

BUILD A DREAM TEAM

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Jeff was a junior vice president at the corporate offices of an investment firm. He aspired to be the president of one of the company's regional properties. Even though Jeff was pegged to be a senior leader of the company, he wanted to be sure he was prepared for every opportunity that came his way. So he brainstormed a list of leaders he hoped could help him. Once his list was complete, he sat down with each person, one at a time, and interviewed them with a short list of questions that would help him grow as a leader. By doing this, Jeff had created a "dream team" and was taking the lead in his career. You can do the same.

A dream team is a loose collection of advisors who help you get where you want to be as a leader. You turn to them because you know that on your path to success, they are further along than you. Your dream team might include:

- Leaders you admire
- Leaders who have the positions you want to hold
- Leaders who have the skills you want to have
- Leaders who have achieved what you want to achieve

You meet with these people one by one to ask them questions, seek their guidance, and learn from their experience.

The big difference between your dream team and other "teams" of people you might call upon, such as a mastermind group, is that you never actually assemble your dream team in one place. In this way, your dream team is more like Fantasy Football than a real team. Every member of this group has been hand-selected because together, they represent the best of everything you need to be the leader you aspire to be. Once you know who's on the team, you can draw on them one by one to support you in your success.

Here are the steps to help you assemble the best dream team possible:

1. CHOOSE THE "GAME."

"Choose the game" means get clear on specifically why you want a dream team. What do you want to learn from meeting with your dream team members? As always, the answer should be tied to your vision. Perhaps you want to:

- Learn how to generate passive income
- Learn how to enjoy life more without giving up your career
- Learn how to smoothly conduct mergers and acquisitions for business growth
- Learn how to triple my profits
- Learn how to be the kind of leader that balances respect for people and the results of the business

Notice that in each game, the focus is on *learning*. On your dream team, you're the rookie, if only in this one area of your life.

2. PICK THE “PLAYERS.”

“Pick the players” means being thoughtful and strategic about who gets on the team. This is not the time to hang out with good buddies and old friends; it's a time to branch out and build new relationships with people from whom you can truly learn. Among the group, it is helpful to have:

- *Advocates*. Advocates champion you, encourage you, and contribute directly to your success, perhaps by introducing you to influential people or making you a part of their team.
- *Experts*. Experts have information and knowledge you need to be successful. Instead of learning it all the hard way, experts help you jump to new levels of awareness by sharing their experience.
- *Inspirations*. Inspirations are people whose accomplishments make you want to be better yourself. As you watch a person who inspires you—whether that person is your most courageous colleague, a person who has risen to the top of her field, or just someone whose approach to life you admire—you are moved to a higher level of contribution and achievement.

These roles will often cross. In fact, people who can play more than one role on your team are often your strongest supporters.

Now notice who is *not* on this list:

- *Friends*. Friendship is not a requirement of your dream team. Chances are you will see your members as friends, and your friends may become members of your team. But you can also learn from people you hardly know and may not even enjoy.

- *Yes-Men and -Women.* Do not put people on your dream team who will only tell you what you want to hear. You already have your own opinions. Your dream team is meant to supplement (not rubber-stamp) them.
- *Your Boss.* Just because bosses manage your position doesn't mean they can help develop your gifts. They may. They may not. You decide.

The diversity of your dream team is essential. Cover as many bases as you can in terms of gender, age, race, and station in life. Your eyes will be opened to new perspectives that will enhance your learning. Look, too, for diversity of "gifts." People who are powerful, political, compassionate, intelligent, international, local, aggressive, spiritual, and reassuring can all add special value. So long as there's chemistry, the more wildly diverse combination of traits you can cover in your dream team, the better. Of course, you can't get all of that in one person. That's why it's a team.

3. SET THE "RULES."

The "rules" of your dream team game are how you want to play. If you don't set up the process in a way you'll enjoy it, you'll be less likely to see it through. For example, you might look for opportunities for informal conversation "when the time is right." Or you might prefer a formal introduction with a letter and a follow-up phone call. Or you might arrange meetings according to each member's choice (e.g. five minutes in the office of one, a fifteen-minute phone call with another, a meeting over lunch with a third). It's a good idea to decide how you want the process to play out so you put your best foot forward and feel comfortable along the way.

4. DEFINE A "WIN."

What is the best-case scenario for this dream team? In other words, what will define a "win?" Are you hoping to develop long-term relationships? Do you just want a lot of information fast? Do you want complex information and are willing to talk to as many people as it takes to get there?

This step is important, because it respects the time of the leaders whose advice you're seeking while also meeting the goals that matter most to you. If what you want is concrete advice on how to set up a sole proprietorship, you can get it in a series of short, one-shot interviews. On the other hand, if you want to become steeped in the culture of high-quality leadership, you'll want to develop deeper, more substantial relationships with the people whose work you admire.

5. GET IN THE GAME!

“Getting in the game” means approaching the people you admire to be on your team—asking them to meet with you, talking to them, and applying what you learn as you work toward your vision. If a meeting with one of your dream team members turns out to be beneficial, great. Ask them if they would mind meeting again. If not, fine. Some of these conversations will turn out to be a waste of time. Others will turn into the kinds of mentorships that last a lifetime.

Remember, the work you do with your dream team is not pandering or political maneuvering. There should be nothing in this process that smacks of manipulation. These are genuine, respectful conversations with people you admire to request the support you would be willing to give someone who asked it of you.

DREAM BIG

Over time, you’ll find that your dream team project becomes a practice. You will make meeting with inspirational leaders and role models a part of your own personal development, because you will see that you can achieve more, and faster, when you are supported by a strong and experienced team. With the help of your dream team, you’ll quickly create the personal and professional life of your dreams.

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