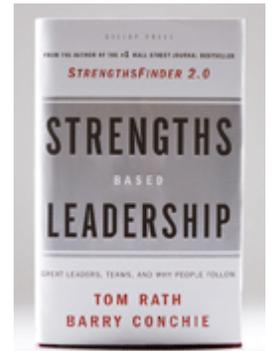


What Strong Teams Have in Common

The Gallup organization has been studying leadership teams for nearly four decades, and has witnessed some telltale signs of strong, high-performing teams.¹



1. Conflict doesn't destroy strong teams because strong teams focus on results.

Contrary to popular belief, the most successful teams are not the ones in which team members always agree with one another. Instead, they are often characterized by healthy debate -- and at times, heated arguments. What distinguishes strong teams from dysfunctional ones is that debate doesn't cause them to fragment. Instead of becoming more isolated during tough times, these teams actually *gain* strength and develop cohesion.

One reason great teams are able to grow through conflict is because they have a laser-like focus on results. Top teams seek out evidence and data and try to remain as objective as possible. As a result, while people may have different views, they are united in seeking the truth. Team members can argue, but in the end, they are on the same side. In sharp contrast, failing teams tend to personalize disagreement, creating territorial divides that continue to grow.

2. Strong teams prioritize what's best for the organization, then move forward.

While competition for resources and divergent points of view exist, the best teams are able to keep the larger goal in view. Members of high-performing teams are consistently able to put what's best for the organization ahead of their own egos. And once a decision is made, these teams are remarkably quick to rally around it.

One team we worked with had a long, drawn-out debate over whether they should invest in a major new idea. After months of intense discussion, it would have been easy for John, who technically "lost" the argument, to sit back and sulk after the decision was made. Yet the exact opposite occurred. Like other great team members we have studied, John got over the debate quickly and asked, "What resources do you need from me to make this work?" Once a decision is made, members of great teams rally around to help one another (and the organization) succeed.

¹ <http://gmj.gallup.com/content/113341/What-Strong-Teams-Common.aspx?CSTS=newsletter&CSTP=html#2>

3. Members of strong teams are as committed to their personal lives as they are to their work.

The best teams we studied seemed to live a contradiction. Some of the most productive team members work extreme hours and endure amazing levels of responsibility. They sometimes work 60 hours a week and travel frequently. Yet they consider their lives to be in balance. They seem to have enough time to do the things they want to do with their families. As hard as they work for the company, they seem to bring the same level of energy and intensity to their family, social, and community life.

When we interviewed Standard Chartered's Mervyn Davies, he told us that he takes as much pride in the amount of time he spends with his wife and two children as he does in his bank's extraordinary performance. While this may seem surprising to an outside observer, Davies described how he strives to dedicate 100% of his attention to his family throughout the weekend. Davies extends this philosophy to all of his bank's employees, always encouraging them to put family first.

Our evidence suggests that the most successful teams have members who are highly engaged in their work *and* highly satisfied with their personal lives. By setting this expectation, which so many others perceive as unattainable, they attract new members who want to do the same. This high level of engagement then sets a powerful example for the entire organization.

4. Strong teams embrace diversity.

Our work with the leadership teams of some of the most innovative and successful companies in the world reveals a simple truth: Having a team composed of individuals who look at issues similarly, who have been the product of comparable educational backgrounds, and who have experiences with similar track records and approaches is not a sound basis for success.

**THE MOST ENGAGED TEAMS WELCOME DIVERSITY OF AGE, GENDER, AND RACE, WHILE
DISENGAGED TEAMS MAY DO THE OPPOSITE.**

Our research shows that leadership teams need a diversity of strengths -- ideally, including individuals who demonstrate a balance of strengths in different leadership dimensions. But diversity goes well beyond team strengths. We have also discovered that the most engaged teams welcome diversity of age, gender, and race, while disengaged teams may do the opposite.

For example, Gallup's research revealed that actively disengaged team members are 33% more likely to plan on leaving their job if they have a manager of a different race (when compared to having a manager of the same race). However, when we study engaged teams, people are actually a bit *more likely to stay* with the company if they have a manager of a different race. So whereas a disengaged employee is more likely to quit his job if he has a supervisor of another race, an engaged employee is less likely to leave under the same circumstances.

The most engaged teams look at individuals through the lens of their natural strengths, not at physical characteristics. This keeps the team focused on the potential within each person and minimizes the influence of superficial barriers.

5. Strong teams are magnets for talent.

Another way to spot a strong team is to look for the teams that everyone wants to be on. For some people, it may be hard to understand why anyone would want to join a team that works longer and harder and that comes complete with sky-high expectations. This is especially true when these "it" teams are characterized by intense competition and extreme accountability for results.

Yet despite all the consequences and pressure, it is your potential stars who most want to be on these teams. They see top teams as the most stimulating place to be -- the place where they can demonstrate their leadership and have a real impact. Instead of being intimidated by the challenge and responsibility, they seek out these teams.

As former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan described in a leadership interview with Gallup, building a strong team within an organization requires the same basic ingredients of a successful soccer squad. Annan encourages the teams to "play in a coordinated manner," but he is quick to point out that should not exclude "individual brilliance." Annan explains that as long as the brilliant ones are pulling with us toward the same goal, this individual talent actually strengthens the collective team. As a result, successful teams often have an organization-wide influence.

Building a strong team requires a substantial amount of time and effort. Getting the right strengths on the team is a good starting point, but it is not enough. For a team to create sustained growth, the leader must continue to invest in each person's strengths and in building better relationships among the group members. When leaders can do this, it allows the entire team to spend even more time thinking about the needs of the people they serve.