

# Leading Legacy Teams.

BY TOM FLICK

I have heard the word “team” used hundreds if not thousands of times since leaving the NFL in 1988 and entering the corporate world. CEOs, presidents, managers, and front-line employees have all spoken the word “team” without ever really knowing how a true team behaves or what it can accomplish. I also know that you don’t leave building a team to chance, because people can form some sort of team without you. Being intentional in everything you do is critical to forming a winning team.

I have come to understand that there are essentially four types of teams. There are teams in name only, *good teams*, *great teams*, and then there are *legacy teams*. When I ask audiences how many have been on a great team, a number of people will raise their hands. I find that those who raised their hands evaluate a great team based on tangible criteria, such as winning a championship or having the leading scorer. But legacy teams are much more than that.

I’ve learned about legacy teams from great coaches I’ve been fortunate to play for during my 22 years of playing competitive sports. I have taught these legacy team concepts to clients and many have embraced the legacy team model and adopted it into their culture with great success. Sites of the legendary Ritz- Carlton Resorts have embraced it. Marriott has embraced it. Shell Oil and US Navy have embraced it, and others are beginning to realize that being a team is more than just working under the banner of your company name.

There are seven prerequisites that make up a legacy team.

1. On legacy teams, *lifetime friendships are formed*. After years pass and the team disbands, one day you could end up eating at a restaurant and see a former teammate across the room—and because of the lifetime friendship that was formed from being legacy teammates, you have deep mutual respect and love for that person.

I was recently at the Orlando International Airport and spotted a former college teammate of mine whom I hadn’t seen in fifteen years. We were across the concourse from each other, and after making eye contact; we made a beeline toward each other and embraced. He happens to be six feet, five inches tall, weighs 270 pounds, and is black. I’m six feet, three inches tall, weigh 175 pounds, and am white, but all that doesn’t matter. We were legacy teammates at the University of Washington and have a deep mutual respect and enduring love for one another.

2. On a legacy team there is a *shared joy of the inner circle*, which means it’s selective, restrictive, limited to team members only. You’ll have a hard time explaining your legacy team experience to your spouse, your neighbor, or your friend outside of work. People often say to me, “That sounds pretty exclusive,” and my response is, “Exactly!” That’s exactly what it’s supposed to be – exclusive!

3. On a legacy team there is *accountability, personal responsibility, and reliability* for the work that needs to be done. Legacy teams desire *never to let their teammates down*. It is abhorrent to do so. Thus you will never see a legacy team where your most talented members aren’t your hardest workers.

4. There is a *good pride* that is alive on a legacy team because teammates understand that the sum is always greater than any individual part. The opposite, of course, is bad pride. Bad pride is false pride and breeds a sense of entitlement—where rules don’t apply to me. Team members with bad pride don’t work hard—they save themselves. Bad pride creates people who are invested when it helps them, and yet you’ll find they are the ones who criticize quickly and make excuses often. All that matters is what they get out of it. Bad pride is ugly for everyone, and it kills the team.

5. There is a *quiet confidence* on a legacy team. Great coaches understand this concept and so the first thing they always teach their teams are the concept of *quiet confidence*, meaning, “We know we’re good but we will show it well; we will walk with class and humility.”

6. The last two characteristics of a legacy team are the lynchpins. Legacy teams are *built around the committed*. A legacy team allows only the committed on their team. No selective participants allowed. Selective participants are those who form subgroups and cliques and have their own niche. The committed understand that we are *all* in this canoe together, *all* rowing in the same direction, with all we have to give. Legacy team members are all-in, going all-out.

7. Lastly, *all roles are honored as equal*. If you’re a sales executive who is out front and receives the bigger paycheck, remember that those people who work in the office, who answer the phones, who do the fulfillment work, who are marketing the business, are equally important. NFL quarterbacks get their name in the paper every game because they throw touchdowns and lead their team. But the offensive linemen, who scrap and fight it out in the trenches to protect the quarterback, are rarely ever mentioned in the paper, yet they’re equally important.

Obviously, this is a broad-brush picture of what a legacy team is all about. Becoming one is, to say the least, extremely hard work. There is a tremendous amount of “me” that needs to be given up for the “we” of the team. Yet those organizations and teams that commit to becoming a legacy team are rewarded tenfold in deeper relationships, greater mission performance, and bottom-line results.

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