

# Thinking Managers

Robert Heller of [www.thinkingmanagers.com](http://www.thinkingmanagers.com) explains how real teamwork is done.

## The Joys of Teamwork

'A number of people working together'. That's a basic definition of 'team' from the dictionary, and it doesn't describe it sufficiently. It doesn't tell you how big or small the group has to be before it ceases to be a team. Also, it doesn't say what 'together' means.

If proper teamwork is achieved, the magic is real enough. The joy of working together is meant to cement the collective power of a group of people - a power which, according to psychologists, is greater than that of a single brain, however brilliant.

The closer any set of persons works together, then the better that work must be. Aside from the results, moreover, 'team' has good, powerful, emotional connotations.

A good team practically defines good leadership. The team is well-led towards definite objectives, decision and action alike are effective, communication is top-class, and every member works towards meeting those clear targets - for the group and for themselves.

All that being the case, how come good teamwork so difficult to achieve? One explanation is that sometime demon, human nature.

In theory, existing members should welcome new talent with open arms. The better the new recruit performs, the better the team will perform - and, again in theory, team success should be each team member's primary concern. In practice, however, that demonic human nature often rears its ugly head.

Established team managers sometimes feel threatened. In a bizarre twist, the new person's failure might be more welcome to the competitive colleagues than his and the team's success.

But benign human nature, economic trends, key management principles and technological change all point to the need for more effective teams. Man is a gregarious animal to whom group loyalties are very strong - just look at the devotion in all social and economic classes to football clubs with which the fan may have no link other than his loyalty and whose teams are largely made up of multinational mercenaries who have no loyalties themselves.

Harness the loyalty drive of its members to any team in a business, and you maximise the benefit from their joint power. You need that power to make the most of the new opportunities which must be taken at a time when core activities are being commoditised, outsourced, pooled, and so on.

In any enterprise, the likely best approach is to build units around a discrete activity and then divide the overall project into the most efficiently manageable sub-units, teams in their own rights and themselves managed on the same principles of delegation and autonomy.

Team purpose should be quite exact and relevant to the business: and the bigger the objective the better. Think small, and you will probably end small. Think big, and you could well be most agreeably surprised: self-fulfilling prophecies are the best forecasts of all.

The leader, of course, is the chief custodian of the purpose and is responsible for seeing that the team members, and the team as a whole, achieve the best results. Do not forget: teams exist to get better outcomes.

In getting good results team leaders become conductor rather than driver, enabling others to play the right music, not by hands-on domination of all decisions and execution, but by providing inspiration, motivation and stimulus.

The leader plays a multitude of parts, but only in part, because for the rest he must delegate. That's what gives teams their real strength and makes them favourite in today's races for success. That monster of human nature has many facets, good as well as bad. The well-led team of well-chosen, well-deployed people negates the bad and emphasises the good and everybody ends up being the winner.

**About the author:** Robert Heller is one of the world's best selling authors on business management.

