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"Teamwork is not a virtue, it is a choice-and a strategic one." Patrick Lencioni

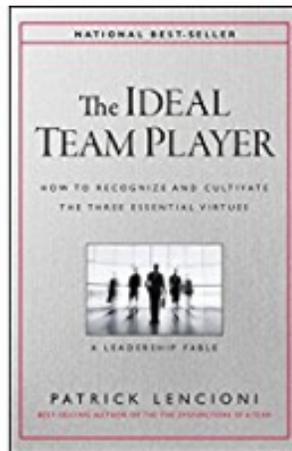
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TOPIC THIS ISSUE:
The Ideal Team Player



THE IDEAL TEAM PLAYER

By: Patrick Lencioni



When team members possess significant humility, hunger and people smarts — they'll be more likely to be vulnerable and build trust, engage in productive but uncomfortable conflict with team members, commit to group decisions even if they initially disagree, hold their peers accountable when they see performance gaps that can be addressed, and put the results of the team ahead of their own needs.

Only humble, hungry and smart people can do those things without a great deal of coaching. Those who don't have all three virtues are going to require significantly more time attention and patience from their managers.

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Let's take a look at the various categories of people, starting with those who have none of the required qualities and moving to the ideal team players who have all three.

Those who lack all three qualities, who are markedly deficient in humility, hunger and people smarts, have little chance of being valuable team members. It would take great effort over a long period of time for them to develop the capacity for all three, let alone two or even one. Fortunately for managers, these people are very easy to identify and rarely slip through interviews and make it onto teams.

For those who lack two of the three in a big way, it's also going to be an uphill battle — not impossible, but not easy.

Humble only: the Pawn. People who are only humble but not at all hungry or smart are the “pawns” on a team. They are pleasant, kind-hearted, unassuming people who just don't feel a great need to get things done and don't have the ability to build effective relationships with colleagues. They often get left out of conversations and activities and have little impact on the performance of a team. Pawns don't make waves, so they can survive for quite a long time on teams that value harmony and don't demand performance.

Hungry only: the Bulldozer. People who are hungry but not at all humble or smart can be thought of as “bulldozers.” These people will be determined to get things done, but with a focus on their own interests and with no understanding or concern for how their actions impact others. Bulldozers are quick destroyers of teams. Fortunately, unlike pawns, they stand out and can be easily identified and removed by leaders who truly value teamwork. However, in organizations that place a premium on production alone, bulldozers can thrive and go uncorrected for long periods of time.

Smart only: the Charmer. People who are smart but sorely lacking in humility and hunger are “charmners.” They can



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be entertaining and even likeable for a while but have little interest in the long-term well being of the team or their colleagues. Their social skills can sometimes help them survive longer than bulldozers or pawns, but because their contributions to the team are negligible, they often wear out their welcome quickly.

Team members who lack only one of the three traits have a little higher likelihood of overcoming their challenges and becoming ideal team players. Still, lacking even one in a serious way can impede the teambuilding process.

Humble and hungry but not smart: the Accidental Mess-Maker. People who are humble and hungry but decidedly not smart are the “accidental mess-makers.” They genuinely want to serve the team and are not interested in getting a disproportionate amount of attention and credit. However, their lack of understanding of how their words and actions are received by others will lead them to inadvertently create interpersonal problems on the team. While colleagues will respect their work ethic and sincere desire to be helpful, those colleagues can get tired of having to clean up the emotional and interpersonal problems that accidental mess-makers so often leave behind.

Hungry and smart but not humble: the Skillful Politician. People who are hungry and smart but lack humility are the “skillful politicians.” These people are cleverly ambitious and willing to work extremely hard, but only in as much as it will benefit them personally. Unfortunately, because they are so smart, skillful politicians are very adept at portraying themselves as being humble, making it hard for leaders to identify them and address their destructive behaviors. By the time the leader sees what’s going on, the politician may have already created a trail of destruction among their more humble colleagues who have been manipulated, discouraged and scarred. Most of us have worked with plenty of skillful politicians, as they tend to rise in the ranks



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of companies where leaders reward individual performance over teamwork.

Managers will need to be “smart” about how to use the terms with their employees. And remember, the real purpose of identifying these types is not to pigeonhole people but to better understand what constitutes ideal team players so we can recognize or develop them on our teams.

Humble, hungry, smart: the Ideal Team Player.

Ideal team players possess adequate measures of humility, hunger and people smarts. They have little ego when it comes to needing attention or credit for their contributions, and they are comfortable sharing their accolades or even occasionally missing out on them. Ideal team players work with a sense of energy, passion and personal responsibility, taking on whatever they possibly can for the good of the team. Finally, they say and do the right things to help teammates feel appreciated, understood and included, even when difficult situations arise that require tough love. Most of us can recall having managed or worked with ideal team players in our careers, as they are quite appealing and memorable.

EMBEDDING THE MODEL INTO AN ORGANIZATION’S CULTURE



Teamwork is not a virtue but rather a choice. For those organizations that are sincere about *humility, hunger and smarts*, here are a few simple ideas for embedding those virtues into your culture.

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- **Be explicit and bold.** Leaders who believe teamwork is important and expect their people to be humble, hungry and smart should come right out and say so. They should tell everyone. Employees. Vendors. Partners. Customers. It's not marketing but rather expectation-setting.

- **Catch and revere.** Leaders should be constantly on the lookout for any displays of the virtues. And when they see those displays, they should hold them up as examples for everyone to see. Great team leaders will acknowledge an act of humility, hunger or people smarts not because they want to be seen as sophisticated or clever managers but because they want everyone to know exactly what kinds of behavior they expect and appreciate.

- **Detect and address.** Whenever you see a behavior that violates one of the values, take the time to let the violator know that his behavior is out of line. And don't just do it in egregious situations. Often, the smaller offenses are the ones that are harder for employees to see and the ones they learn from the most. Of course, doing this well requires tact and good judgment. The key is that leaders and, eventually, teammates don't squander opportunities for constructive learning.

Great cultures tend to be appropriately intolerant of certain behaviors, and great teams should be quick and tactful in addressing any lack of humility, hunger and people smarts.

Hiring using the Ideal Team Player Model

Though it would be nice to have a perfectly reliable, diagnostic tool for accurately identifying and selecting people who are humble, hungry and smart, no such tool currently exists. However, by doing thorough interviewing and selective reference checking, a manager can hire people with a high degree of confidence that they'll be ideal team players. The key is sticking to a few concepts, all of which may seem obvious but are too often overlooked.

- **Don't be generic.** Too many interviews leave interviewers with extremely general assessments of candidates. "She seems like a nice person. I like her." That would be fine if you were looking for someone to mow your lawn once a week. If you're looking for a team player who is humble, hungry and smart, being specific about targeted behaviors and attributes is critical.

- **Debrief each interview as a team.** Interviewers should



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debrief quickly after each interview, specifically around observations related to humility, hunger and people smarts. For instance, if the first two interviewers agree that the candidate is hungry and smart, the third can focus on humility, taking more time and probing more directly for the unknown piece.

Make interviews nontraditional. Interviews should incorporate interaction with diverse groups of people in everyday situations, and they should be longer than 45 minutes. Get out of the office with a candidate and see him deal with people in an unstructured environment. Running an errand at the grocery store or the mall is not a bad idea. Spending time in a car and seeing how he behaves when he's not answering a question helps to understand him better. Whatever you're doing with that candidate, look specifically for signs that he is humble, hungry and smart.

Ask what others would say. Instead of asking candidates to self-assess a given behavior or characteristic related to humility, hunger or people smarts, ask them what others would say about them. There is just something about having to answer on behalf of another person that makes a candidate more honest.

Ask candidates to do some real work. The point is not to get free work but rather to see how people perform in real-world situations so you can discern whether they are humble, hungry and smart.

Don't ignore hunches. If you have a doubt about a person's humility, hunger or smarts, don't ignore it. Keep probing. More often than not, there is something causing that doubt.

Assessing Current Employees using the Ideal Team Player Model

How exactly should a leader go about evaluating people for humility, hunger and smarts? There is no easy, quantitative diagnostic, but there are reliable, qualitative approaches that can work very well. There are a number of questions managers can ask themselves about a given employee to determine whether he or she is humble, hungry or smart.

Humble. *Does he genuinely compliment or praise teammates without hesitation? Does she easily admit when she makes a mistake? Is he willing to take on lower-level work for the good of the team?*



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Does she gladly share credit for team accomplishments? Does he readily acknowledge his weaknesses? Does she offer and receive apologies graciously?

Hungry. *Does he do more than what is required in his own job? Does she have passion for the “mission” of the team? Does he feel a sense of personal responsibility for the overall success of the team? Is she willing to contribute to and think about work outside of office hours? Is he willing and eager to take on tedious and challenging tasks whenever necessary? Does she look for opportunities to contribute outside of her area of responsibility?*

Smart. *Does he seem to know what teammates are feeling during meetings and interactions? Does she show empathy to others on the team? Does he demonstrate an interest in the lives of teammates? Is she an attentive listener? Is he aware of how his words and actions impact others on the team? Is she good at adjusting her behavior and style to the nature of a conversation or relationship?*

Developing Employees using the Ideal Team Player Model

Once a leader (or employee) has established a clear sense of his employees' (or his own) relative strengths and weaknesses related to the three virtues, the process of improvement can begin. The most important part of the development process, and the part that is so often missing, is the leader's commitment to constantly “reminding” an employee if she is not yet doing what is needed. Without this, improvement will not occur.

Humility. The source of a lack of humility is always related in some way to insecurity, and for most people, insecurity is rooted in childhood and family issues that go way back beyond their first day on the job or the team. Without getting too deep into psychological analysis or therapy, a manager or coach can experience significant relief simply by identifying the general cause of insecurity.

People who lack humility need behavioral training in an exposure therapy kind of way. Don't be put off by the clinical sound of this. Employees can make progress simply by acting like they are humble. By intentionally forcing themselves to compliment others, admit their mistakes and weaknesses and take an interest in colleagues, employees can begin to experience the liberation of humility. This happens because they suddenly realize that focusing on others does not detract from their own happiness



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but rather adds to it. After all, **humility is the most attractive and central of all virtues.** But the best way of all is to have teammates coach the employee, providing encouragement and immediate feedback when the desired virtues are demonstrated or lacking.

Hunger. All too often, employees struggle to become hungry because they don't understand the connection between what they do and the impact it has on others. When a slightly non-hungry employee hears his colleagues describe their motivation and connection to the mission, he may get "infected" by his teammates' passion. Set clear behavioral expectations for employees, and then hold them accountable. When a non-hungry employee starts to exhibit signs of hunger, praise her publicly and have teammates do the same.

Smarts. Employees who lack people smarts have no desire to create interpersonal problems with their teammates. They just don't understand the nuances of interpersonal situations, and they don't seem to realize how their words and actions impact others. A person who has trouble being smart with people can be likened to a pet. Like a puppy being trained, he needs to be quickly and lovingly rapped on the nose with a newspaper whenever he does something non-smart. So, in the middle of a meeting, stop and say,

"Hey, Bob, this is the part of the meeting where you should thank her for what she did."

If this sounds rudimentary or even juvenile, that's okay. It won't be once you establish the real nature of the help your employee needs. And if he is sincerely interested in getting better, he'll thank you for it.

