

Handbook: Building Your Team the KEEN Way

The second of the KEEN 3Cs is “Connections”. It is an essential that you acquire the skills needed to be a good team member, and an exceptional team leader when the opportunity to serve arises. Here are some things to look for when building your team. This is a big list, but one to read through and consider as you move forward.

Next is to have everyone agree upon and sign a Team Contract based on these items. A template is provided in a separate document.

1. Understands the Topic/Industry

Technical competency makes you a valuable asset to a team, but an understanding of the topic as a whole, and the industry within which it lives, is critical. You should also have a keen interest in marketplace trends. Keep up by reading industry periodicals, web research and regularly checking what the competition is offering.

2. Establish Trust

The foundation of any team or activity, whether professional or personal, is trust. Team members have to know others will deliver on promises, support shared goals, pitch in during challenging times and maintain open communication. If you put your trust in your team members, and they return that trust, the team bond is strengthened. Here are a few ways you can strengthen that bond:

- Have patience – trust is built over time, so be tolerant and considerate of any mistakes.
- Remain calm – this will inspire trust and loyalty because your employees know where they stand with you.
- Be transparent, open, and flexible – this will help to get rid of any mistrustful perceptions.
- Provide mutual feedback – the key is to have a plan in place and a process to follow.
- Participate in ongoing team exercises – a few examples include the human knot, scavenger hunts and having employees maintain eye contact for 60 seconds.
- Understand Yourself
- Achieving self-awareness about your strengths, limitations, motivations and tendencies will help you contribute most effectively to the team by taking on the tasks for which you are best suited and by eliminating behaviors that hinder the attainment of shared goals.

3. Look Inward

Self-Awareness / Honesty / Be Positive / Be Adaptable

Self-awareness score was the strongest predictor of overall success. Self-awareness is also a key characteristic of mental toughness. In the competitive world of sales, mentally tough employees demonstrate grit and motivation to see a project through to completion at a high level. That’s a valuable addition when putting together successful teams. Teams are dynamic and constantly in flux, so consider

which of your employees are self-aware enough to pick up the slack when they see it and delegate work when they're overloaded.

Self-Aware

In order to be a great team player, it's crucial to have an unbiased awareness of what you're good at, and what are your weaker areas. Gary Vaynerchuk says: "Self-awareness is being able to accept your weaknesses while focusing all of your attention on your strengths."

In the modern era, we're conditioned into improving our weaknesses rather than doubling down on our strengths. When you follow this path, it's hard to rise above mediocrity. However, when you're brutally honest about your weaknesses, you can finally accept them and hone other skills that will make you extremely valuable to your team.

Teams benefit when individual members are fully aware of their strengths and weaknesses, but it's especially important that all team members understand the key attributes of their other team members. Valuable team members are experts in their chosen disciplines, and they shouldn't be expected to switch roles with one another when there isn't a major overlap in competencies.

For the same reason that Hightower plays as a linebacker and Brady plays as a quarterback, putting individuals in roles where they can fully utilize their talents is essential if you want your team to function optimally.

Honesty

A team member should be honest about their achievements as well as their shortcomings. Everyone makes mistakes from time to time, but when people try to shift the blame and weave false narratives, disasters can occur. Entrepreneur and author, James Altucher, once said: "Honesty is the fastest way to prevent a mistake from turning into a failure."

Bad news can be difficult to handle, but the sooner you embrace the truth, the faster you can innovate and come to a solution. Being honest doesn't mean being brazen; you can deliver constructive criticisms tactfully without hurting anyone's feelings.

When you're dealing with an honest person, you know where you stand with them. You don't have to worry about them spinning narratives in order to achieve a certain agenda, they just say it as it is. When rapport is based on honesty, this creates deeper relationships. When team members relate to one another better, they also produce greater results for the organization.

Be Positive

Being positive doesn't mean behaving like Barney the Dinosaur, singing gleeful songs to your colleagues and exchanging hugs every day. Positivity isn't about how smiley and talkative you are, it's a mindset. You can be positive in a low-key manner and still have a wonderful impact on your teammates.

When you're conscious about staying positive, you'll see failure as feedback rather than a cataclysmic disaster. Positivity means finding a solution to a problem rather than passing the blame and dwelling on things you can't control. Research shows that positive employees are 12% more productive. Additionally, when you're happy, you make better decisions, feel healthier and make your colleagues happier (and more productive) too.

An interesting item is the "Law of State Transfer". Put simply, whatever emotional state you're feeling will rub off on whoever you're talking to. This law applies to interacting with your other team members.

Be Adaptable

Adaptability is a requirement in this day and age. This comes down to a willingness to learn new information and pick up new skills, and deal with any external issues and distractions that are always around. . You may have to grow in ways that may not make sense based on your immediate goals, but instead are for the greater good of the organization. Those of you who are calm under pressure and mature enough to prioritize the team's needs over their own are invaluable teammates.

Adaptability also means being flexible to the working habits and personalities of your colleagues. If you're collaborating with teammates who prefer to work remotely, you may need to learn how to various tools for video conferencing and managing projects.

If you're outgoing and talkative, you may need to adapt to your introverted colleagues who require quiet environments in order to work productivity. If you're naturally introverted, asking a few friendly questions here and there will help to build rapport with your outgoing colleagues.

4. Characteristics

Committed to Mastery / Intrinsically Motivated / Persistent / Detail-Oriented

Committed to Mastery

When every member of the team is committed to personal growth, this not only creates an awesome working atmosphere, but it constantly brings new information into the organization which assists creative problem-solving. Great team members make time in their weekly schedule for refining their talents and adding new tricks to their repertoires.

Intrinsically Motivated

Most employees are heavily motivated by financial gain. This isn't good or bad, it's just an economic reality. There is nothing wrong with doing a job for money, but if you're doing it only for money – then you'll never be a great team member. Anyone who has achieved a level of mastery at a skill appreciates the daily ritual of practice. This intrinsic motivation should fire you to turn up day in, day out, irrespective of the accolades. It's very difficult to be enthusiastic about something when extrinsic motivations like money, fame, and praise are all that you have.

If you're not intrinsically motivated to perform the daily tasks in your vocation, you're either in an environment where your talents are not being maximized, or you're in the wrong vocation. Many people have experienced the negative atmosphere of working on a team with members who are just going through the motions, and it is no fun at all. Conversely, when your teammates are passionate about their disciplines and intrinsically motivated, the positivity is infectious.

Persistent

As Winston Churchill once said: "Success is stumbling from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm." When you embrace new challenges and refuse to give up after temporary setbacks, your chances of success increase exponentially. Fortune favors the brave, but only the persistently brave.

James Dyson created over 5,000 failed prototypes of a bagless vacuum cleaner before he was eventually successful. Even then, he had enormous challenges bringing the product to market, since this new product presented a threat for the manufacturers of vacuum bags. After overcoming these obstacles, James Dyson's net worth is over \$4 billion. Interestingly, he only hires employees who believe that failure is good! By keeping a positive attitude and persevering even when things aren't going your way, this rubs off on your colleagues and creates a wonderfully productive workplace atmosphere.

Detail-Oriented

Being detail-oriented doesn't mean you're incapable of grasping grand visions, it just means that you pay close attention to the small things. For instance, detail-oriented workers always meticulously proofread their work before submitting it. Imagine hiring an editor or copywriter that wasn't detail-oriented!

Paying close attention to details means you recognize patterns that other people might be oblivious to. When something is out of place, you can depend on detail-oriented employees to notice. This is very helpful in terms of problem-solving, particularly if a creative solution is required.

Detail-oriented team members are great at reading body language and determining people's intentions. Because of this, these individuals are likely to respect people's boundaries and know when it's appropriate to engage someone. Being detail-oriented not only results in a higher quality of work; it also entails better social skills.

5. Outward Connections

Understand Others / Empathy / Reliable

Understand Others

Just as you have a personal work style, so does everyone on your team. Instead of expecting others to operate according to your style, seek awareness of their strengths and limitations. This will give you a better understanding of which employees exhibit mental toughness and how to place them within your teams to best compliment everyone's strengths and support their weaknesses.

The best way to understand others is by doing the following:

- Pick up on any emotional cues (verbal and non-verbal) – the tone of voice, body language and other non-verbal ways of communication.
- Actively listen to what others have to say – this will help the person speaking to feel more at ease and able to communicate better.
- Be aware that not everyone has the same point of view – show sensitivity and understand their perspective.
- Provide assistance – depending on your understanding of the emotions and needs of the person.
- By learning about each other's intrinsic motivations and work styles, team members can understand why people do what they do and reduce unproductive conflict. Through enhanced mental toughness training and development, your team will know how to better bring in new clients as well as retain them. Even the best programs have a natural drop off if intrinsic human behavior isn't addressed.

Empathic

Have you ever heard the adage: "Treat people how they want to be treated"? This may not be good advice. Here is a much better tip: treat people how you want to be treated.

Empathy is about being aware of how other people feel. If you're unable to put yourself in someone else's shoes and see things from their viewpoint, people are not going to enjoy working with you. Fortunately, empathy isn't a fixed attribute – it's something you can improve. Learning how to listen to your colleagues and assess their mood based on their sub-communications will make you a much better team player.

If a colleague has donned headphones and is exhibiting closed body language, they're probably doing some serious work and it's better to not disturb them. When you respect people's boundaries and embrace their individuality (even if you don't always agree with them), people will enjoy working with you.

Reliable

While most team members prioritize personality traits over skills to a large extent, reliability is something that everyone should deliver. Even if a person has a phenomenal skill set, if they're wishy washy and don't follow through on their promises, then they're not a good team player.

Although reliability is considered to be a fixed trait, environmental factors also impact the reliability of employees. If the team reinforces that reliability is not rewarded, then it's much more difficult to behave reliably – even if you're reliable in every other area of your life. Reliability can be improved by implementing flexible working practices.

Oftentimes, workers can be extremely reliable when they're allowed to work on a schedule that aligns with their personality and biology, but can seriously underperform when they're hurled into a situation with no privacy and abundant distractions. If you want to make a meaningful contribution, it's important to find a place that respects your individuality and will allow you to work in a style that maximizes your potential.

6. Define Roles – Team Structure

Teams need a leadership structure and an organizational plan to succeed in their mission. And it takes different types of personalities to make a team run effectively. Some people are better communicators, some have brighter ideas and some are more efficient and organized. By defining responsibilities beyond specific tasks and thinking about team roles holistically, a team can maximize the talents of the individual members while forming a single entity with the power to achieve great things. Team Roles Include:

- Champion – someone who enjoys promoting ideas, rallying the group, and driving change.
- Creator – someone who enjoys generating ideas, designing solutions, and tackling creative challenges.
- Implementer – someone who is adept at taking charge of the daily work activities and administrative tasks.
- Facilitator – someone who does well managing relationships, both within the team and externally; they are the glue that holds everything together.

Teams should decide on a leadership structure and how decisions will be made. Will it be by majority vote or just flipping a coin? Obviously one method is better than the other, but you must decide how to make decisions and move forward. So decide on a leadership plan and as needed select a team leader who will be responsible for keeping the team on task.

You also need a scribe to keep track of information as it is gathered, and you will need a method to make it available to all team members. A Shared folder in a cloud based system is usually sufficient. And you will need a way to track team and specific member deliverables, timelines, tasks, milestones, etc. A GANNT chart is an easy way to do this, and someone must be responsible for keeping it up to date and available to all. As needed select a person to be responsible for this important role.

7. Set Ground Rules

It's your team, and the team is free to make its own rules of engagement. Rules may relate to how members communicate, how they establish and meet deadlines and how they handle obstacles. With ground rules in place, members know how to navigate challenges and how they will be held accountable in a non-hierarchical structure.

Important: Ground rules should be flexible and changeable based on team needs. Following rules simply because they exist is not an effective practice. Setting ground rules within your team can help improve the quality of work life by:

- Creating open communication.
- Ensuring everyone acts professionally.
- Making sure everyone is treated the same and with respect.
- Conduct Negative Polling; instead of asking people if they agree on a given approach, decision or meeting point, ask if anyone disagrees. You are giving them the opportunity to voice concerns rather than simply acquiescing in an effort to go along with popular opinion. You'll notice which of your team members exhibit ego-strength, another aspect of mental toughness, which can be used as a model for how these conversations should go. Conflict is not necessarily something to be avoided. When a few teammates can work through their disagreements in a respectful, productive way without taking it personally, your entire becomes stronger and more effective.

8. Leadership

Know When... / Multitasking / Autonomous

Know When to Lead and When to Step Back

Leaders should know when to lead and when to step back. Leadership plays an important role in team development, whether it's setting the standard for accountability, facilitating communication or mediating conflict. They also know the work styles of different team members just as they know their own. However, it's important that leaders' strengths and limitations are on the table alongside everyone else's and that they are open to improving their contributions and increasing self-awareness. In the end, team members will only be as committed to team development as the leader is.

A true leader on an effective team does not try to take over, make assumptions on behalf of other team members or micromanage their contributions. Doing so defeats the value of the flat, cross-functional structure. It also shuts down communication and limits interaction. The secret: if leaders follow the other nine best practices described in this list, this one will fall into place naturally.

Able to Multitask

In the modern era, people rarely have the chance to focus on one project at a time. In most situations we are required to juggle a handful of tasks while rigidly adhering to deadlines. For this reason, multitasking is one of the most common traits that employers screen for in job interviews.

It's no surprise that those who are able to multitask effectively are always well organized. By sticking to a daily sleep and exercise routine, decluttering your desk regularly, writing down information that you can't remember and creating a task list in the mornings for your work days, your ability to multitask will improve exponentially.

Naturally, procrastination is the antithesis of multitasking. If you're avoiding tackling tasks when you're supposed to be hard at work, this will negatively affect all the projects on your calendar when a backlog ensues. By cutting off distractions such as email or texting you'll find it easier to overcome procrastination. Also, you may get better results by doing your least favorite tasks early in the morning and giving yourself small rewards for tasks completed. By striving for consistency instead of perfectionism, your productivity and ability to multitask will increase.

Autonomous

Ego-driven people love working with others that they can control and dominate. Unfortunately, this is because they care more about feeling important than they care about the objectives of the organization. Micromanaging never produces good results, but it can help certain people to feel special temporarily.

Good team players want others who are dependable, and who will do their part without constant supervision. In a 2013 survey, it was found that people who have a choice over when, where and how to work achieve higher levels of satisfaction, innovation, and job performance.

"Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results." – Andrew Carnegie

9. Good Communications

Give and accept feedback

It's impossible to work together as a team if individual members don't fully understand one another. Communication skills are imperative for anyone working in a team environment. Arguably the most important communication skill is knowing how to give tactful, constructive criticism. While you might be voicing a criticism for the purpose of driving the team forward and solving a problem, if you're not careful, the person on the receiving end may view it as a personal attack.

By showing appreciation for what the person did well, and then explaining what they could have done differently, you create a positive framework for the criticism and that will lead to a much more positive outcome. In terms of delivering criticisms, there are cultural aspects to consider. What's considered as direct communication in Holland might be considered as a social faux pas in England, so be sure your style of communication reflects the culture of your location.

Being a good communicator also means knowing when to stay silent. Oftentimes, if you don't have an insightful comment that will drive the discussion forward, it's better to say nothing. Good listeners don't receive the same formal recognition as good talkers, but they're just as valuable to a team.

10. View Team Building as an Ongoing Activity

Team effectiveness is not something you think about offhandedly in between the other stuff. It should be your focus. The team is the engine that drives the project result. And just like engines need maintenance to run efficiently, teams need to revisit best practices to make sure effectiveness remains optimized. It is the most important contribution you can make for your team.

Building mental toughness within your team takes time, and not everyone will be mentally tough individually, but you can build particular skills within those team members who possess parts of a whole. By distributing the traits of mental toughness across your team in a way that supports itself, you can install a safety net so that there is always someone to catch things before they fall through the cracks.

Take time for reflection. It's easy to get caught up in deadlines, checklists and moving things into the "done" pile. But this mindset also fosters bad habits, and can lead to missing opportunities for system and process improvement. Take the time to reflect on both accomplishments and setbacks so you can not only reinforce what worked, but also focus on what can be done better next time, not who deserves blame.

Now go to the Team Contract, fill it out and have every team member sign it as a commitment to a successful project outcome.