

Team Building

The importance of team dynamics

In recent years I have had an increasing role within Newfrontiers UK in helping to oversee churches and in doing this I spend a great deal of time talking with eldership and staff teams about **team dynamics**.

As a church grows team dynamics will become an increasingly important component of success. It has become clear that one guy can see a church grow to around 100 – 150 and many individuals are capable of this. Beyond that point a **team-building gift** is needed and *this ability will determine success in growing a church beyond this point.*

One area of team management that many guys identify with is that of the football manager – even if it is only on the level of fantasy football! All the elements are there – the team, with gifted individuals. Some of them are young and talented, but not necessarily with the depth of character you would want. There are issues of allocating places in the team, instilling a common philosophy of football. Behind the team are the directors, the fans and the media and then there are issues of finance and budget, injuries and the 'shelf-life' of the team members. You need a youth team policy. And what happens when you import a super-star from another team, someone from another league? How do you and the team handle the change? Then there is the effect of the manager – he works with the team all week but his 15 minutes of input at half-time can turn the game. Certain teams have 'team spirit' – that dynamic of being with each other that gives them that 'extra' something in what they do. Looking at a team in a church context it is easy to see parallels.

Team growth and diversity

We have **biblical examples of team** - as in Acts 11:22. We see a situation where the gospel was expanding but there is persecution and the scattering of believers as a result. The apostles had not been involved in setting up the Antioch church but at this point sent a representative to see what was happening. They found 'evidence of the grace of God' and a great number added to the growing church. *Barnabas thinks 'team' at this point and Paul, who has been out of the picture for some years, is brought in - :27* indicates that other ministries were also on the scene.

By Acts 13 this is a massive church. There is a **team** with prophets and teachers. **Barnabas leads** and Paul is the last team member listed. This team is made up of those from **different ethnic backgrounds**, bringing a whole new level of complexity to the team. At King's we are seeing an increasing number of black people joining us – *as a result we are intentionally recruiting leaders, according to gift, across the multi-cultural spectrum.* Some time back I asked all of the church trustees to stand down as all of them were white. We reappointed with diversity on the team, this being a real expression of our commitment in this area. Owen Hylton, who until he went to lead the church plant in central South London was an elder here at King's, has been a tremendous help and provocation to us on the high value that we should place on inclusiveness. *We now assess each church event and ministry through a different filter of success – that of **cultural and ethnic inclusivity.***

Issues of growth and transition

Returning to Acts 13, the local church team releases Barnabas and Paul to travel as an apostolic team. With Barnabas leaving the church there is a transition to a team, which can bring with it massive issues. It can be difficult when an established leader hands over to a successor – *the underlying character and attitude of both are key here*, how the transition between the old and new leader takes place. It takes grace to stand back and allow someone else to take over – **a real test of character.**

In Acts 15 we see that this team has to be accountable to the apostolic team in Jerusalem. There are *issues of theology* at this point which need to be resolved and as these issues are thrashed out and resolved *useful principles are laid down for other churches*. The apostolic team then send Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch. Later, when these two make plans to revisit the churches where they have had previous input **a dispute** blows up between them – over a young team member! Should John Mark be included? His track record was that he had dropped out of a previous missions trip – was he going to prove unreliable again? There is the added complication of family ties between John Mark and Barnabas (they are thought to have been cousins) - this can be an issue today. Should family members, say husband and wife, be employed together? Is there a danger of a power/opinion block on the team?

The dispute over this one junior team member is such that the team splits! This is obviously not good – but **God uses the situation**. The two halves of the team go in different directions geographically, covering more ground and there is later restoration of John Mark.

Successful teams and why they don't always happen

To have a successful team the following elements are required:

1. **A clear sense of direction** – vision and purpose
2. **The right people in place** – a 'dream team'
3. **Sound finances** – resources are essential

If one of these is missing it will be hard to achieve the desired result.

Reasons why people don't build teams:

1. **Control** – the leader can't let go. Such control doesn't have to be by force of personality – it can be a quiet individual who has to have everything flow through them. This will become a limiting factor – the lead guy has to initiate a transition if the church is to grow beyond 200.
2. **It's quicker to do things yourself!** – The leader sees that something needs doing and knows that he can do it quickly. If he is going to delegate the task he will have to recruit, train and monitor that person and they aren't going to do it as well – at least initially! The half-done and wrongly done elements of the task will keep coming back to him and will give him extra work, not less!
3. **Past failures** – if the leader has been let down by a previous team member who hasn't delivered on supposed promise or who has received training and personal investment from the leader and has then decided to move on and go somewhere else.

In this context *inertia* takes over - **in a growth context the immediate takes over from the strategic.**

A leader's capacity

As leaders we have to ask ourselves – *What is my capacity? What can I achieve?* It's good to know this because members of your team (other leaders in effect) who have a greater leadership gift than you and more capacity will not play on your team for long. **There is a direct relationship between the leader's capacity and the capacity of the team member.** *If this relationship is out of kilter the result will be frustration on both sides.*

Leaders generally work hard. However, the issue is not just one of **hours spent** but of **levels of responsibility** and **emotional capacity** - a leader carries the team. For me, increasing responsibilities outside King's mean that there are no venues in my life where I don't lead. This can be demanding. *The advantage of this is that I have the chance to shape the culture of each ministry/event where I have input.* Inevitably too my diary shapes the church agenda.

For every successful leader there are always more people who know that they are going to be **second in rank**. Some are happy to be part of a specialist team within the church and I would reckon that they feel good about that for around 80% of the time – with the occasional frustration! *Inevitably a team member may come to the point where they want and need to lead their own team.* Some will stay but some will go to grow elsewhere.

John Maxwell has been a favourite writer and speaker of mine for some years and I especially agree with him when he says,

'...those closest to the leader will determine the level of success for that leader.'

This means that you should choose your team members carefully!

Building your dream team!

In my experience I have found that the following principles are important – if not vital – for building a great team!

- Team members genuinely care for each other.

What is the team temperature? *A leader will monitor this and ensure good relational 'gel' in the team.* Each year I take the King's elders away for 4 days. We go to France where a former elder and his wife have a large house with a pool. In the mornings we pray and discuss and in the afternoons we rest and 'play'. *This is invaluable time together and I see it as real investment in the team.* I think every such team needs an equivalent.

- Team members know what's important.

Priorities need to be recognised and stated. Challenges need to be identified. These are the tasks of a leader and there will come times when as a result of these activities that you recognise that you need to up your game. One year I returned from my summer break to be informed that our Church Administrator was moving on, one of the elders was ill and had to take long-term sick leave and we were £90K down on our budget! We had a Family Meeting to tell the church what was happening and one of the outcomes was that I had to re-involve myself in areas such as taking funerals and pastoral care. By Christmas of that year I was losing the plot! I was glad to take time over the break to analyse the critical elements in our situation which I identified as – diversity, finances, apostolic reach, growth and impact on the team. On the first Sunday in January I presented these challenge points to the church and addressed them.

What are the key challenges you and your team are facing? If there is corporate ownership of these, that will help you as you assess your resources and move forward.

Team members communicate with each other. **Trust and openness** should be the norm. Permission! Any idea is acceptable for discussion! (And implementers will struggle with this!)

Team members grow together.

Training should be a continuous process. *Developing skills is a high priority.* In recent years we have had input into the team in the following areas:

Diversity : David Anderson

Counselling : Jeanie Kendall

Management : Brian Watts

Personality profiling : Peter Brierley

Multiple meetings : Steve Nicholson – US Vineyard Movement

Various : Willow Creek Association; Holy Trinity, Brompton

and from various apostolic figures within Newfrontiers. These bring huge gifts and other skills.

Our Newfrontiers foundations are strong and we are happy to receive from other streams of church life where appropriate and to grow in awareness and 'roundedness'!

There is a good 'team fit'.

A useful tool in this area is the *Belbin personality test*. I would recommend that you and your team do this together. It will help you know more about the individuals in your team and to value difference in the team rather than being annoyed by it! It is important that your team has the *full range of gifting and personalities* in the room.

Team members place individual rights beneath the best interests of the team

This requires a level of **maturity** from the team members who will be able and gifted in their sphere of work and who could, in some cases, go and lead their own team. **Preaching** is a case in point here. One of our elders was an able teacher and was at once stage the second preacher on the team after me. As the church has grown we wanted to promote and give opportunities to younger guys – the outcome of this (and other strategic staff appointments) is that he now preaches only once or twice a year – *a real sacrifice*.

Each team member plays a special role – ideally to the person's strengths.

Working within your own gift means that you can run further and do more. Also knowing how you function physically helps – I know that I generally do better with 6 one hour sessions rather than 1 six hour session. You should be aware of what drains you in church life. I know that I'm a 'solution' person so that pastoral care and I have a limited shelf life together! Our personalities contribute to this.

An effective team has strength in depth

Having worked at this, I really believe that my team at King's is one of the strongest in depth within Newfrontiers!

Team members know exactly where the team stands on any issue.

Some years back we were going into a major building project and the small group system began to fall apart. I came under immense pressure to radically restructure this part of church life but I felt that it was not the time for a big policy change in this area. 'Cell' church was the big thing at the time but we decided to wait for 2 to 3 years. *Our priority was the building* – I felt we would only get one chance to design and erect a good building – once that was done we could recreate our small group system on an annual basis if we chose to! As it was, the delay gave us time to reflect on this important area of church life.

In more recent days we have moved to multiple Sunday meetings. We worked out that an attendance of 180 was 'critical mass' for a new meeting in our auditorium. At this point I spoke to all the ministry leaders and told them that I wanted them in that meeting! This was a change of philosophy.

Team members are willing to pay the price

There has to be a personal counting the cost which may well have *financial and career development consequences* with implications for wider family members.

Defining your unique role in the team

1. Define the role of the leader!

Doing this will prevent responsibilities falling into that area where everyone presumes that someone else is taking care of it! And because you are a self-aware, self-reflecting leader you will be aware of **your own areas of limitation** and will **staff your weaknesses!**

2. Have clear job descriptions for team members.

Let others with expertise in this area sort the details of these documents as well as staff contracts. Though it seems tedious at the time, *good documentation in this area can save a great deal of trouble in the future.*

3. Areas to be aware of when building a team.

- *Age distribution.* If all your elders are the same age, they will continue to age together and you will need to introduce a rank of younger elders to add youth and vigour to wisdom and stability!
- *Individual training.* Variety in skills and gifting. Different experience histories.
- *Varied personalities*
- *Ethnic mix.* Diversity is an increasingly important and visible issue in our churches.

Winning Teams

I have already recommended the Belbin test for you and your teams – it is a well-researched secular team test which shows the contribution each type of individual makes to a team. Belbin enables you to identify the strengths and weaknesses in your team. On any team there needs to be:

- A trusted **chairperson** who uses people's abilities. Trust is key – the team won't function without it.
- A **creative person**, preferably clever as well. What Belbin calls a 'plant'. This person will often bring a new angle on an issue. I have come to value contributions from our creative people at critical times in decision making.
- A fair spread of **mental abilities.**
- A good spread of **team roles**
- A matching of **team roles and responsibilities**

- A **shared consciousness of the weaknesses of the team**. At an early stage I realised that we were missing an *implementer* on our team. I'm a *shaper*, with implementer as my secondary role. As a result everything was bouncing back to me – not ideal. So, we staffed an implementer! (All senior staff appointments at King's will undertake Belbin testing – that way we know where we are!)

The ability to recognise gifts – is a gift! We are learning about this all the time – the important thing is that you need to *understand yourself as you go to recruit*. Bringing a new team member on board - especially a senior team member – could destabilise the team. The **personality** of the newcomer is vital, so it's not just about gifting. *They have to 'fit'*.

Appreciating those on the team who are different from me means that I recognise that we need ALL their gifts and abilities, *otherwise you will end up recruiting only people like yourself which will weaken the team*.

It's important to play to your strengths as a leader – and discover and then cover your weaknesses.

Youth Development Policy

It's not just wise football managers who invest in youth training. As a church leader *spotting gifts and potential in young people and providing them with opportunities to grow in serving is a good investment*. Give them input and on occasions give them their head! I have good reason to advocate this approach as I benefited from it myself.

The pastor of my home church began to invest in me when I was 20. By the age of 21 I was sitting in Elder's meetings and was arrogant and opinionated. But all I learned then bore fruit in later situations as I had been exposed to the practice of leadership in previous years.

My plea is that **leaders give responsibility at an early age**. *If you have young people that show potential then encourage them to aspire to the next level of leadership and provide learning and training opportunities that will stretch but not overwhelm them*.

Book recommendations on leadership and team building

Developing the Leader Within You : John Maxwell

Developing the Leaders Around You : John Maxwell

Making a Team Work : Steve Chalke with Penny Relph

Effective Keys to Successful Leadership : Frank Damazio