

3 Ways to Derail Team Formation

By Sal Silvester, 5.12 Solutions

Most teams struggle to reach their highest levels of effectiveness because of their inability to cultivate the right team of people from the beginning. As a result, communication breakdowns, unnecessary conflict, and poor decision making leads to a loss of key opportunities.

It doesn't have to be that way.

Over the past 20 years working with management teams, functional teams, and emerging leaders, I've noticed three common mistakes that derail the formation of an effective team. Overcoming these costly mistakes will enable you to cultivate a team of committed people instead of a disgruntled majority.

Mistake 1: Ambiguity of team purpose and vision for the future

It's hard to create an effective team when the purpose of the team is not clear and its vision for the future is vague. You'll know your team lacks clarity if its priorities are constantly changing and your meetings are focused primarily on the "round robin," where each person updates everyone else on things that no one cares about.

Neither result in an effective use of team time.

The first step in cultivating a high-performing team is to clearly define the team's purpose. The team's purpose should answer these questions:

- What should this team do that no other team does?
- Where is the team going? What is our preferred vision for the future?
- How is the team going to get there? (Peel back the onion on this one and you'll notice that this question is answered with the key values that enable the team to be most effective.)

Having clarity of purpose will help your team move beyond information sharing to actually solving problems and making decisions.

How is your team doing?

- ✓ Is your purpose clear?
- ✓ Is your vision for the future compelling?
- ✓ What values will guide you?

Mistake 2: Hiring a warm body instead of the right person

Your team's moving a hundred miles per hour. You're trying to meet corporate demands, customer concerns, and employee needs. Your team has so much work on its plate that it can't wait any longer to fill that "open rec."

The challenge on many teams is that they don't have an effective process for bringing the right people on board. Interviews are 30 minutes long and a candidate has 8 in a row; candidates are evaluated based on technical skills alone without regard for cultural fit; hiring decisions are made based on gut feel instead of an intentional approach.

And the end result...you end up with a warm body.

The longer-term end result...the person leaves within 18 months.

An even worse end result...the person sticks around and joins the majority of the disengaged and you continue to pay their salary.

Organizations that are most successful focus on their people first, and that starts with the hiring process. They make sure they get the right people on the bus and in the right seats (see Jim Collins' *Good to Great*). And, they wait until they have the right person instead of taking a warm body.

These successful organizations are clear about the values that drive their success (see Mistake #1); they are clear about the competencies that they need in new hires – knowledge competencies, skills competencies, and personal trait competencies; they have a consistent hiring process that allows for in-depth interviews to happen; they have an objective method of evaluating candidates.

Having the right people on your team is critical to your long-term success.

How is your team doing?

- ✓ Are values clear and aligned with the hiring process?
- ✓ Do you understand the knowledge, skill, and personal trait competencies your candidates should possess?
- ✓ Does the hiring process allow you to experience candidates in different environments?
- ✓ Are people trained to conduct behavioral based interviews?
- ✓ Are candidates evaluated based on clear objectives?

Mistake 3: Dis-orientation

Most team members are hired and then thrown into the fire.

There are unwritten rules to figure out, different personalities to decipher, an outdated organizational chart to interpret, and a job description that was “copy and pasted” with irrelevant information about their role.

Sure, your new team member may go through an on-boarding process with Human Resources, but that typically does little to convey the “real” culture of the team.

The problem with this common scenario is that employee attrition typically happens within the first 18 months of a team member’s tenure. And, when you consider that it costs 1-3 times a person’s salary to hire someone new, the lack of attention to your new employee can get expensive very quickly.

Taking the time to intentionally orient new team members will help accelerate their integration on the team and enable them to be productive. At a minimum the following should be reviewed with the entire team every time a new person is hired.

- Share behavioral styles among team members so that everyone is clear about each others’ preferences and styles of working (we use DiSC® with our clients whenever possible).
- Review the team’s purpose and vision for the future.
- Communicate team norms and values.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities. Ensure key hand-offs are discussed and new team members are introduced to influencers on other teams.

Additionally, the team leader should:

- Ensure goals and standards are discussed and documented.
- Begin to conduct monthly 1-1s to provide the new team member with a consistent opportunity to express needs and gather feedback.
- Align recognition efforts so that the new team member is awarded/acknowledged at Year 1, instead of waiting until Year 5.

How is your team doing?

- ✓ Do you have a formal process to orient new team members?
- ✓ Are goals and roles clearly defined and understood?
- ✓ Have monthly 1-1s been started to open the lines of communication?
- ✓ Are recognition efforts aligned with improving retention in the first 18 months of a team member’s tenure?

So, where do you go from here?

In this report, I outlined 3 mistakes that derail organizations from cultivating successful teams and how to avoid them. There are more factors that make teams successful, but focus on these first and you'll build a strong foundation for creating a *sustainable* competitive edge.

If you'd like some guidance on how to ignite the potential of your people to accelerate business results, a good place to start is to simply review each of our regular People-First e-newsletters and apply some of those concepts to your personal and professional growth. Share People-First with your team, take a look at our [blog](#), and participate in one of our monthly webinars.

If you want your team and leaders to make a major shift in how they work, I invite you to connect with me to schedule a complimentary Strategy Session. During this session we'll explore your business challenges, current team dynamics, results you'd like to achieve, and determine if our higher-end team development programs are a fit for you.

The conversation will take about one hour and can be done by phone. Email me (info@512solutions.com) with three dates and times that are convenient for you.

About Sal Silvester



Sal Silvester is the founder of 5.12 Solutions (five-twelve). He is the author of *The Ultimate Goal Setting Guide* and the forthcoming book *Ignite! The 4 Essential Rules for Emerging Leaders*. Senior leaders and HR Professionals from mid-sized to large organizations call on Sal and his team to help them ignite the potential of their people - enabling them to accelerate business results and become employers of choice.

You are welcome to pass this report on to your colleagues and friends, or better yet, direct them to the www.512solutions.com website.