



How to build an exceptional team (even when **YOU didn't choose them, and **THEY** didn't choose you!)**

When you can choose the team yourself, getting it right is much easier – see [\[url\]](#) for our booklet 'How to choose the right person for the job (when you're really not sure who's best)'.

Most of the time, though, we don't get to choose the teams we work with.

And this can lead to all *sorts* of problems!

The three pillars of great teams

All great teams, in science or business or politics or sport, have three central strengths in common:

- 1) They have an absolutely clear and ambitious target,
- 2) They have a detailed strategy, and
- 3) They are built on honest, positive relationships.

It's surprising how many teams don't have a clear target – and how many have clear targets that just aren't ambitious enough to inspire them. Look at your team targets – do they make you feel excited? If they don't, how can you make them ambitious enough to excite you? You should aim to be the best team in your organisation – or to create lasting change in your whole organisation – or to set new standards for best practice in your field.

It's equally surprising how many teams do not have a clear, detailed strategy. Look at your team – is it clear who does what? Is it clear when tasks will be completed, and how stages will be assessed? If not, you have to be prepared to focus on this until it is clear – to everyone involved.

The magic ingredient

The third point, though, is the most important of all – relationships.

If you have honest, positive relationships in your team, it will be far easier for you to get points 1) and 2) right. In fact, it will be almost impossible for you NOT to get them right!

Relationships are not easy, though.

If you rolled your eyes at that, you know what we're talking about.

And relationships in business can be even more difficult – because business is meant to be about rational, logical decisions, isn't it? Even though 80% of all problems in business are caused by emotional reasons, we persist in trying to solve them with logic – unsurprisingly, it doesn't work very well.

Do the unusual – solve the relationship challenge

If you understand the importance of relationships in your team, you will already have taken your first step on the road to building the most successful team in your organisation.

But don't make the mistake of *starting* to work on your relationships with the other people in the team.

The *first* relationship you need to solve is your relationship with YOURSELF.

To be a strong leader, and to help build a strong team, you need:

- Self-regard (a complex mix of self-worth, self-esteem and self-confidence – in that order). Contrary to pop psychology, it is actually just as important NOT to feel good about yourself ALL the time as it is to be able to feel good. You need the balance to be able to see how to improve.
- Emotional self-awareness (identifying the real emotions inside you and knowing what you are feeling at any one time and, eventually, which part of you is feeling it)
- Assertiveness
- Independence
- Self-actualisation (this is the ability to create the life that you want to be living – to deal with the circumstances that life throws your way, and play the cards you've been dealt to their best advantage)

Making improvements in these areas is an open-ended, complex process – it's where we do a huge amount of our work. But to get you started right now, here are some simple initial steps that will make a REAL difference to you.

It is particularly important for leaders to score strongly in self-regard and self-actualisation, so we'll look at those two first.

Self-regard

When you have a strong level of self-regard, you are able to see what you're doing well, to see what you're not doing well, and not let criticism shake your self-worth. It's important to understand the difference between self-worth (which should always be positive) and self-esteem (which should be an honest assessment of your actions, which will sometimes be positive and sometimes negative).

One simple way to get a grip on this is to buy a notebook. Make sure it looks really good – if you can't find one you really like the look of, buy a great postcard and stick it on the front. Don't skip this step – it sounds trivial, but it isn't. Next, start noting in the front of the book what you do well. Every time you do something well, write it down – from 'practising Yoga successfully' to 'dealing sensitively with Jeff from Accounts'.

Starting from the **BACK** of the notebook, begin to write down the qualities you have – what you like about yourself. Being honest, being positive, being loving – the things that make you who you are. This will help you see the enormous and vitally important difference between **who you are**, and **what you do**.

When you are faced with criticism (whether the person criticising you intends it to be positive or negative) make sure that you deal with it in the front of your notebook. Criticism is about what you do, **NOT** who you are. You should aim to treat all criticism as interesting feedback – after a meeting where you are criticised, get your notebook out and write down your action, your intention and the response. For example, you might write 'I said XYZ to Jeff. I intended him to feel that I was being supportive. He felt that I was interfering.' This immediately gives you some obvious possibilities to help improve the situation, free from the emotional self-defence that criticism usually triggers.

Then (and this is important) turn to the back of the notebook, and re-read **who you are**. Your strengths are still there – criticism doesn't change them. And more than that – you can now add 'being open, being brave, able to accept criticism' to that list!

Self-actualisation

Set aside half an hour to think about this in detail. To begin with, choose a negative event from your past – something that really hit you. Write it down. Then, look at the positive things that came out of that pattern later on. For example, you might put 'Got sacked'. But then in the spare time you had when you weren't looking for work, you joined an activity group you'd never had time for previously. Then in that activity group you met a new friend, and you decided to go travelling together.

When you've mapped out the negative event, and three or four of the positive things that followed it, make a note of **how long** it took you to do the positive things. Was it three days, or two weeks, or five months?

When you can see how long it took before each of the positive events happened, you will be able to see that all of them *could* have happened faster. There is a very important lesson here – the sooner you move through the emotions of a negative event, the sooner you will reach the new positives. This isn't about denial – when something bad happens, you will feel bad – but you can go through the shock, denial, anger, bargaining and depression much, much faster.

Self-actualisation is also about living in the now. Far too many people put up with things that make them unhappy because 'it will all be different in a few months'. Tomorrow never comes – you need to be happy today. Write down a brief assessment of your life as it is right **NOW** – with particular focus on your work-life balance. How is it now? How can you be happy now, not in six months? Write down five examples of things that would improve your life right now – and take action on the

Emotional self-awareness

Once a day for the next week ask yourself how you are feeling – and write down an honest answer. Watch an emotional film and let yourself go through those emotions (you might prefer to do this at home, rather than in a cinema!). At the end of the week, look at what you have written, and you will start to see the patterns of your feelings. Then keep on doing this – once a day, write down how you are feeling. It will make you enormously more aware of who you are and how you feel – and it will also, as a bonus, make you happier. That sounds counter-intuitive, but it's a well-established pattern.

Assertiveness

Spend a week only delivering 'I' messages. You can't say 'You made me angry' – but you can say 'I feel angry about what you did.' You can't say 'You missed a deadline' but you can say 'I feel unhappy that you missed a deadline.' You can't say 'Will you do this for me?' but you can say 'I would like you to do this for me.'

Make a note of how often you manage to do this. You will probably find it surprisingly difficult – but the more you do it, the easier it will become, and the more assertive and confident you will feel.

Independence

Go somewhere on your own that you would never normally go on your own. Take yourself out for dinner – a proper dinner. Dress up. Take your emotional intelligence notebook with you – it will be a good chance to write some extra points in it, and it will help you feel that you look as though you've got something to do! Once you've got over the shock of doing it for the first time, try and make it a regular part of your life – give yourself a treat, on your own, once a month. You deserve it.

Once you've started the long-term process of improving and strengthening your relationship with yourself, you are ready to start getting the best from the other people in the team.

One simple step to transform people's attitudes

Building the strongest, most honest possible relationships with any team takes time and effort.

However, there is one simple (yet extremely powerful) tactic that can set you off extremely quickly on your journey to building the greatest team in your organisation.

Take it for **granted that everyone's intention is to do their best**

Don't take it for granted in a lazy, don't bother to think about it kind of way – presume it, in an active, positive, deliberate way. Choose *deliberately* to presume that EVERYONE in the team wants to do their best – and make sure they know that is what you are presuming.

Create and nurture an atmosphere where you CONSCIOUSLY believe that people are always, on a deep level, wanting to do their best – and are giving of their best in that moment. It often doesn't look as though that's true, of course – but underneath any negative attitudes (at some level) is *always* a real desire to give of their best.

The more you believe in it, the more it will come to the surface.

We all like to appear as ADULTS – we like to give off the impression that we are in control and we know what we are doing – but the truth is that part of us is still in a CHILD STATE. The more other people believe in us, the more we believe in ourselves, and the more positive we become.

Make it true of yourself, and others will follow.

Beware: this is **NOT** the same as expecting perfection!

If you expect perfection, you will always, continuously, be disappointed.

Instead, strive for EXCELLENCE. All the time that you are striving for excellence, you are succeeding. Make sure that others aren't expecting perfection, and disappointing themselves – help them focus on striving for excellence, and feeling permanently successful.

Dealing with people who take a negative approach

Dealing with people who seem determined to take a negative approach can be very difficult. Some people seem afraid of ambitious targets, some people seem set on perceiving themselves as victims, some people even seem to think that the only way to avoid blame is to blame others first and louder.

How can you believe in their positive intent? How can you believe that they want to give of their best?

It's actually quite simple.

You just need to accept that everyone is complex – everyone has several different psychological issues going on at any one point.

If people are afraid, or negative, or blaming, it is because they have learnt that behaviour, and they have been allowed (or even encouraged) to make that behaviour their default setting.

Underneath those behaviours, though, EVERYONE has the NEED to feel important and to be liked – and this is the need which makes people want to do well – to give of their best. It can be very well camouflaged sometimes – but you can be entirely certain that it IS there.

Your job is to ignore their negativity, and talk directly to their desire to give of their best. It *will* feel difficult, especially at first – but you may be surprised how quickly it will make a dramatic difference.

When someone who has been left to wallow in their own negativity is suddenly treated with respect, enthusiasm and belief, it can transform their entire working life.

You can be the agent for that kind of change.

How to take this further

This simple, magical technique works wonders.

We have seen it transform relationships in teams that have been identified as failing.

We have seen it cure working relationships that had been completely stuck.

To access this paper, you have already subscribed to our monthly bulletin '**Getting the best out of the people you work with**'. [If you haven't – if a colleague has given you a copy, for example – you can subscribe at <http://www.IndigoBrave.com/gettingthebest>].

Each month, we will give you one simple, effective tactic you can implement *straight away*. Take the actions we suggest each month, and you will see the beginnings of a remarkable change in the people around you – and in your own feelings towards your work.

If you would like to find out more about Indigo Brave's Results-Driven Communication workshops, where we use a combination of powerful techniques to help you practise, understand and exist in this kind of behaviour pattern, please visit:

www.IndigoBrave.com/RDC

Brilliant and exciting – my belief about what's possible for this team has gone through the roof! Nina Dauban, CEO Nottinghamshire Community Foundation