

## Team leaders wanted! Sign up here

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Teams are increasingly how work gets done in organizations<sup>1</sup> creating a growing number of team leader and team leadership opportunities. Employees often contribute to multiple teams within and across departments, businesses and geographies.

This generates a requirement for organizations to develop greater leadership bench strength as well as coach new team leaders in situ.

*What attributes should managers be looking for when selecting team leaders and what tips can they offer new team leaders?*

### Team leader attributes

Team leaders play an important role in both **team performance** and **team health**.

They help to execute vision, provide guidance to team members, build morale, foster creativity and promote values<sup>2</sup>. An effective team leader:<sup>3</sup>

- Can translate vision into action
- Has positive energy
- Is level-headed
- Can delegate well
- Is a role model (e.g. leads by example, approachable, always looking to learn and improve)
- Is not afraid to course correct<sup>4</sup>
- Is versatile (can adapt to working with different functions, people and styles)

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<sup>1</sup> McDowell, T. et al., *Organizational design: The rise of teams*, 2016 *Global Human Capital Trends*, Deloitte University Press, February 29 2016, <https://dupress.deloitte.com/dup-us-en/focus/human-capital-trends/2016/organizational-models-network-of-teams.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Joseph, C., Importance of a Leader In a Team, Chron.com  
<http://smallbusiness.chron.com/importance-leader-team-52168.html>

<sup>3</sup> Root III, G.N., The Attributes of an Effective Team Leader, Chron.com.  
<http://smallbusiness.chron.com/attributes-effective-team-leader-11791.html>

<sup>4</sup> Llopis, G., 6 Ways Successful Teams Are Built To Last, Forbes.com  
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/glennllopis/2012/10/01/6-ways-successful-teams-are-built-to-last/#75ad295c2b55>

In addition to helping the team to achieve results, leaders can promote team health<sup>5</sup> by:

- Encouraging a shared vision
- Equally valuing individual ideas
- Emphasizing mistakes as part of the learning process
- Demonstrating freedom to offer constructive criticism without fear of retribution

This helps to create a climate of *psychological safety* — “a team climate characterized by interpersonal trust and mutual respect in which people are comfortable being themselves,”<sup>6</sup>

Google’s project Aristotle, their research project to discover what makes a great team, identified psychological safety to be the #1 trait of their high performance teams<sup>7</sup>

### **How to help new team leaders get off to a good start**

*When coaching new team leaders what tips or advice can managers offer them?*

#### 1. Make the time to lead and get to know your team

“To be effective, leaders need to invest time in the role.”<sup>8</sup> Take time to listen to your team members (e.g. issues, aspirations) and also identify potential strengths and weaknesses.

#### 2. Communicate your vision and values

During your initial interactions with team members use the opportunity to share your values, priorities, how you will make decisions and evaluate performance.

“By communicating your vision and values, you will show your team that you’re committed to a healthy degree of transparency”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Edmondson, R., 10 Characteristics of a Healthy Organization or Team, Catalystreader.com January 11, 2012. <https://catalystleader.com/read/10-characteristics-of-a-healthy-organization-or-team>

<sup>6</sup> Edmondson, A., Building a psychologically safe workplace, TEDxHGSE, May 4, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhoLuui9gX8>

<sup>7</sup> Shriar, J., How To Build Psychological Safety On Your Team, Officevibe, September 6, 2016 <https://www.officevibe.com/blog/build-psychological-safety>

<sup>8</sup> Crump, C., 8 tips for new team leaders, liquidplanner.com, July 29, 2014. <https://www.liquidplanner.com/blog/8-tips-new-team-leaders/>

<sup>9</sup> Watkins, M.D., The First 90 Days, Updated and Expanded: Proven Strategies for Getting Up to Speed Faster and Smarter, Harvard Business Review Press, May 14, 2013

### 3. Set or reframe goals - with your team's input

Take the opportunity early on to clarify team goals. By involving the team you'll lay the framework of holding team members accountable and the group's decision-making will be clearer and more efficient.<sup>10</sup>

### 4. Create an environment that encourages teamwork and dialogue

It's important to create an open and inclusive team culture where team members are encouraged to contribute and feel comfortable in voicing views and ideas.

The more transparent you can be, the more comfortable people will feel being similarly candid with you<sup>11</sup>

### 5. Establish and then seek to achieve an early win

An early wins gives focus, builds confidence and creates momentum.

“At the same time, early wins must be achieved in ways that are consistent with the culture of the organization. Success in getting early wins is built on a foundation of effective learning early on.”<sup>12</sup>

## Sources of team leadership

Team leadership doesn't only come in the form of an appointed or formal team leader. Research conducted by Michigan State University and the University of Michigan<sup>13 14</sup>, focused on “leadership processes within a team and described how team leadership can arise from four sources” across two dimensions — *internal* (e.g. team leaders and/or project manager) or *external* (e.g. sponsor, coach), and *formal* (appointed) or *informal* (shared or conducted by someone who the group looks at looks as a leader). These

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<sup>10</sup> O'Hara, C., What new team leaders should do first, Harvard Business Review, September 11, 2014 <https://hbr.org/2014/09/what-new-team-leaders-should-do-first>

<sup>11</sup> DeWitt, J., 5 tips for new team leaders, HBR.org, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014 <https://hbr.org/2014/09/5-tips-for-new-team-leaders>

<sup>12</sup> Watkins, M.D., New Leader? Get Early Wins, hbr.org, January 15, 2009 <https://hbr.org/2009/01/new-leader-get-early-wins>

<sup>13</sup> Morgeson, F.D., DeRue, D.S., Karam, E.P., Leadership in Teams: A Functional Approach to Understanding Leadership Structures and Processes, Journal of management, Vol. 36 No.1, January 2010 5-39

<sup>14</sup> Truxillo, D. M., Bauer, T. N., Erdogan, B., Psychology and Work: Perspectives on Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Routledge. P 502, 2016

leadership functions and roles can help the team “satisfy their critical needs and regulate their behavior in the service of goal accomplishments.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Preparing team leaders**

Learning on the job is good, though team members will also want to see someone who can lead<sup>16</sup> with a level of experience. For example, before offering someone a global team leader role, it may be helpful to provide them with some global project experience.

### **Conclusion**

The opportunities for team leadership are increasing. Managers can play a vital role by selecting, developing and coaching team leaders, by seeking leadership support from multiple sources, and by being proactive in developing leadership bench strength.

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<sup>15</sup> Morgeson, F.D., DeRue, D.S., Karam, E.P., Leadership in Teams: A Functional Approach to Understanding Leadership Structures and Processes, Journal of management, Vol. 36 No.1, January 2010 5-39

<sup>16</sup> Reagin, T., 10 Characteristics of great team leaders, Catalystreader.com.  
<https://catalystreader.com/read/10-characteristics-of-great-team-leaders>