



Building a Champion Team

Champion teams have the following requirements:

1. A good leader
2. Common Goals
3. Rules of the game
4. Code of honour
5. 100% Participation
6. Support for risk takers

I find the best way to explain these points is to compare a business team with a sporting team, because fundamentally they are the same. So here goes:

1. A good leader

How often have you seen a sporting team being easily beaten and then after half time, they come out and win the game. What happened at half time? The coach and captain (leaders) got the team re-focused on what they had to do and motivated them to do it.

How often have you seen a captain of a team make a decision on the field (eg. Whether to kick for goal or go for a try) that lead to the team winning or losing. A good captain needs to consider the situation and then be decisive. If they make the wrong decision, they will take responsibility and consider what they overlooked.

A business team leader is no different. They need to keep the team focussed and motivated and to make business critical decisions and hold themselves accountable.

2. Common Goals

Every sporting team has short and long term goals. The short term goals would be to win each individual game. The long term goal would be to win the competition.

If a team didn't have the long term goal of winning the competition, then it would be harder for them to regroup after losing a game. The long term vision enables them to keep focussed and continue improving to start winning games.

Business is no different. You need to have a vision of what you want the business to look like in the future (5 – 10 years). You then set the Key Objectives you need to achieve to get you there. As the old saying goes "If you fail to plan, then you plan to fail". But like the sporting team, these goals are useless if they are not known by all your staff and together you strive to achieve them.

3. Rules of the Game

Every game has to have a set of rules to ensure it is a meaningful competition. You can imagine the bedlam if you were to give 2 teams of 15 people a ball and then put them onto a field with no rules of the game. Similarly, it would be unfair to give the rules to one team and not the other.

In business, the rules of the game are things like Conditions of Employment, Job Descriptions and Key Performance Indicators. Yet many businesses fail to have these properly documented and effectively passed onto all staff. You can imagine how upset a football player would be if they kept getting penalised for rules they were unaware of and employees are no different.

4. Code of Honour

Every **successful** sporting team has a code of honour that dictates how they treat each other and the level of commitment that they expect. A controversial example of a team that didn't have this, would be the Women's Eight rowing team at the Athens Olympics.

This is called "Culture" in business and every great business has a strong culture that all team members buy into. Do yourself a favour and read "Fish" by Stephen Lundin.

5. 100% Participation

For a sporting team to succeed all team-mates need to participate fully. That's why great teams put huge emphasis on training to ensure they all have adequate fitness and skill levels.

A team of employees is no different and you can't expect team members to participate fully if they don't have the necessary skills and knowledge to complete their required tasks effectively.

6. Support Risk Takers

Good coaches develop game plans that allow their players to take chances if an opportunity arises. Opportunities to win games can be easily squandered if the game plan is too rigid and the players are scared of making mistakes. How often do you see a beaten team start playing a free flowing game after they realise they're beaten and relax?

Business opportunities are overlooked every day, because employees fail to act in case they get disciplined if it doesn't work out. Now I'm not saying we should let employees do whatever they want, but if we have the first five points in place, then employees know the parameters they can make a decision in. If it fails to work, then a good manager guides them through their thought process to see where they went wrong, whilst supporting their initial action.

Keeping with the sporting analogy, I would like to make one final point.

Before every game a coach develops a game plan that guides the players on how to beat the opposition. Otherwise the team will play the entire game based on decisions individuals make at the spur of the moment. This will lead to disarray, as the individuals won't know what to expect from their team-mates.

In business the game plan is a system. To have a successful business run by a champion team, you need to systemise it as much as possible. This is the only way you can ensure that your results – be they for customers, staff or stakeholders- are consistent.

Systems run the business and people run the systems.