of my professional commitment. I will always be grateful for their encouragement and support.

With the help of many, I built these Canada Games on a philosophy of multiple ownership, which required an exceptional commitment from the Host Organizing Team and the volunteers within their respective teams to ensure the Games would be a resounding success. As with any large undertaking, these Canada Games required the investment of time and treasure from multiple individuals. By approaching the project as a steward who was prepared to serve through my very best efforts, I was able to harness the necessary interest, enthusiasm, and solid commitment of the team, ultimately achieving success together.

After researching several previous hosts, I came to the conclusion that their team-building and management models based upon planning and predicting were outdated. Because of the accelerated rate of changing circumstances and the relative size and socio-political challenges associated with the 1995 Games, I envisioned leading an effective collection of small teams based upon resilient adaptation. Every one of our 18 teams would need to be networked to become assumption-free and focused on sustained organizational adaptability.

Peters and Waterman (1982) in *In Search of Excellence*, emphasized the importance of adaptable small teams to the overall success of excellent organizations. They stressed what made small teams adaptable: trust, common purpose, shared awareness, and empowerment of individual members to act.

Harnessing and sharing the power and experiences, as noted by General Stanley McChrystal (2015) in *Team of Teams*, of many small teams allowed our Host Organizing Committee to adapt quickly to complex and changing events on the ground. Consequently, innovation was unleashed – an economic and social imperative that couldn't have come from a top-down approach. Serving together in this manner connected each individual with a sense of team and a culture of stewardship toward our common goals and ultimate success.

According to the Alberta Community Development study (1994), the Games spawned an economic impact of over 31 million dollars, with a total sales volume of over 37 million dollars, while creating 421 new person years-of-employment. By all accounts, the 1995 Canada Winter Games, which left a surplus of over one million dollars to the city of Grande Prairie for youth sport development, were considered the best games ever.

TEACHING

"Despite the apprehensions of some, veteran board members and seasoned presidents almost always cite retreats as the single most powerful lever to direct attention to (board) effectiveness..." (Chait, Holland, and Taylor, 1996)

As noted in the Olds College *Governance as Stewardship Policy Manual* (2017), board leadership requires, above all, that the board provide the vision, values, mission, and

outcomes of the college. To do so, the board must first have an adequate vision of its own job. Generally, the board recognizes its own effectiveness as a function of monitoring performance and adding value to the long-term growth and development of Olds College.

Unfortunately, as I have written in my 2015 book, *Governance as Stewardship*, new board members' acceptance of the benefits of governance as a collective effort is not readily understood or linked to board (team) effectiveness and performance. Hence, prior to this acceptance occurring, there is a need to learn about their roles and responsibilities as board members. As with any team, board members require a strong understanding of their shared service to be successful in developing their leadership roles and to reach their goals together. Therefore, teaching them the fundamentals of this team approach is a first task toward building this strong foundation of service and stewardship. Furthermore, boards that participated in targeted, ongoing training did demonstrate effectiveness, improved competency levels, and higher institutional performance ratings.

Leading a learning process toward elite effectiveness, as demonstrated by the Olds College Board, is discussed by Walker (2017), in *The Captain Class – The Hidden Force That Creates the World's Greatest Teams*: "When economists stumble onto some entity that doesn't conform to the usual trajectory of things and can't be easily explained, they often describe it as a black swan."

As the self-proclaimed and contractually obligated captain of this governance *black swan* overhaul, I've never really exhibited the traits of traditional higher education leadership. If I brought anything to this massive, team-leading renovation, it was my varied experience, unconventional worldview of higher education, entrepreneurial behavior, and willingness to "carry the water." The reform job was not glamorous, but it did require knowledge of what a successful effort and effectiveness would look like – and a plan to get there.

As a part of his intensive study of elite teams, Walker (2017) identified seven traits of Tier One captains, or so-called members of a forgotten tribe.

1. Extreme doggedness and focus in competition
2. Aggressive play that tests the limits of the rules
3. Willingness to do thankless jobs in the shadows
4. Low-key, practical, and democratic communication style
5. Motivates others with passionate nonverbal displays
6. Strong convictions and the courage to stand apart
7. Ironclad emotional control

To be clear, I certainly do not claim to be a Tier One captain, however I do know that teaching this particular team-leading, learning-based, governance-renewal process to other individuals and teams has yielded similar first-tier results. Many other people, including chairpersons, board members, vice presidents, and support staff contributed mightily to the exceptional turn-around and achievement of governance excellence by this world-class team.



RECOMMENDATIONS

"Winners assemble as a team." (Ernie Tunnell)

In his recent book, *Thank You for Being Late – An Optimist's Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations*, Thomas Friedman (2016) speaks to one of higher education's greatest challenges: "One of the hardest things for the human mind to grasp is the power of exponential growth in anything." As everything around our traditional-thinking sector keeps doubling or tripling or quadrupling yearly, the ability to bring collective thought and action to bear on the complex learning challenges has never been more acute. In other words, the assembling, the leading, and the evaluating of future-ready and future-proofed teams appears to have emerged as job one for administrators and academics.

Bearing in mind the aforementioned leadership roles of a team builder – steward, servant, and teacher – allow me to offer *Black Swan* recommendations for all higher education professionals charged with the responsibility of leading teams in this age of acceleration. In brief, I'll focus on three main imperatives: Talent, Team, and Trust. Attending daily to these when working with others will set leaders up for improved relevancy, kinship, and resiliency in their teams and provide enough latitude for human error made elsewhere.

One: There is no substitute for **talent** attraction, acquisition, and retention. That is, talent which is diverse, well-equipped, globally-focused, and, most assuredly, hungry. When recruiting, look deeper, longer, and in non-traditional places for it. Remember, you recruit your own problems. Most high-performing teams will reflect an assortment of intellectual, social, political, and reputational human capital. Once contracted, ensure the reports' growth by mentoring them via regularly scheduled one-on-one meetings. Invest in their professional development. Mutually agree during cycle one on outcomes-based goals. Learn about their backgrounds, values, attitudes, families, and lifestyles. Look for significant improvement in overall performance in the second cycle and for them to be in full stride by no later than the third cycle. It



should be evidenced by universal innovative thinking in their work and in working with others on their team.

Two: Without a consistent attitude of **team** first, there is little hope for the attainment of high group effectiveness. Team synergy is a direct function of all members feeling their investment is worthwhile and valued. Be careful of deterrents to team building, such as terminology (e.g. executive), rewards (e.g. individual), and treatment (e.g. privileges). Teamwork intelligence (TQ)

is every bit as important, if not more important, today as emotional, intellectual, and social intelligence. Encourage it. Reward it. Success is a product of everyone doing his or her job exceptionally well. As their leader, your responsibility is to attend to the orchestration of the performance. For example, many years ago, as a head coach in a major university basketball program, I would sit a player who did not visually and audibly acknowledge the teammate who passed him or her the ball which led to a basket.

Three: Certainly not of any less importance, is **trust**. Its development begins with you, the leader, and the relationship-building process with those who work with you. Your word needs to be the tie that binds. Thus, your actions need to measure up to your words. That is the basis for credibility – known as the bedrock of trust. Remember words count – but deeds count more. The transactional relationships need structure. You and your reports are not equal, and you certainly do not expect to be doing their jobs, nor them to be doing yours. The accountability process needs to be clearly articulated during their orientation. The development of the social contract between the two parties must follow – as mentioned earlier, the outcomes-based goals covenant. Their performance needs to be formally monitored on a quarterly basis, complete with written constructive feedback.

At the end of the day, it is your job as a leader to develop a highly effective team. It is no small task in today's accelerating world with all its distractions, technologies, and complexities. It requires your full attention. A better version of each of your reports is your responsibility. Your mission? Taking your work to the next level annually by doing better work collectively for others on a consistent basis. Be more diligent - more ingenious - more ethically and morally right.

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