



# How To Build A Strong Team

Hire The Right People

By

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One of the great experiences of life is being part of a “team.” The first team we join is our family. We learn so many important lessons of life during our growing-up years. We may also join other teams during our childhood and youth. We play sports and participate in other activities that help us learn the meaning of meaningful work with others.

Learning how to work as part of a team is vital to working in journalism, media, or communications. I’ve had the opportunity of working with a lot of great teams through the years, and I look forward to sharing some thoughts about teamwork during the next few months.

# Define “Team”

Let’s begin by defining “team” —

*A team is a group of people who share a common goal and work together to achieve that goal.*

With that definition in mind, let’s look at how to build a strong news team.

1. Hire the right people
2. Train them
3. Encourage them
4. Support them

There’s more to it than that, but it’s a basic outline we can use as a starting point.

# Hire the Right People



# Managers

The strength of your team depends, to a great degree, on having the right people on your team. Whether you manage a small team or a large team, your resources will always be limited. Your budget allows you to hire a certain number of people for the work. There are usually more applicants than you have openings for any particular position, so who do you hire?

First, you want someone who is **qualified** for the job. Qualified means different things based on the size of your operation. A small news, media, or communications company may hire some of their people directly out of college. A larger operation can usually hire people with several years of experience.

A lot of the work of finding the right person to join your team begins by reading scores of resumes and looking at large numbers of video tapes, listening to audio tapes, looking at social media posts, reading news releases, etc.

## Hiring 'Without' Professional Experience

In addition to looking at their grades while in school, find out what they did to prepare themselves to join a team. Talk with their teachers and friends (if you can). What insights do you get into your potential hire's personality and work ethic? Do they work and play well with others? How did they spend their time outside of classes? Extra-curricular activities that pertain to working in journalism, media, or communications fields? Did they work for a campus radio or TV station? Did they work on the school newspaper? Did they work in some college media areas? Did they handle communications for campus clubs or college administrators? How did they get along with other members of the campus team? What books, newspapers, and articles did they read personally? What newscasts did they watch or hear? What about their social media accounts? Anything stand out as good or bad for joining your team? Did they take any positions on social media that might cause problems for your team in the future?

## Hiring 'With' Professional Experience

If you are in a position to hire people with professional journalism or communications experience, you have more information available about how they will work with your team. How did they work with previous pro teams?

If you're hiring for a journalism position, what kind of news stories did they cover? Did they demonstrate curiosity and skepticism in the process of covering stories? Were they objective and accurate? What books, newspapers, and articles did they read personally? What newscasts did they watch or hear? What about their social media accounts? Anything stand out as good or bad for joining your team? Did they take any positions on social media that might cause problems for your team in the future?

If you're hiring for a media position, what types of media were their strengths? Do their strengths match up with your employment needs? Same questions about personal social media accounts.



If you're hiring for a communications position, how did they handle news releases, company social media accounts, inter-office communication, public relations, etc. Same questions about personal social media accounts.

## The Hiring Process

I remember reading through hundreds of resumes and looking at video tapes for days or even a few weeks before starting to call top candidates. Top candidates were the people I thought had the best potential for doing a great job for our station and becoming a strong member of our news team.

You can learn a lot about someone by talking with them on the phone. If you like what you hear, set up an online video call. See how the applicant handles themselves in front of the camera. Do they speak clearly? Can they handle tough questions about themselves? Do you see areas where you could help them be better on air or in person?

You might present them with some hypothetical work-related situations to see how they handle them. Is *critical thinking* one of their skills? Ask them questions about work and personal ethics? Do you like their answers? Think they would add strength to your team? Have them ask you questions. Are they curious? Skeptical? Are they just trying to get “a job,” or do they want to get the “right job?” If they want the right job,

they'll ask you some tough questions about your team, your philosophy, management style, etc. Do they ask *brave* questions or *safe* questions? If they are brave enough to ask you tough questions, imagine what they'll do when they work for you?

How did they handle themselves in both the phone and video call interviews? Did anything you heard or saw change your mind about their being a top candidate? If it did, then that's good. It's better to see potential problems before you hire someone and the problems fall into your lap.

There's an old saying in the construction business — "measure twice, cut once." That's good advice for hiring managers. Take your time. Don't rush into hiring someone just because you are down multiple people and you need help immediately. Hiring the wrong person can deeply harm your team and possibly your credibility as an organization or company. Take your time, find the right person, go through the hiring process carefully and methodically.

If possible, it's good to have a travel budget each year for bringing out-of-town candidates to your location. Most operations will have some openings to fill each year, so it's wise to plan for it. My goal was to select three top candidates to bring to the station for in-person interviews. It's not cheap to fly them in, put them up in a hotel, and pay for their meals, and so having a travel budget is helpful. If your company doesn't have travel budgets, you may have to pull from other parts of your general budget, get creative, or hire people who live in the area.

I liked top candidates to visit the station for at least a couple of days. That gives you time to show them around town, and meet some of the people they would interact with or cover. Be sure to set aside plenty of time for members of your team to meet and interview the top candidates. Give them some direction ahead of time concerning what you're looking for and get their feedback after they've met the candidates. Introduce candidates to your manager and other department heads. Find out what they think about each of your top candidates.

Remember, building a strong team means that everyone is pulling in the same direction. Your best team members are among the best people to help you find the next strong member of the team. If you manage a team long enough, you'll see team members come and go. Keeping the team strong is your goal as a manager.

# Employees



If you're already on a pro team, you should appreciate your hiring managers taking their time to find the right person for open positions. Who they hire will affect you in both professional and personal ways. Volunteer to spend time with top candidates. If your job takes you outside the building, take candidates with you. Are they curious? Skeptical? Do they care about accuracy and objectivity? Do you think they would be a strong addition to your team? Let your manager know what you think about each of the candidates.

If you're trying to become a member of a team, then think about what strengths you could bring to the team. What would you add to the team that other applicants might not? If you get the opportunity to talk with a manager by phone and/or online call, make the most of the time you have with them. Listen before you speak. Ask good questions and good follow-up questions. Use the skills you've learned so far to show the hiring manager what kind of team member you would be for them.

If you are chosen as a top candidate, follow the directions of the hiring manager carefully. Don't waste company money. That's not a good way to start a relationship. Showing that you can follow directions and care about the company's bottom line is part of demonstrating that you are a great choice for helping to strengthen the news team. Also, help members of the team get to know you — the real you.

**Don't lie.** Don't lie on a resume. Don't lie to a manager. Don't lie to other members of the team you meet. Don't make yourself out to be more than what you really are as a journalist. If you made mistakes on social media in the past, bring it up to the hiring manager. If managers are savvy, they'll find out anyway. Let them know you learned an important lesson from your mistakes and that you will be more careful in the future. If there's anything in your background that might cause problems for you should they become known, talk with the hiring manager about it. While some managers are slow to hire, they can be fast to fire. The more honest you are with managers, the better off you'll be in building your career.





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