

# The Essence of a Team

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By Tom Herald

Have you ever noticed the differences between really good companies that stand out among the competition and those others that just seem out of step? How about sports teams? Why did the Bruins dominate the Canadians during the first round of the Stanley Cup? Why do Roger Penske and Rick Hendrick routinely field championship racing teams? And, why is Richard Branson so successful? The one common difference that all successful businesses, sports teams or organizations share is rooted in their ability to outperform their competitors as a team.

I was just visiting an exceptional Chevrolet dealer in the Midwest, the number one volume dealer in Indiana who just completed an outstanding first quarter. And as soon as you walk onto their lot you immediately recognize the essence and importance of teamwork. There is absolutely no evidence of a recession or that their manufacturer is on the brink of bankruptcy. Instead, the entire team, from porters to managers, is focused on serving customers and selling cars.

I also just finished a training event at the Mohegan Sun Casino and Resort, another exceptional organization. Let me tell you, everything from the valet to check-in to event coordination was performed with meticulous attention to detail and uncommon enthusiasm, the way Las Vegas casinos used to. Every guest is pampered and every customer is fully accommodated with world class service. And, the employees are quick to point out that as a team, they “take pride in their service.” Their reward was a sold out hotel with \$800 per night room rates.

Then there are companies like US Airways, who just raised their bag check fee another \$5 per bag and, they charge you for peanuts. You remember, these were the add-on fees some of the airlines implemented to offset the spike in fuel costs last summer. Well the cost of fuel has come down but these “annoyance fees” have gone up. And US Air’s generally unfriendly, non-smiling staff are quick to tell you with their “too bad, not my problem” attitude, that they’ve just taken more wage cuts and are more worried about being laid off than about serving customers.

Well I flew these guys a couple of weeks ago after vowing never again and quickly saw the deteriorating fruits of their labor. I needed to change to an earlier flight so I could catch my daughter’s softball game. The ticket change fee was \$150, even for a frequent flyer. So I asked, was the earlier flight full? No. It was two-thirds empty, as was the one from which I wanted to change. Still, there was no negotiation. For that moment they had me, as they squeezed another \$150 out of my wallet. My only other option would have been to pay the \$800 one-way fare for the earlier flight. I was annoyed with every moment of the experience and puzzled by their inability to see the big picture.

In complete contrast I flew on Virgin America for the first time last week. This company has taken air travel to a whole new level of service, and it was refreshing to see a friendly, professional, enthusiastic and happy team at work. Everything about my trip with Virgin was a positive experience, from the \$250

fare to their smooth ability to make the passengers of a sold out flight feel comfortable. Again, I needed to change my flight, however their approach made much more sense. This airline has a “no fee” policy, as long as space is available. And, they don’t charge for peanuts. Now which airline do you think posted a first quarter profit while the other had a multi-million dollar loss?

As consumers, we are all critics and fans of retail businesses to varying degrees. And as business owners/operators, analyzing the hundreds of examples around us on a daily basis is a great way to learn something new about running a company. It is easy to see who to emulate and who to ignore. But at the very least, these good and bad examples remind us of how customers react to service, both with their spending and their comments. Since reading Mark Sanborn’s book *The Fred Factor*, I am always looking for examples of successful companies that get it right. In every one of these success stories you will find energetic people who operate as a **team**.

### ***The Essence of a TEAM:***

**Talent** – Every successful team is comprised of talented individuals who have the aptitude, drive and character to do their assigned job exceptionally well. Each position on the team is well defined and interdependent and each team member fully understands how their contributions affect the overall success of the team.

One essential talent that is vital to the success of any team is leadership, and a team needs it all levels. Leadership is one’s ability to influence and inspire others. It is the driving force that gets any team through adversity and turns a group of talented people into a team of champions. And just like every football needs a good quarterback. Every team needs a talented leader.

**Enthusiasm** – Enthusiasm requires a positive mental attitude and is highly contagious. So is a bad or pessimistic attitude. One negative person can bring down the spirit of an entire team. But another who has heart and shows courage with an enthusiastic approach to the job can bring everyone around them up, including customers. Enthusiasm makes people feel good. It brings excitement to the team and costs nothing to implement. But the rewards are immeasurable.

**Accountability** – Every member of a team has responsibilities to the team and, these team mates hold each other mutually accountable for the performance of the entire team. Accountability is a fundamental discipline for any competitive team because it ensures all the tasks necessary for success are accomplished and raises the standards of excellence. It puts the elements of success in the hands of each individual on the team. Without it, there is no synergy and the most talented and enthusiastic groups of individuals will never realize their full potential.

**Mission “Oriented”** – All teams need something to win. They need their success to be defined. They need a clearly defined mission to accomplish that becomes the goal on which every team member can focus their efforts. They also need to taste victory, because winning becomes an addictive habit that is essential for champion performers.

Start small and work on achieving little victories first, as a team. Then work toward your BHAG (Big Hair Audacious Goal). The important point is to have a goal for the team to accomplish together; something

meaningful on which they can focus their combined efforts. Once you have the goal, devise the plan, measure your progress, and the rest is about execution.