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## Executive Book Summaries®

# Great Teams

## 16 Things High Performing Organizations Do Differently

### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

What makes a team great? Not just good. Not just functional. But great?

Over the last six years, long-time *Sports Illustrated* associate editor Don Yaeger has been invited by some of the greatest companies in the world to speak about the habits of high-performing individuals. Yaeger was approached by his most consistent client, Microsoft, to develop a talk on what allowed some teams to play at a championship level year after year. What do some organizations do seemingly better than most all of their opponents?

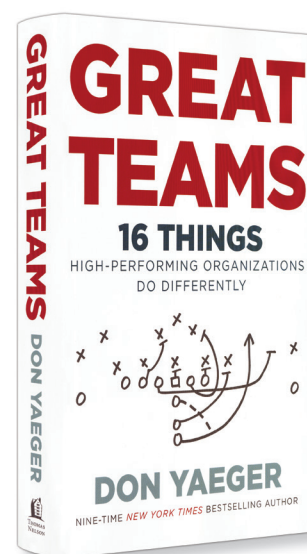
Yaeger took the challenge. He has conducted more than 100 interviews with some of the most successful teams and organizations in the country. From those interviews, he has identified 16 habits that drive these high-performing teams.

Building on the stories, examples and first-hand accounts, each chapter in *Great Teams* comes with applicable examples on how to apply these characteristics in any organization. *Great Teams* is a powerful companion for thought leaders, teams, managers and organizations that seek to perform similarly.

The insight shared in this book is sure to enhance any team in its pursuit of excellence.

### IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The four essential pillars and 16 characteristics that set a Great Team apart.
- The synergistic leadership style of Great Teams.
- The importance of culture in Great Teams and organizations.
- How Great Teams embrace change and manage conflict.
- How Great Teams avoid the pitfalls of success.



by Don Yaeger

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# THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: GREAT TEAMS

by Don Yaeger

**The author:** As the author of more than two dozen books, nine of which have become *New York Times* best-sellers, Don Yaeger has developed a reputation as one of America's most provocative journalists. His award-winning writing career, including more than 10 years as associate editor of *Sports Illustrated*, has led to guest appearances on every major talk show in America — from Oprah to Nightline, from Fox News to Good Morning America.

*Great Teams: 16 Things High Performing Organizations Do Differently* by Don Yaeger. Copyright © 2016 by Don Yaeger. Summarized with permission of the publisher, Thomas Nelson. 272 pages, \$24.99, ISBN: 978-0-718-07762-4.

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## Introduction

There is something special about watching a Great Team at work. Whether it is on the gridiron, on the diamond, on the hardwood or in a corporate setting, when a group of people “click,” the environment feels electric and the outcome is often extraordinary.

Great Teams are driven to create a culture of greatness. Trendy offenses, tricky defenses or “hot products” often get the credit for success, but the truly amazing organizations don't stay at the top of their marketplaces without building a team-first culture.

The effort to achieve that culture can be broken down to four essential pillars that set a truly Great Team apart from one that simply performs well:

- **Targeting Purpose:** The team is connected to a greater purpose. Members understand whom they are serving and why that matters.
- **Effective Management:** The team is able to think creatively and act dynamically in order to stay fresh, effective and relevant.
- **Activating Efficiency:** Each member of the team brings a unique set of talents, experiences, perspectives, work ethic, personality traits and know-how that melds with and complements those of the other team members.
- **Mutual Direction:** There is a strong sense of understanding, appreciation, shared responsibility and trust that unites and motivates the team to work together.

Moreover, there are 16 defining characteristics that special teams all share. These traits can be worked on independently by individual team members, but the truly outstanding teams use them to build on one another. Organizations that exhibit real greatness combine talent,

relationships and innovation in a variety of ways for the sake of achieving a shared goal. ●

## Pillar One: Targeting Purpose

### 1. Great Teams Understand Their “Why”

Every day, whether it's at practice or a game, an important meeting or an ordinary day at the office, the highest-performing teams show up with a sense of purpose; they understand the “why” of what they do and can clearly see how it matters. The better an organization understands whom it serves, the more effective it will be in weathering challenges along the way.

For this reason, a Great Team will constantly remind its players and employees that they are involved in something larger than themselves and their individual goals. Some team members will instinctively grasp this essential concept and will appreciate and respect the tradition of what they do or whom they work for. Others will need reminding, and leadership must intentionally create emotional moments that connect them to their greater purpose. But whatever the case, understanding the deeper motivation behind the effort is one of the most important elements of a truly Great Team.

Author and inspirational speaker Simon Sinek explained, “When an organization lays out its cause, how it does so matters. It's not an argument to be made, but a context to be provided. An organization's ‘why’ literally has to come first — before anything else.” Companies that understand the purpose and philosophy behind the “why” are usually astute, high-performing organizations that tap directly into the pulse of those they benefit the most. When utilized correctly, this understanding can



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create a powerful sense of duty and purpose for business teams because the employees know exactly whom they are working for and to what end. ●

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### Pillar Two: Effective Management

#### 2. Great Teams Have and Develop Great Leaders

There is no question that the key to any organization is leadership. From the CEO to frontline staff, strong leaders are critical to performance. Great Teams that sustain success place a high value on developing leadership. Promoting such a culture leads to consistent behaviors and better habits and ultimately increases that team's chances of winning.

Brad Black, CEO of HUMANeX Ventures, considers professional assessments a “foundation of development” and essential for any leader desiring to be great.

“Context matters,” Black said. “If you were told that you were the Olympian of your chosen profession, then you'd have a context [on which] to base your strengths. And all leaders should have a strong sense of who they are before they attempt any developmental venture.”

All leaders should know where they — and their teams — stand on skills, strengths, weaknesses and latent talents. Black said that understanding who you are as a leader is a “gift to yourself” and can create the road map for your own growth.

Here are the five most common leadership styles, along with the principles for developing an effective system of leadership that fits your team:

**Command and control:** Bobby Knight, George Patton, Martha Stewart and Al Dunlap are leaders who have employed Command and Control governance. This approach is autocratic in nature and does not involve their subordinates or followers in the decision-making process. They prefer to tell versus lead, and they are highly concerned with the details of what their teams do. Typically, these individuals micromanage aspects of their teams' strategies. Such individuals ensure that an organization's long-term vision remains intact.

**Relational:** For Relational leaders, people come first. These managers strive to keep their teams happy and in harmony. They are approachable and employ a “come with me” style of leadership. A Relational leader can be very good at building trust, respect and employee buy-in as a result of letting people have a say in the decisions of

the company. In the business world, CEOs Sara Blakely of Spanx and Tony Hsieh of Zappos head wildly successful companies, but both are known for their even-keeled leadership and for engaging others in decision making.

**Expert:** Great Teams are often led by visionary leaders who are sponges for information and knowledge and who depend on their high levels of knowledge or specialized sets of skills to guide their teams. These are the Expert leaders. In the corporate world, Bill Gates was an absolute Expert as the chairman, CEO and chief software architect of Microsoft Corporation. Likewise, no one questioned the authority of Phil Jackson when he was head coach of the Chicago Bulls and Los Angeles Lakers. His knowledge of the game — from recruiting to the Xs and Os of play calling — was second to none.

**Charismatic:** Imagine a leader with a personality so engaging and inspiring that you hang on his or her every word. These are people who don't tell you what to do but create a vision of what you can do and light the fire to make you want to rush out and accomplish it all. Charismatic leaders tend to be incredibly skilled at reading an environment, scanning and processing the moods and concerns of both individuals and larger audiences, and honing their actions and words to suit any situation. And while the skills are often innate to the personalities of the leaders, they can also be practiced and honed to improve any organization. President John F. Kennedy possessed this kind of charisma. His charisma and authentic passion could be felt in every single word, which was why he was so good at connecting with the hearts of his audiences. Pete Carroll, head coach for the Seattle Seahawks and former head coach for the University of Southern California Trojans, is known across the sports world for his cool-headed temperament and engaging personality.

**Synergistic:** Synergistic leaders balance the best characteristics of the other four styles, so they have the best chance of establishing a Great Teams culture. These leaders have visions for their teams but also the ability to empower others to be innovative; they advance the needle of progress through all aspects of their teams, easily adapt to change and develop others in their ranks. John Wooden, the legendary head coach of the men's basketball team at the University of California, Los Angeles, was the epitome of a Synergistic leader. For Coach Wooden, building team culture involved a process, and he used elements from the other leadership styles to establish a culture based on integrity and accountability.

Every leader is capable of learning and adapting in order to build a Great Team. In particular, great leaders must

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consider not just their own leadership styles but the styles their teams need in order to be very successful.

### 3. Great Teams Allow Culture to Shape Recruiting

Great Teams recruit players who fit — who will thrive within the established team culture and add value to it. The talent of the employee or teammate is important, but fit trumps all. These organizations understand that Great Team culture establishes an environment conducive to success, but that success ultimately depends on the right kind of personnel. A Great Team understands that fit is more important than credentials.

How do you distinguish A-caliber players from the rest of the talented field of recruits? The answer: Look for unique qualifiers that correspond to your team culture. CEO Tony Hsieh of Zappos uses “weirdness” as a unique differentiator to determine his A-caliber recruits. For Hsieh, his A-caliber players are people who see themselves as regularly moving outside of their comfort zones and being able to contribute strange, new ideas to the organization.

### 4. Great Teams Create and Maintain Depth

Once the leaders of a Great Team recruit A-caliber players who fit the culture, they continue the process by building depth in the organization. Depth provides suitable replacements for key players and a sense of calm in moments that can be perceived as tumultuous by members of the team.

The top-performing sports and business organizations all operate on the principles that 1) no team player is irreplaceable and 2) talent must be shaped in order to build a deep bench at all levels of the organization. One of the best ways for leaders to do this is to create healthy internal competition. The right kind of competition within an organization can bring out the best performance and growth of A-caliber recruits and high-potential employees.

Additionally, Great Team cultures develop strategies for improving the quality of depth at various positions within the organization. Implementing intense practices or creating a learning environment can enhance both the skill level of individual players or employees and the depth of the team positions.

The concept that one person’s presence or absence can make or break a team is antithetical to how a team should operate. An organization that lacks depth places immense responsibility on the shoulders of a few.

This can be a crucial mistake, as the Indianapolis Colts learned during their 2011–2012 season. When their superstar quarterback, Peyton Manning sustained a neck injury

and missed the entire season, the team suffered. They won only two games that season because they did not have a backup plan in the event of Manning’s absence. By contrast, when St. Louis Rams quarterback Trent Green was injured in 1999, backup quarterback Kurt Warner took over. This deep-bench substitution led to the Rams’ first Super Bowl win and sparked a three-season run that is famously known as the “Greatest Show on Turf.”

Just as a good coach has a plan to replace a starting player, a business leader must have a plan to replace a key employee. This is one of the most helpful and necessary parts of creating depth in a company. Even when it’s not feasible to hire from outside to fill a vacancy, it makes sense to plan for a replacement from within the organization and prepare that person for the new responsibilities.

### 5. Great Teams Have a Road Map

Every Great Team lays out its plan for finding success in a clear and concise road map. To help navigate that vision, a successful organization has an active, well-designed training program with end goals in mind. This plan is the fabric of an organization’s culture, and all involved in it understand the importance of following the road map to reach their desired success — even if the journey is a long one.

A road map guides a team in its pursuit of greatness and forms a culture in which individuals can identify their long-term roles. No team can achieve long-term success without one. Whether in the world of sports or business, a road map is vital to reaching a team’s full potential.

Bill Snyder, head coach of the Kansas State University Wildcats football team, installed a road map for his organization that transformed the struggling football program into a national powerhouse. One of the first things he did to turn the team around was to post his “16 Goals for Success” as a motivator to inspire program change. These goals — gathered succinctly on a single page — were leadership terms with clearly spelled out definitions — and expectations — for his players to follow daily. The Wildcats used Snyder’s clear vision as a driver, winning 193 victories in his 24 years of coaching.

A Great Team outlines expectations for all members of an organization and for the organization as a whole. This clear-cut set of objectives — a road map — enables the organization to set benchmarks and goals and ultimately to lay the foundation for its own success.

Take, for example, Nestlé Global and its 4x4x4 Roadmap. In this one-page document, Nestlé describes its vision for the brand across all departments and subsidiary products. This road map outlines Nestlé’s four

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“competitive advantages,” four “growth drivers” and four “operational pillars.” Combined, these 12 principles form a clear outline of the company’s plan for the future.

The Nestlé Strategic Roadmap differs from a typical business mission statement in the same way the plan of a successful sports organization differs from that of a mediocre one. Nestlé clearly states its goal to be “the leader in Nutrition, Health and Wellness, and the industry reference for financial performance, trusted by stakeholders.” Its road map spells out how it will achieve this goal as a company.

### 6. Great Teams Promote Camaraderie and a Sense of Collective Direction

Team building requires camaraderie — fellowship among members of the team.

Camaraderie doesn’t happen by accident; developing a strong sense of trust, accountability and togetherness around team goals requires intentional effort. When an organization comes to a collective understanding of its objective, the individuals develop a sense of responsibility to each other. They know the direction the team is heading and trust that their teammates are willing to work hard to accomplish their respective goals.

Sylvia Hatchell, head coach of the women’s basketball team at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, is the third-winningest head coach in NCAA women’s basketball history. She has built a strong team culture by creating a family system and promoting a mentality of respect and winning — especially in regards to developing camaraderie. Hatchell said, “Out there by yourself, you can be broken. With your team, you can’t. That’s how you win championships.”

Building mental and emotional bridges among team members can increase employee engagement, productivity and innovation. Camaraderie is often overlooked, but it can be the greatest asset in unifying a team. ●

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## Pillar Three: Activating Efficiency

### 7. Great Teams Manage Dysfunction, Friction and Strong Personalities

While 100 percent camaraderie is the dream scenario for team culture, some degree of dysfunction is likely in even the best situations. When a team has strong personalities and talented people, there will inevitably be friction. The roles of persecutor, victim and rescuer are played out in disagreements in sports and business each and every day. Such a clash of personalities can heavily disrupt the

productivity of a team — or can even destroy it. But if the situation is handled wisely, the fireworks can be defused and a productive working relationship can move forward on a positive note.

The common perception is that conflict should be avoided at all costs. But not all conflict is negative or deconstructive. It can be a source of tremendous energy and innovation when managed well.

According to the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, leaders commonly manage — or mismanage — conflict in one of five ways:

Some rely on their rank and title, debating fiercely if necessary, to force their way through workplace friction. That’s **competing**. Others try to “play nice,” giving in to even unreasonable demands to keep the peace. Their strategy is **accommodating**. Some fail at addressing conflict because they’d rather pretend it isn’t happening and hope it will settle itself. They are masters at **avoiding** the issues. Still others prefer **compromising** and try for a middle ground.

Each of these four strategies for dealing with conflict can have some success. But Great Teams set a standard above the rest by choosing the fifth option — **collaborating**. This means they do their best to listen actively, consider all points of view, and stress the common purpose and shared values of the organization.

Great Teams don’t falter in the face of friction but grow stronger when addressing it directly.

### 8. Great Teams Build a Mentoring Culture

The most successful and high-performing teams strategically embed professional guidance within their cultures to inspire teaching and learning at every opportunity. Great Teams understand how powerful the synergy can be between veterans and recruits, especially when both mentors and mentees have clearly defined responsibilities to make the relationship successful.

Like the most successful teams in sports, many of the high-performing organizations in business make mentoring a priority. Technology manufacturer Intel, for example, has created a process that connects individuals on the basis of high-demand skills. The mentees — whom Intel calls “partners” — choose topics that interest them, and an Intel questionnaire and extensive employee database match the recruits with mentors who are subject-matter experts in those areas. Intel has three rules for its mentoring relationships: 1) partners govern the relationship, create meeting dates and ultimately decide what they would like to work on; 2) mentors and partners draw up a contract

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that contains the details of the mentoring relationship; and 3) terms and limitations are left to be discussed and decided upon by the mentor and partner, *not* Intel. The fact that employees can access Intel's innovative mentoring system through email and company intranet expands the mentoring reach across the company's international employee pool. The result is a diverse, open stream of information sharing that ultimately fuels growth by shaping the company culture. As Intel has shown, when a corporate culture includes mentorship, the end result is a dynamic learning environment with leaders constantly shaping leaders.

### 9. Great Teams Adjust Quickly to Leadership Transitions

In sports and business, transition is inevitable. Any organization will be uniquely challenged when responding to employee retirement, resignation or termination — but Great Teams adjust more quickly than their opponents and do not allow leadership change to derail their missions. Instead of losing momentum and letting change become an excuse for failure, the leaders of these organizations allow moments of change to accelerate their teams' success.

In 2005, Symantec acquired Veritas Software in order to gain a competitive edge; however, the move more than doubled Symantec's staff — to 14,000 — and created engagement problems with far-flung employees. Communication suffered, cooperation dwindled and disengagement grew. Silicon Valley watchdogs, keenly observing the merger, even recruited and hired away Symantec employees.

Former vice president Jennifer Reimert and her team sought to correct these failures with a more effective way to reward outstanding members of their huge employee base for good service. Later that year, the company introduced Applause, an employee recognition program that rewarded high performers. Applause not only recognized the top 15 percent of the company's employees, but also served as a driver for refreshing Symantec's corporate culture and reinforcing the company's values of innovation, trust and customer-driven action.

Employees were empowered to congratulate and celebrate the accomplishments of colleagues who did outstanding work or provided innovative ideas. Job satisfaction and cooperation soared as people rewarded one another enthusiastically. Production rose as employees strove for recognition themselves. And by centralizing the process, Symantec reached more employees than ever and strengthened its corporate culture.

### 10. Great Teams Adapt and Embrace Change

Being resistant — or even oblivious — to change is a common mistake. Great Teams keep their eyes open to what is going on and tweak their methods to ensure an ability to thrive in changing circumstances. At the same time, their leaders remain mentally tough and understand the importance of focusing on the task at hand in the midst of changing circumstances.

Bill McDermott of SAP said, "Always be who you said you would be to your customer and do things for them that others perhaps wouldn't do." The ability to adapt style of play to current conditions is crucial in business, particularly in a digital world where consumer demands change quickly.

The first step in embracing change is recognizing the internal and environmental factors that made you successful in the first place. Understanding how these components have changed over time will help identify what the company needs to do to stay ahead of the competition.

Achieving success is an evolving process that becomes more challenging with each passing year. But if an organization can acknowledge the reality that past success does not necessarily predict future success, then change becomes an unlikely ally rather than an adversary.

Any team desiring to be great must develop the mental edge required to master change. Ultimately, that's what makes the most innovative and undeniably successful teams great.

### 11. Great Teams Run Successful Huddles

A common frustration among organizations is company meetings, which can trigger negative emotions throughout the levels of any team. Lateness, inattention, overdrawn objectives and unclear directives are enough to give even the most seasoned professionals a dislike for meetings. But Great Teams use these gatherings to inspire confidence, encourage productivity and create a competitive advantage. They understand the value of getting together in person or via technology to share opinions, coordinate plans and solidify team culture.

A Great Team will be intentional about how meetings are conducted. Here are 10 ways Great Teams can ensure equally great meetings:

- Begin and end meetings on time. Consider instituting consequences for team members who are chronically late.
- Schedule meetings wisely. Great meetings and huddles are planned when all participants can attend.

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- Begin with a shared or pre-read agenda — and stick to it.
- Engage employees with strong, emotion-driving content.
- Make the meeting's objective clear from the beginning.
- Don't waste time with off-topic discussion.
- Allot enough time for necessary discussion points.
- Calculate the cost of all in the meeting, and make the appointment count.
- Tailor the meetings for all participants.
- End the meeting by reviewing objectives met or decisions made. ●

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## Pillar Four: Mutual Direction

### 12. Great Teams Improve Through Scouting

Great Teams scout their competition in order to gain competitive advantage. Having a clear understanding of how competitors do things can set up a company to do the same things better. This is key for immediate and long-term success.

In sports an appropriate strategy or game plan cannot be formulated without a detailed scouting report. Scouts provide both firsthand and video evaluation of the opponents' tendencies or styles of play. Additionally, the staff completes a computer analysis of the opposing team — both current and long-term — for the coaches to study and break down.

When leaders of a professional team perform a scan, they examine the trends dominating their customer demographics, education, government policy and especially their competition. Great Teams analyze every perspective and option and position themselves to take full advantage of any knowledge gained about an opponent.

In the corporate world, the SWOT analysis is a user-friendly, widely accepted tool that helps an organization evaluate itself internally. Leaders who utilize the SWOT understand that they can directly manage their internal strengths and weaknesses and capitalize on favorable conditions in the marketplace, but must anticipate — and react appropriately to — outside threats.

Benchmarking, like the SWOT analysis, is one of a leader's strongest resources in identifying how the company's products, practices and services measure up against competitors. The goal of benchmarking is to evaluate whether internal processes are above or below external industry standards. This works by examining

company-to-company comparisons of day-to-day functions and overall performance.

Scouting — both internal and external — is a consistent learning tool that all teams should adopt and reinforce. Good scouting keeps a team continually aware of its potential, the capabilities of its opponents and the need to develop aggressive championship strategies.

### 13. Great Teams See Value Others Miss

Great teams never answer the “why” question with, “Because we've always done it this way.” Instead, they regularly evaluate each situation and seek unique opportunities for improvement. In today's fast-paced world, many of those opportunities can be found in the world of analytics — defined as “the method of logical analysis.”

Big data is a hot topic in the worlds of sports and business because the collection of metrics, analytics and information can reveal a potential advantage or disadvantage. The Great Teams collect that data and analyze it to recognize trends others might miss.

Sometimes a team needs a fresh look at what everyone has decided the “rules” for success look like. At the Pulaski Academy, the Bruins varsity football team is led by Coach Kevin Kelley. In 2003, Coach Kelly watched a taped lecture by a Harvard professor on the value of the fourth-down punt. The professor analyzed 2,000 football games and came to the conclusion that teams should *never* punt.

Armed with new perspective and valuable stats, Kelley broke down the numbers behind his own team's fourth-down decisions. The data he found backed up the concept that going for it on fourth down was the correct call, even though most football coaches adamantly insisted on punting the ball to the other team. And for that reason, the Pulaski Academy Bruins made an unorthodox decision they would never punt the football again. Coach Kelley's unconventional football philosophy has been effective for his team, which has five state championships under his leadership.

With metrics now considered a best practice in today's marketplace, several key lessons have emerged from the leading voices in statistical analysis: Big data drives accurate decision making. Statisticians understand the importance of informed business decisions, and data analysis can help encourage an organization toward — or dissuade it from — taking a course of action.

### 14. Great Teams Win in Critical Situations

Every player or employee wants to be a part of a team that can achieve victory in the most critical of situations. A Great Team wins in those moments because it has figured out effective ways to finish strong. And with the game

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on the line, a team accustomed to pressure can execute its strategy without hesitation and not fall apart in the process. The culture of a fourth-quarter team requires countless hours of team preparation so that its members learn to trust in themselves and each other when the stakes are high. This type of approach can help a team get through a season, series or game even when the scoreboard tilts the wrong way.

A high-performing team does not remove its foot from the accelerator even in critical moments but instead focuses on ongoing strategy and goal completion. In critical times, a team should always do what it does best. Intense moments should never be the stage for trying something rarely practiced.

### 15. Great Teams Speak a Different Language

Through success or failure, great leaders always know what to say to bring out the best in their organizations. Many teams undervalue the art of properly framing communication, especially in times of struggle. Successful leaders do not berate or chide team members but seek ways to positively articulate objectives and expectations. They have better coaching conversations, ask better questions and drive results. Positive communication is not only a habit for high-performance teams but also a tool used to reinforce and enhance the values of organizations.

Great Teams create cultures with solid foundations in positive reinforcement. Walt Disney World and Disneyland acknowledges superstar employees — which the company refers to as “Cast Members” — on the spot with its Guest Service Fanatic cards. Whenever Disney management (or any fellow employee) notices a Cast Member truly living and expressing the company’s service values of safety, courtesy, show and efficiency, the actions of the employee are recognized on the spot by handing out the cards. Card recipients are eligible for drawings, and copies of the cards are kept in the recipients’ personnel files.

The cards have been beneficial to Disney because 1) leaders are expected to be on alert for employees who are living the values and 2) Cast Members are recognized for doing their jobs well and reinforcing culture. Additionally, the cards serve as fantastic leadership indicators when the company is seeking dedicated employees for promotions. It’s always easier for team leaders to criticize performance, but Great Teams create cultures that have solid foundations in positive reinforcement.

### 16. Great Teams Avoid the Pitfalls of Success

As difficult as winning is, winning repeatedly is more challenging by a factor of ten. Even after defeating all

competitors, some organizations are truly unprepared for victory. A team that does not know how to navigate success will ultimately be thrown off track in its attempts to succeed further. The Great Teams maintain success by not falling victim to the pitfalls of human nature; they overcome common temptations, resist complacency and nurture a culture that wins consistently. Winners capitalize on new opportunities, adjust game plans and do not settle for what worked last season or year.

The Great Teams are led by culturally intelligent leaders. These individuals understand the impact that a strong workplace culture can have on goal completion and focus-driven work. And a culturally perceptive team can be especially valuable during challenging times.

The most successful brands of our time — such as Nike, McDonald’s, Google and Apple — tend to transcend the marketplace, ultimately becoming something much greater than a brand: a *meaning*. A brand becomes symbolic by keeping cultural promises in an ever-changing society; its relevance is embedded in its desire to remain significant. Likewise, risk-taking organizations outperform companies that play it safe during periods of change. These teams seek and create new possibilities with an innovative spirit.

It’s never too early for a team to discuss the temptations of victory and new goals worth fighting for. Successful teams should ask themselves, “How do we respond after a record year? In what ways can we defy the natural human tendency to coast?”

For a Great Team, repeat success is often a byproduct of a high-performing culture. Maintaining championship or industry-leading momentum requires experienced leadership, cultural drivers and clear communication of the end goal and how to get there. People want to feel excited about the future and the potential of progress.

Progressive leaders understand these truths and connect their teams to a culture that motivates, challenges and empowers them to start and to keep winning. Always strive to remember the pitfalls of success — and don’t let them derail your Great Team! ●

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