

Directions

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Is your leadership team performing as it should?

by Ellen Davis

Yes, it happens more often than we like to think: leadership teams fail, or they certainly don't perform all that well. Putting a group of managers together based on the reporting structure alone isn't enough. Getting them to like one another and work harmoniously together isn't enough either. Strong HR departments might actually prove harmful to the development of a strong leadership team! And a leader who strives to mirror the most acclaimed leaders of her day can't always make things right.

These are among the findings cited in a May 2009 article in [Harvard Business Review](#) entitled "Why Teams Don't Work" — an interview with famed teams researcher Dr. Richard Hackman. While there is application to all sorts of teams, I think the article is particularly relevant for leadership teams.

You need to read the article, and I don't want to steal its thunder. But here are a few quotes that resonated well with my own observations of leadership teams:

"I have no question that a team can generate magic. But don't count on it."

"In truth, putting together a team involves some ruthless decisions about membership; not everyone who wants to be on the team should be included, and some individuals should be forced off."

"Small teams whose members stay together for long periods of time perform best."

"Perversely, organizations with the best human resource departments often do things that are completely at odds with good team behavior."

"Don't try to ape any leadership model or team, because there's no one right style for leading a team."

"...being a real and committed team player — whether as a team leader, a deviant, or just a regular member who speaks the truth — can be dangerous business indeed."

Dr. Hackman also sets out conditions for success. You'll want to read the article to learn about those. Or better yet, consider reading his book, [Leading Teams](#).

I had the privilege of working with him briefly when I was employed by Cummins, and find Richard Hackman to be among the best of the best team scholars. Listen to what he says and take heed!

Note: The article, "Why Teams Don't Work," can be purchased at <http://hbr.harvardbusiness.org/2009/05/why-teams-dont-work/ar/1>.