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HOW TO BUILD A TEAM OF HIGH PERFORMERS

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Napoleon Bonaparte was not only a skilled army general. He was also the greatest military strategist of his time. He fought and won many battles. The only battle that he lost was when he forgot to feed his army before combat. In Russia. He lost the battle miserably.

I know what you're thinking. "Come on, monsieur. Why should Napoleon's loss concern me? After all, I'm not an army general. I've never set foot in barracks. I'm a business manager. Team leader. Business captain. Certified maharajah. What has this to do with me, sir?" Good questions. I'm glad that you asked these questions. I'll explain.

It happened in Johannesburg, South Africa, on 24 June 1995. The venue was Ellis Park. Finals of the rugby world cup between South Africa - fondly known as Springboks by its fanatic fans - and New Zealand's All Blacks. Springboks were crowned champions after

defeating All Blacks by 3 points with the scoreboard reading 15 - 12. On the contrary, before the match, bookmakers had tipped All Blacks as favorites. Springboks went into the games as underdogs. "So, what exactly happened for the Springboks to come out victorious?" You ask. Read on.

Forget about the score line of the match. Forget about Springboks being crowned champions. I'm aware that haka, the pre-match choreographic performance by All Blacks is jaw-dropping. Forget about it. Forget about vuvuzela sound trumpeted by 60,000 enthusiastic fans that showed up for the match. Interest yourself in the event leading to the match and what happened after it.

A few minutes before the match, unannounced, he showed up in the dressing room. For pep talk with the team. He didn't dress like the person in charge. For a positive motive. Yet the outfit was appropriate for the occasion - he donned replica green rugby jersey with #6 embroidered at the back. Interestingly, number 6 jersey was for captain of Springboks, Francois Pienaar.

After cracking a few jokes and exchanging pleasantries, he called for silence and spellbound the team with a simple but momentous message, ". . . *the whole country, blacks and whites, is behind you. You must go to the field fully motivated, knowing that you'll bring glory to your nation, South Africa.*" With those two points, he gave each one of the players, officials a warm bear hug and left the changing room for Ellis Park's VIP lounge to watch the match. Nelson Mandela. Former



president of South Africa was the one behind the gesture and message in point. You can imagine how these words permeated soulset and changed the mindset of the team. Words of an inspirational leader have the power to coax out the best in the team. Inspiring words of a leader have the ability to bring positive perspective of a daunting task. Great leaders create, radiate, and communicate confidence to the team to deal with insurmountable situations. If I present to you that the Springboks won the championship even before they put foot in the field of play, would you dismiss it? This, in leadership, is referred to as Mandela magic. What are your Mandela magic moments?

Each time I read a story about Nelson Mandela; I don't just hear it anew but develop goose bumps. I know. I am not alone. Others, including you, feel the same way. Words of inspirational leaders work like yeast. They feed and enrich the soul to rise and ripen like dough.

As a leader, make yourself visible in crucial moments. You can't afford to estrange yourself from your team. Lead from the front. Don't lock yourself up in your corner office in the executive suite. Go and circulate. Meet your team in the mailroom. Subordinates want to see their leader in the trenches sharing happy tidings and making sacrifices together for the good of the team and organization.

Take another look at Napoleon. He enjoyed successful war exploits premised on unrivaled team building skills. The more I read his stories and study his battle strategies, the more I come to appreciate the role of great leadership in business and private life. I used to wonder why some organizations build teams of high performers while others - under the same conditions - fail. As I grow older and wiser, I have come to appreciate the materiality of the story - it all points to how leaders wrestle with the team, their individual and collective needs. Epic performance is a hallmark of compassionate, caring, empathetic leadership. Nothing gets accomplished without servant leadership. John Maxwell understood this principle better than I can claim to, when he said, "no one will lend you a hand until they know that you care for them."

Dear leader, how do you contend with subordinates' needs? Keep their tummies full and they just may stay with you a little longer; . . . they just may dig deeper into their innermost and give you their best. I've never come across a person who's successful, attains goals by doing things that he dislikes. Have you ever felt what it means to be ignored by your boss or someone who holds high office? It hurts. Neuroscience contends that the number one social need of a human being is the need to belong; . . . the need to be appreciated; . . . the need to be told that one's work contributes to a mighty mission of an organization, tribe, nation. Do this and see the results that your team brings. It's no secret that this inkling works with greater magic when the appreciation, compliment, encouragement comes from the boss or any one in high office but related to the team.

We all have the power to perform magic like Nelson Mandela. Napoleon Bonaparte. Steve Jobs. JF Kennedy. Kamuzu Banda (founding president of Malawi). Helen Keller. Louis Gerstner (former iconic CEO of IBM). But we choose to hold back the magic wand. Great leaders build great teams by wrapping their team with an appealing idea or a mighty cause. Making the team to believe in something bigger than their personal ego. Mandela inspired the Springboks to win championship by uncovering a compelling cause for the team, ". . . *it will bring glory to the nation . . .*" what mighty cause do you inspire your team with?

In 1980, Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft, garnered support of his subordinates when he set and presented a compulsive vision for the team and organization, ". . . *to provide a computer on every desk and every home.*" I'm glad that you and I are direct beneficiaries of Gates' cause. This article was composed and scripted on a software that was once a mental picture of one Bill Gates. Steve Jobs



was not only the face of Apple but also a talented team builder. He lured the unwilling former Pepsi CEO, John Scully, to join Apple in a classic manner. He inspired Scully with a simple but thrilling idea; “. . . *do you want to sell sugary water for the rest of your life, or you want to come with me and change the world? . . . to put a dent on the universe?*” Jobs painted an appealing mental picture about what the future held for Scully once he joins Apple. I don’t think you could have resisted the offer if you were the one standing in the shoes of John Scully. Or could you?

A local tourist visited NASA. As he walked around this mind-blowing facility, he bumped into a cleaner performing some strange dance antics while mopping the floor. Mesmerized by the cleaner’s attitude, antics and the job at hand, the tourist asked the cleaner; “Hey fella, you seem to be excited about something! What’s up?” With a smile grinning ear to ear, the cleaner responded passionately, “*I am putting man on the moon.*” He repeated the very same words that JF Kennedy made in 1961 to inspire Americans to rein supreme in space exploration programme; “. . . *by the turn of the century, America should put man on the moon . . .*” JF Kennedy’s speech was, in fact, intended to persuade Congress to support the Apollo program. It wasn’t intended for the cleaner in the corridors of NASA offices. Allow me to tattoo your brain once more: Words of great leaders permeate the soul and change mindset of the team that they are privileged to work with. More often than not, they percolate and break the peripheral. They chunk off the dross. They go far. In the case of JF Kennedy, his words were so weighty that they did not only charm Congress, but the whole nation, including the lowly carpet cleaner at NASA. JF Kennedy’s words were so hypnotizing that Americans didn’t wait for a century to walk man on the moon. His dream was realized within seven years.

If you were to motivate your team to come to work without paying them a shilling, how would you go about it? To help people become productive members of a team, it is imperative for you, as a leader, to have a handle on their motivations. I am aware that different people have different motivations. But when it comes to issues of legacy, we share commonality. Who doesn’t have the desire to do something great in one’s community? Tell me, who does not want to make a difference and change people’s lives? Who doesn’t want his or her contribution to fit in the compelling cause or idea or vision of his or her organization so that when all is said and done, he or she should leave other people better than he or she found them? I attest. Teams and individuals that aspire to and live by this craving become blockbuster performers, do remarkable things, and attain runaway success in business and private life.

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