

Teams That Thrive

Five Disciplines of
Collaborative Church Leadership

(Hartwig & Bird)

Summary

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Teams That Thrive: Five Disciplines of Collaborative Church Leadership

Ryan T. Hartwig and Warren Bird

The primary audience for the book is senior leadership teams for churches; however, other teams can easily adapt most of the content.

Thesis: Teams that thrive:

1. Believe that collaborative leadership is practically and biblically the right way to lead.
2. Discipline themselves daily to practice the fundamentals that make a great team.

Note: This summary provides links to tools (not part of the book) that can help you implement some of the authors' suggestions.

Why Read a Book about Leadership Teams?

Leadership teams shape the culture, direct the mission, establish the vision, and model the values of your church.

If your leadership team is thriving, it is likely that the rest of the church will thrive as well.

Why Do Leadership Teams Make Sense?

Scriptural Foundations for Senior Leadership Teams

- The Trinity models teamwork ([Gen 1:2-3](#) and [John 1:1-3](#)). God eternally exists and functions as a divine team.
- The body of Christ works as a team ([1Cor 12:12](#) and [1Cor 12:27](#)).
- The New Testament describes many leadership teams ([Eph 4:11-16](#)).
- Whether apostles, deacons, or elders, the Bible describes them as teams.

Functioning as collaborative leaders is part of God's design for local church leadership.

Practical Reasons for Senior Leadership Teams

1. Greater productivity: When team members fully operate out of their gifts and strengths toward a common goal, leadership teams can outpace the combination of individual contributions ([1Cor 12-14](#)).
2. Less stress on the lead pastor: By spreading out the responsibilities to several persons, there is less pressure on the lead pastor ([Ecc 4:9-10](#)).
3. Greater leadership development: When emerging leaders participate in significant decision-making, they grow as leaders.
4. More creativity and innovation: When members collaborate, they are able to build on one another's ideas in creative ways.
5. Better decision-making: By engaging members with multiple perspectives, there is more information available from which to make decisions.

6. More safety and accountability: Making decisions as a team provides checks and balances. Each member is accountable to the others on the team.
7. Less loneliness: Operating as a team combats isolationism.
8. Greater joy and satisfaction: Members are more content when they can voice their opinions, ideas, and feelings to one another.
9. Greater trust among the congregation: Staff and congregants find reassurance in knowing that several godly people are involved in shaping the direction of the church.

Are We a Working Group or True Team?

The above benefits are available only to those teams who do the hard work to be a true team. Answer the questions below to see if you are operating more like a working group or a true team.

No		Yes
	Do members keep their egos in check?	
	Do members admit to mistakes, weaknesses, or insufficient knowledge?	
	Do members speak openly when they disagree?	
	Do members confront behavioral problems directly?	
	Do members put the success of the team or organization above their own success?	
Working Group		True Team

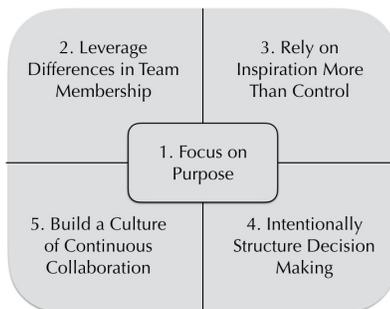
How Well is Your Team Thriving?

Eight Common Reasons Teams Fail

1. Everything is a priority, so nothing is.
2. Lack of leadership skill and understanding.
3. No inspiration or model for becoming a great team.
4. Undisciplined efforts.
5. Absence of godly character among team members.
6. Confusion over the team's purpose.
7. Over-reliance on the lead pastor.
8. Dysfunctional team communication practices.

What Are the Collaborative Disciplines of Teams That Thrive?

1-Focus on Purpose



Without a clear sense of purpose, team members won't know what is most important.

A common meaningful purpose sets the tone and aspiration. A **5C Purpose** will help your team reach its potential.

1. **Clear:** Makes the value of the team clear.
2. **Compelling:** Addresses something that truly matters.
3. **Challenging:** Each team member is required to contribute in a meaningful and interdependent way.
4. **Calling-oriented:** Helps members accomplish God's calling in their lives.
5. **Consistently-held:** Each team member fervently pursues the purpose.

Purpose is the invisible leader of exceptional teams.

2-Leverage Differences in Team Membership

Every person on a team doubles the team's communication and collaboration complexity. The best size is five or fewer. Team members should have diverse yet complementary skills, experiences, and attributes. Ideal characteristics for members include:

- Exemplary Christian character (**1Tim 3**)
- Diversely skilled and experienced related to the team's purpose

- Adept at solving problems
- Action-oriented
- Committed to collaboration
- Aligned with the church's mission and vision (**Mat 6:33**)

Develop layers of teams for different purposes. Continue leadership development throughout the church.

3-Rely on Inspiration More Than Control

Behavior of those who lead teams that thrive:

- Allow God's Word to guide them.
- Engage others to bring out the best in them.
- Cast vision and focus on the big picture.
- Do real work as part of the team.
- Welcome dialogue and shared decision-making.
- Develop relationships with team members.
- Deal with conflict constructively.
- Build trust by focusing the team on pursuing a common purpose.

To Build Trust, Be Trustworthy:

- Be competent at your tasks.
- Be honest and transparent.
- Be reliable. Do what you say you are going to do.

First Among Equals - Options

- Person with ultimate authority and responsibility.
- Rotate based on skill and expertise for task.
- Person with tenure or position.

Ten Practices of Great Team Leaders

1. Structure the team for success (processes, practices).
2. Establish a 5C purpose.
3. Get the right people on the team.
4. Facilitate goal setting (monthly and yearly).

5. Set priorities and focus.
6. Maintain a collaborative climate.
7. Unleash talent by allowing others to do real work.
8. Do real work themselves.
9. Employ effective procedures for problem-solving, decision-making, and innovating.
10. Manage performance (hold members accountable to goals and behavioral norms).

Leadership Development Strategy

- Establish a structure for success (ex. agendas that require all members to participate).
- Shut your mouth. Wait for members to contribute ideas.
- Be “strategically incompetent.” Even if you can do it all, don’t.
- Take a humility pill. Learn from criticism.
- Provide the necessary resources (education, funding, materials...).
- Collaboratively develop a compelling direction.
- Resist the urge to control. Encourage others to make decisions and offer their best.
- Occasionally be absent. Some people may be more creative and take more risks if you are not there watching.
- Occasionally do something not in your official job description. Show the importance of taking on different perspectives.

4-Intentionally Structure Decision-Making

When making decisions, thriving teams use structured processes while seeking God for His leading.

Spiritual leadership chiefly involves seeking to know and do the will of God.

Why Leadership Teams Face “Wicked” Problems

- Leadership teams make influential decisions that carry significance beyond their material impact.
- Leadership teams must respond to thorny problems (**Exo 18:22**).
- Leadership teams must sometimes manage tensions.
- Leadership teams are comprised of members who are accustomed to operating with a high degree of autonomy.

Assess the Challenges Your Leadership Team Faces in Making Decisions

PROBLEM	never true	sometimes true	often true
The right people are not at the table or they don’t speak up.			
After the lead pastor speaks, discussion centers on his ideas.			
Some members dominate the conversation.			
It’s unclear if the team made a decision or just had a discussion.			
The team revisits a decision multiple times before taking any action.			
The lead pastor overrides the decisions the team makes.			
Team members self-censor their thoughts to keep the peace.			
The team tends to revert to the way things have always been done.			
The team takes “forever” to make decisions.			
TALLY: Count how many in each column and multiply by factor.	x 0	x 1	x 2
YOUR SCORE			

If your score is 10 or higher, you have serious challenges in the way you make decisions.

Teams perform best when they do two things:

1. Use a structured process for solving problem and making decisions.
2. Frequently seek God for His perspective.

Communication Practices That Make a Difference

- Encourage robust, challenging dialogue.
 - ▶ Clarify the purpose of the conversation.
 - ▶ Gather divergent views and perspectives.
 - ▶ Build shared understanding of the divergent views and perspectives.

- ▶ Create new options by combining views.
- ▶ Generate a conversation for action.
- Cultivate and manage healthy conflict.
 - ▶ Vigorously solicit critiques of plans, decisions, and assumptions.
 - ▶ Model respectful, assertive, thoughtful, and honest critiques.
 - ▶ Cultivate the norm of speaking up when you see something.
 - ▶ Rotate the role of devil's advocate to search for shortcomings, oversights, and problems.
 - ▶ Regularly ask each team member to point out one area for improvement (team, ministry, or church).
 - ▶ Learn to be hard on the problems and easy on the people.
- Listen to one another in equal amounts. Take actions to be sure that no one person dominates the conversation.
- Adopt a church-wide perspective. Teach members to see things from other members' perspectives.
- Take time to make decisions.
 - ▶ The best idea wins, regardless of whose it is.
 - ▶ Vision and values guide decisions.

The Functional Approach to Group Decision Making

1. Analyze the problem. Define the problem and identify the consequences of not solving it.
2. Establish decision evaluation criteria. [Note: For a download of a Decision Making Tool, see the Tools page of <https://gracelead.co>].
3. Generate possible solutions. Use brainstorming techniques.
4. Evaluate the possible solutions. [Note: For a tool to help with this, download the Potential Improvements Tool from the Tools page of <https://gracelead.co>].
5. Select the solution(s) to implement. Continue to hold up the decision to the Holy Spirit (**Acts 15:28**).

5-Build a Culture of Continuous Collaboration

The Meeting Practices of Top Teams

- Team members collaborate outside of meetings.
- Meeting conveners distribute the agenda, at least a day in advance, to all members.
- All team members have an opportunity to shape meeting agendas.
- Agendas clearly specify the work for the meeting. [For a tool that can help you structure your agenda, download the Meeting PAL form from the Tools page of <https://gracelead.co>]

Information Sharing

- Establish expectations for reading updates and reports. Hold team members accountable.
- Resist the urge to overload people with information.
- Establish informational dashboards that put key metrics and data at people's fingertips.
- Put time on agendas for sharing stories.
- Provide a brief meeting summary within a day of each meeting. [Download the Meeting Summary Tool from the Tools page of <https://gracelead.co>]
- Extend information sharing to people outside the team.

Team Building

- When you launch a new team:
 - ▶ First, come to a shared understanding of the team's purpose.
 - ▶ Discuss what each member uniquely brings to contribute to accomplishing the team's purpose.
 - ▶ Agree on team behaviors that will and will not be acceptable.
 - ▶ Decide on each person's unique roles on the team.
 - ▶ Enjoy one another's company as you focus on the work.
- When you take a schedule break to refresh:
 - ▶ Look back. Celebrate your wins and analyze your failures. Where did you win/lose? Why did you win/lose? What is working/not working?
 - ▶ Look up. Pray individually and as a group. Rest in His presence and ask for direction.
 - ▶ Look forward. Remind yourselves of your purpose. Review your team norms and individual roles. Make adjustments. Scope out key elements for the coming seasons.

What's Your Best Next Step?

Avoid Sabotaging Your Team

1. Challenge the status quo.
2. Invite and cultivate feedback about how you work as a team. Continually compare what you preach about teams to what you actually do in your team.
3. Establish an environment that promotes planning and structure (clear vision, mission, goals, priorities; effective decision making; adequate information to solve problems)
4. Build a culture of team leadership.
5. Promote biblical accountability ([Pro 27:6](#)).
Feedback is the breakfast of champions. Mutual accountability is the secret to team success.

When You Need to Change Course

- Establish a sense of urgency.
- Create a guiding coalition for change.
- Develop a compelling vision and strategy.
- Repeatedly communicate the vision.
- Address obstacles to the new vision.
- Generate short-term wins.
- Consolidate gains to energize people for more change.
- Anchor new practices to your team's culture.

Catalyze Your Team's Growth

- Make sure your team is really leading.
- Ensure that your team is effective:
 - ▶ Focused on the 5C purpose
 - ▶ Leveraging differences in team membership
 - ▶ Relying on inspiration more than control
 - ▶ Intentionally structuring decision making
 - ▶ Building a culture of continuous collaboration
- Continually monitor your team's progress
- Invest in your team's development