

LEADERSHIP

Building and Caring for Your Team

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Big Idea: A great leader knows how to equip, empower and release others

The Why: Your ministry or organization will die without it

When I was growing up, it wasn't uncommon for me to hear these words: "You're Bossy." Because I was also not always the nicest little girl, sometimes I would respond by saying:

"Oh yeah? Well, what about your face?"

Hey, I grew up in Jersey, what do you expect? Thankfully, God has refined me over the years. And the truth is—I was bossy. From a young age, I loved the idea of leading something, generating movement around an idea, getting people to buy into whatever that idea was, and then follow me while we execute it. It didn't matter if it was a class project or a recess game. I wanted to be THE LEADER.

I don't think that was a bad thing at all. In my youth, I sensed that I was designed to be a leader. I just didn't know how to get people to follow me or build a team. As I got older, I was a part of many different teams, sports teams, drama teams, choir, etc. Each experience was different, but each experience taught me something about the value of a team. I remember having great coaches and flourishing under their leadership. I also remember being on teams and begging my mom to quit because I hated the experience. She didn't :) And now, I'm grateful for that because, without all of those experiences, I wouldn't have the passion I have today for building teams.

The truth is, if you're a Christian, you don't have to read very far in the New Testament before seeing something so clearly: Jesus was a team builder. Here's why that is important: Jesus didn't *NEED* the disciples to do ministry with Him. He *WANTED* them. He wanted to

equip, empower, and then **release** them to do ministry so that, after He was gone, His work would continue.

We get a better understanding of this idea when we read this verse in Ephesians, "...And their calling is to nurture and prepare **all** the holy believers to do their **own** works of ministry, and as they do this, they will **enlarge and build** up the body of Christ." *Ephesians 4:12*

When was the last time you thought about your spiritual lineage? Is there anyone in your life who would look to you as a mentor or a spiritual father/mother? Is there anyone you are pouring into, equipping them to do the work they were called to do? Some of you might read that and think that this doesn't apply to you. Maybe you're young, and you expect that someone should be doing this for you. And maybe you're right. But investing in others and building teams has nothing to do with how old you are or how much experience you have. At every stage of our lives, we should be empowering others and raising up others to take our place.

Why does this matter so much?

In the Church, THIS is how the Gospel will continue to spread generation after generation. Simply put, if the Church doesn't build teams and equip others, the Church dies. And for those of you outside of the church, this idea of team building is how your business or organization grows and experiences ultimate success.

The question to answer is HOW? How do we build teams? How do we empower others? Listen, there are tons of books, podcasts, workshops and classes on how to build teams. I don't think I have it all figured out, that's for sure. But what I want to share with you are lessons I've learned over 20+ years in ministry, and doing these things has helped me build dynamic teams AND empower people to be who God has made them to be. There is NOTHING better than that!

So, let's get practical:

First, you have to identify the **GOAL** in building teams: To reproduce yourself in ministry or the workplace by **Equipping, Empowering** and **Releasing** others to serve/work using the gifts God has placed inside of them.

You should constantly ask yourself: Who knows what I know and can do what I do?

Look at this verse from I Peter: "God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another." *I PETER 4:10*

Don't miss this: God has already done the hard work here - He has already gifted people. Our churches are filled with people who already possess the gifts they need to be on YOUR team. Wasn't that nice of God? And He also helps us out by giving this command: Use your gifts to serve others.

There is a fundamental principle here that I don't want you to miss as you think about this. Too often, we think our role as leaders is to convince others to help out - to share the burden, lighten the load, take the weight off. While there are definitely aspects of this in building a team, please remember this:

We are not asking people to help. We are empowering people to serve.

Read that a few more times. Say it out loud. Memorize it. One of the worst mistakes you can make as a leader is to take the approach of just trying to get people to help. The quickest way to dismantle your team is to find the menial tasks you don't like doing and try to give them to someone else. That is not team building. That is merely assigning chores. Empowering others to serve is based on the truth that God has made ALL of us for a purpose. He has given each one of us gifts from his "great variety of spiritual gifts," and you are allowing people to use that gift to serve Him and serve others.

I want to share Four Practical tips on how you can first begin to build a team, and then once you've started to build it, how to care for those you are leading.

CAST VISION

If you and I were friends sitting down for coffee having this discussion, this might be the point where I raise my voice and demand your attention. I see leaders skip this crucial step all the time. They move right to the ask - the *WHAT*- instead of casting visions - the *WHY*. To cast vision for your team, start by asking yourself these questions:

- Why would someone want to be on your team?
 - Why did you start it?
 - Why are you trying to build it?
- What do you love about your team and what they do?

If you can't answer those questions, you're going to have a hard time generating momentum for your team - but once you can answer those, you have a great platform to share the *WHY*.

People are not drawn to tasks. People are drawn to vision.

Several years ago, I was teaching first grade. One of my students' fathers was a salesman for a company, and he asked if he could come over and tell my husband and me more about it. To be honest, I wasn't interested, but he persisted and so we invited him over and as he began to talk about his company, his eyes lit up, he was coming off of his chair with enthusiasm, and at one point, he literally said these words:

"THIS COMPANY IS CHANGING LIVES!"

By the end of the night, we had bought several products! He cast such a compelling vision, and we caught it. Let me ask you something: When is the last time you felt that excited about your team, your company, or your ministry? Do your eyes light up when you talk about it? Do you feel passionate about what you are doing? Do people even know it matters to you?

We can say many negative things about social media, but one of the best things about it is that it gives us a platform to share with others what is valuable to us. I often say, "*What's visible is what's valuable.*" You don't have to tell a young couple in love to post more selfies :) They love showing their love! Why? because it's valuable to them. If team building and empowering others is valuable to you, you have to make it visible to others.

Here is the second principle to being a successful team builder:

DEFINE EXPECTATIONS

One of the most frustrating things we can do as leaders is to invite people to be a part of our team without clearly communicating the expectations. I've sat down with struggling leaders before to talk about team building, and they will say something like this:

"Well, I've tried to build a team, but it doesn't work. People just bail."

And I get it. Sometimes that does happen. But something else that I've seen repeatedly is someone bringing people on to their team without defining expectations, which sets everyone up to fail. People generally want to know what's expected of them. And when they know, they will rise to meet the expectations. Remember this: **People crave clarity.**

As you begin to build your team, you should always be answering this question:

Do people know what they need to know to do what I want them to do? I can promise you this, if they don't, they are already on the road to burn out. Be vigilant about clarity and watch people stay around for a long time.

There's another reason why defining expectations at the beginning is so important: it creates an authentic environment to circle back with someone on your team when they're not meeting expectations. We can feel frustrated as leaders when our teams aren't performing well, but we only have ourselves to blame if their lack of performance is due to our lack of clarity. Let's move on to the last two principles. These principles are centered around *caring* for the team you have built.

CHECK-IN

Not long ago, I talked with a ministry leader who was trying to rebuild a team he had inherited. He started out by making phone calls to people who had previously served on the team. As he began to make these calls, one by one he heard the same story: these volunteers had gone MONTHS without ever hearing from their leader. He was shocked. If you are building a team inside of a church or a ministry, please don't forget this:

Volunteers GET to quit whenever they want to.

They don't have to give two weeks notice or hand off their role to someone else before they go. You may think they owe it to you, but they don't. One of the best things you can do to retain the team you've built is to check in with them often. This shows them they are cared for and appreciated. I use a simple two-question format when I am checking in with volunteers on my team:

- How are **You?** This is a personal check-in. It's an opportunity to hear about how they are doing, how their family is, how you can pray for them. Connecting with them about their lives is a great way to show them how much you value them being a part of your team.
- How are **We?** This is a team check-in. It's an opportunity to hear about how they are doing on the team, how things are going, and things you need to address. Are there any obstacles you can help remove? Do they need your support in some way?

I think great leaders understand that the more they ***care for their team***, the more their team will ***care about their work***. This last principle is SO important - like, consider-getting-it- tattooed-on-your-arm important.

CELEBRATE/EVALUATE

The Celebrate/Evaluate principle goes like this:

Celebrate BEFORE you ***Evaluate*** so that you don't ***Deflate*** your team.

Here is why this matters: As leaders, we have to care about how things are going. The product or result of our team's work has to matter to us and we want it to be excellent. Because of this, we typically stay in evaluation mode - always seeking to improve things, making decisions and giving feedback. And those things HAVE to happen - no question. BUT. And please don't miss this: When we consistently stay in evaluation mode, we MISS celebrating the things - even the little things - our team is doing well. And a team that is continually being *evaluated*, without being *celebrated*, is quickly *deflated*. And there are few things less thrilling than trying to lead and motivate a deflated team.

Several years ago, I inherited a deflated team. They were hard workers and very good at what they did, but the team morale was low because they had not experienced a culture of celebration. Early on, I realized that to galvanize them around a new vision and increased workload, they needed to experience being celebrated consistently. I began sending texts daily to people on the team. They were short and simple, but those quick messages began to make a difference. Not long after that, we did a team lunch, and I wrote each of them a personal card of thanks for how hard they had been working. I have to tell you that it was one of the most rewarding moments for me as a leader. I watched their faces as they read their cards. I saw some of them dab at their eyes; some just grinned like a kid on Christmas morning. Listen, those cards and texts cost me *nothing*, but they meant *everything*.

And here is the biggest takeaway: As they began to feel celebrated, they were so open to being evaluated. It became a common practice for them to ASK me for feedback and evaluation. Most people on a team want to work hard and do a great job. They want to please and succeed. As they are successful, great leaders must notice and celebrate.

I will wrap up with this final thought on celebrating and evaluating. A deflated team is also an exhausted team. They may not even be overwhelmed with work. Most times, they're not; they just feel *depleted* because they are *deflated*. One of the best things you can do as you begin to lead a team is building a culture of celebration and then evaluation. It's a sure way to build a healthy team.

Building and caring for a team is an opportunity to empower people as Jesus did. He brought people around Him and brought the best out of them. He modeled what it looked like to Equip, Empower, and Release people. I love that we have his example to follow. As we follow his lead, we will become great leaders and team builders ourselves.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

- Read Ephesians 4:12. How are you living this out?
- Why do you think Empowering Others is so important for growth?
- Who is someone that has invested in you and helped you get to where you are today? Who is someone you could do that for?
- What aspects of team building seem the hardest? What are some practical things you start doing now to work on those?
- Pray.
 - For yourself: that God would strengthen you as you lead others
 - For your team: that God would bless and multiply your team
 - For your ministry: that God would bring others into your sphere of influence whom you can invest in and empower for the work He has called them to do.