

5 steps to create a Super Bowl winning team

by Linda Adams

Just like the New England Patriots and the Philadelphia Eagles, great teams do not happen by accident. There has to be deliberate intention in investing in the team and a shared goal that is bigger than any one team member.

This week, sports fans, columnists, and analysts will debate the strengths and weakness of each team every minute of every day until Super Bowl LII begins Sunday. Depending on how the game goes and how decisive the victory, conversations will probably continue long after the last down with arguments over which team had the strongest quarterback, the smartest coach or more speed in the back field.

Those details matter—on any team, each individual’s talent contributes to team performance—but the difference between winning and losing, between good and great, between the championship ring and a hollow-sounding “better luck next year,” is teamwork.

Great leadership is essential and skilled players critical. But it is always the quality of their interactions that matter most. Over the years, I’ve studied hundreds of teams in multiple industries, including sports. And on each team I’ve taken dozens of measurements, analyzed the data, and looked for patterns. The highest performing teams across all organizations have identifiable traits and characteristics.

On extraordinary teams, team members have each other’s backs and are focused on team success. They put the team agenda ahead of any personal agenda and commit to work for a teammate’s success with as much energy and attention as they work for their own.

Tom Brady may be the best quarterback to ever call a play, but he’s nothing if the offensive line lets him get crushed before he can spot his receiver or fire the pass. Doug Pederson may be the canniest coach, but his genius is irrelevant if his players can’t execute. And that old trope about offense winning games and defense winning championships? All true and still, the best defense in the league is the one that works with ruthless efficiency, hands over the ball to their offense, and watches the rest from the sideline.

But most importantly, when things go south, as they always do, the best teams talk about it.

The highest performing teams are:

- 106 times more likely to give each other tough feedback
- 125 times more likely to call each other out for poor performance
- 50 more likely to openly discuss conflict

In business, the markers are not always as clear as numbers on a scoreboard after each quarter. And the time frame is rarely as rigid. But the savviest businessmen and women know that however their team is performing today, they can be better tomorrow. The traits and characteristics of the highest performing teams can be learned and taught. They are as replicable as they are identifiable. If you are interested in having a Super Bowl winning team this year, take the following steps:

1. **Make sure your players know how to play their position and are playing it.** Lack of role clarity and how job responsibilities connect with the larger goal is often at the root of poor performance on the team.
2. **Define the goal and ensure the whole team is bought in.** From the last day of last season, The Patriots' unwavering focus was Superbowl LII. Does everyone on your team understand the overarching and unified team goal?
3. **Establish the standards of performance.** What are the behavioral and operating norms all team members will be held accountable to uphold? Do you hold all team members accountable to the same standards, no matter what their position or how much of a "superstar" they are?
4. **Extend trust to team members.** Assume positive intent and if you don't understand a teammate's motivation or behavior, find out what may be behind it.
5. **When the going gets tough, have the tough conversations.** When things are challenging and the scoreboard says you are losing, improvements and change are required. Without feedback and debate, and the team's willingness to engage in honest, sometimes even uncomfortable dialogue, change never occurs.

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