# How to Structure and Build a Team For Long-Term Success

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My dad was a high school basketball coach in the middle of rural Arizona. He rarely had the exact same group of players on a team year after year, so he never had just one system that he relied on. Instead, he learned to accept that he got who he got, reviewed what talent he had been given, and built that year's system based on the player's strengths.

And I've learned from his example. As a manager, that's how I try to structure my teams. I ask myself who I have or can hire that can fill a role based on their temperament, abilities and goals. Ultimately, that puts people in places where they can contribute, and if those individuals succeed, the team and organization will grow, too. On a larger scale, this can position a company for stronger growth and competitiveness.

## Four core components necessary for success

There are many ways to structure an organization: A leader can use a matrix structure with various employees reporting across functions or teams. Or, organizations can employ a more formal pyramid structure. Some marketing departments will align their teams around the various audiences or channels they're trying to reach.

However, *who* I'm hiring for the team is much more important to me than how the business charts out. I prioritize who candidates are as a person, looking for four considerable

qualities:

1. **Grit** – Have they experienced failure in their life, and did they rise above it? Do they own up to that failure and understand the lessons learned from the mistake, or are they still just running from it?
2. **Optimism** – I wish I could tell you that I am naturally optimistic. Unfortunately, I'm a glass-half-empty kind of person and know keeping a sunny outlook isn't easy. I look for consistently positive people because it fosters stronger team bonds. I have found that optimism can often get a person noticed, which tends to move them up the ladder as people gain confidence based on their positivity.
3. **Written communication** – I have spoken at several marketing conferences, and the one skill that I have told young marketers is to hone their writing skills. Communicating your ideas within an organization through email, creating an effective AI prompt, or drafting a persuasive marketing plan relies on the written word.
4. **Seeking "good enough"** – Marketing budgets are rarely as large as the team believes they need. A good marketer has to make do and figure out how to get things done despite a lack of budget. In my experience, people will often sacrifice "good enough" to reach perfection. They don't understand that perfection is illusory. It doesn't have to be perfect, and everybody will make mistakes. The ability to effectively solve a problem in a matter that is efficient and effective without being perfect is a skill that leaders highly value.

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# Strategic placement means everybody

## wins

When leaders are actively developing the structure of their company, it’s wise to hire individuals who are good at things they are not. But they also can look at what individuals have the *potential* to be good at. In a previous organization, I had an employee who was involved in event management but who wanted to move into marketing; I had another employee who was tired of email marketing but wanted to learn event management. Both employees had to learn new skills to move forward with these new paths. Being in this situation allowed me to help both of them achieve their career goals while putting them in positions where they could learn and be happier.

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# True relationships are worth the balancing act

Leaders have to be careful not to get caught in a situation where somebody could misconstrue their kindness or attention, but being in leadership doesn’t have to mean sacrificing gaining friendships. Balance being too friendly with being able to offer necessary corrections. By nature, I tend to be a people pleaser, so I must work on being tougher – especially early in relationships. After my collegiate basketball career ended, I became a high school basketball referee. I found that the whole game went smoother if I was tough in the first quarter of a game. It is important to establish a sense of control when they first hire a new team member, and then they can infuse the second, third and fourth quarters with more friendship.

Leaders can have situations that test the relationships they’re working to build. Let’s say someone has two people on

their team, and they have to decide which one gets promoted. The one who didn't get promoted might feel like the leader let them down. Leaders must maintain enough professional distance so that an employee knows it was not due to favoritism in this situation.

Sometimes, giving certain people opportunities to learn conflicts with the experience others already have. Suppose an employee is an excellent marketer, so they're put in charge of a small team. What happens if one of the people who will now be reporting to this new manager already has experience as a manager? If the first employee is not given this opportunity, they won't learn how to manage a team without the promotion — but if they get the position, jealousy could set in with the second employee who has proven skills. In this particular instance, it helps maintain clear communication between those getting the promotion and those not. Utilizing various conversations, such as during mid-year or other reviews, points about your plans for the individual and the overall team can help you manage through the inevitable tough times.

As I think through my career, it is actually not just my team's work that I am most proud of. It is seeing those team members go on to become great managers in their own right. If, at the end of the day, I can look back and see many of my former team members becoming great managers, I will feel like I was a success.

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## For a responsive foundation that lasts, build on people

Company structure matters, but I consider *who* employees are to be more important when building a business. By intentionally playing chess to move workers where they can have the greatest

development and influence, leaders can set themselves and their teams up for success.

Along the way, leaders shouldn’t be afraid to pursue good relationships, even though doing so requires balancing potentially conflicting goals or interests. By making people the heart of the company and viewing success through a different lens, leaders can establish a reliable, flexible framework that can respond continuously to the future.

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