

# The 17 Essential Qualities of a Team Player

by John C. Maxwell

[Fertig Notes]

## 1) ADAPTABLE

IF YOU WON'T CHANGE FOR THE TEAM, THE TEAM MAY CHANGE YOU

- Inflexibility is one of the worst human failings. For rigidity of the mind there is no antidote. It carries the seeds of its own destruction.
- Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not be bent out of shape. Michael McGriff
- Team players who exhibit adaptability have certain characteristics.

### 1) *Teachable*

Adaptable people always place a high priority on breaking new ground.

### 2) *Emotionally Secure*

People who are not emotionally secure see almost everything as a challenge or a threat.

### 3) *Creative*

There's an expression that says a person's age can be determined by the degree of pain he experiences when he comes in contact with a new idea. Quincy Jones

### 4) *Service Minded*

Doing nothing for others is the undoing of one's self. Horace Mann

- **To become more adaptable...Get into the habit of learning.** For many years I carried a three-by-five card in my pocket. Every day when I learned something new, I'd write it down on the card. It got me in the habit of *looking* for things to learn. **Reevaluate your role.** The mental exercise will increase your flexibility. **Think outside the lines.** Many people aren't adaptable because they get into negative ruts. If you tend to be prone to ruts, then write down this phrase and keep it where you can see it every day: "Not why it *can't* be done but how it *can* be done."

## 2) COLLABORATIVE

WORKING TOGETHER PRECEDES WINNING TOGETHER

- Great challenges require great teamwork, and the quality most needed among teammates amid the pressure of a difficult challenge is collaboration. Cooperation is working together agreeably. Collaboration is working together aggressively. Each person brings something to the table that adds value to the relationship and synergy to the team.
- Becoming a collaborative team player requires a change in focus in four areas:
  - 1) *Perception: See Teammates as Collaborators, Not Competitors*  
To collaborative team members, completing one another is more important than competing with one another. They perceive themselves as a unit working together, and they never allow competition between teammates to get to the point where it hurts the team.
  - 2) *Attitude: Be Supportive, Not Suspicious, of Teammates*  
That means assuming that other people's motives are good unless proven otherwise. If you trust people, you will treat them better. And if you treat them better, you and they will be more likely to create collaborative relationships.
  - 3) *Focus: Concentrate on the Team, Not on Yourself*  
As a person on a team, you will usually ask one of two questions when anything happens: "What's in it for me?" or "What does this do for the team?" Where you focus your attention says a lot about whether you compete with others or complete them.
  - 4) *Results: Create Victories Through Multiplication*  
If you work alone, you leave a lot of victories on the table.
- You may not be working *against* the team, but that doesn't necessarily mean you're working *for* it, but that doesn't necessarily mean you're working *for* it. Do you bring cooperation and added value to your teammates – even to the people you don't enjoy being with? Do you help multiply the efforts of others? Or does the team become slower and less effective when you're involved? If you're not sure, talk to your teammates.
- **Think win-win.** Usually when you collaborate with others, you win, they win, and the team wins. Find someone on the team with a similar role whom you have previously seen as a competitor. Figure out ways you can share information and work together to benefit both you and the team.

- **Complement others.** Get together with someone who has strengths in your area of weakness and vice versa.
- **Take yourself out of the picture.** Get in the habit of asking what's best for the team.

### 3) COMMITTED

#### THERE ARE NO HALFHEARTED CHAMPIONS

1) *Commitment Usually Is Discovered in the Midst of Adversity*

Struggles strengthen a person's resolve. Vince Lombardi said, "The harder you work, the harder it is to surrender."

2) *Commitment Does Not Depend on Gifts or Abilities*

We don't need more strength or more ability or greater opportunity. What we need to use is what we have.

3) *Commitment Comes as the Result of Choice, Not Conditions*

4) *Commitment Lasts When It's Based on Values*

Anytime you make choices based on solid life values, then you are in a better position to sustain your level of commitment because you don't have to continually reevaluate its importance.

- If you find yourself reevaluating your intention to stay with the team whenever you and your teammates face adversity, then you need to become more committed.
- Being committed involves risk. You may fail. Your teammates may let you down. You may discover that fulfilling your goals doesn't give you the results you desire. But take the risk of committing anyway. George Halas, former owner of the NFL Chicago Bears, asserted, "Nobody who ever gave his best regretted it."
- You cannot make a commitment to uncommitted people and expect to receive a commitment from them. Examine the relationship to see whether you are reluctant because the potential recipient is untrustworthy.

### 4) COMMUNICATIVE

#### A TEAM IS MANY VOICES WITH A SINGLE HEARTBEAT

- You can get along if you just talk to each other.
- Without communication, you don't have a team; you have a collection of individuals. Communicative players...

1) *Do Not Isolate Themselves from Others*

The more teammates know about each other and about the team's goals and methods, the more they'll understand. The more they understand, the more they'll care. A player with passion as well as information and connection is a powerful asset to the team.

2) *Make It Easy for Teammates to Communicate with Them*

3) *Follow the Twenty-Four-Hour Rule*

Without knowing both sides of the story, people tend to give the benefit of the doubt to themselves and to assign negative motives and actions to others. Without communication, the situation just festers. If you have any kind of difficulty or conflict with a teammate, don't let more than twenty-four hours go by without addressing it. In fact, the sooner you communicate, usually the better off you and your teammates will be.

4) *Give Attention to Potentially Difficult Relationships*

Relationships need attention to thrive. That is especially true of relationships between people who have potential for conflict.

5) *Follow Up Important Communication in Writing*

- Anytime you're on a team but not communicating with team members, the team suffers.
- **To improve communication...Be candid.** Open communication fosters trust. Having hidden agendas, communicating to people via a third party, and sugarcoating bad news hurt team relationships. **Be quick.** If you tend to sit on things instead of saying them, force yourself to follow the twenty-four-hour rule. **Be inclusive.** Certainly you need to be discreet with sensitive information, but remember this: people are *up* on things they're *in* on. Open communication increases trust, trust increases ownership, and ownership increases participation.

### 5) COMPETENT

#### IF YOU CAN'T, YOUR TEAM WON'T

- People forget how fast you did a job – but they remember how well you did it.
- Inspiration is easy. Implementation is the hard part.
- Highly competent people have some things in common:
  - 1) *They Are Committed to Excellence*
  - 2) *They Never Settle for Average*
  - 3) *They Pay Attention to Detail*- If you do the little jobs well, the big ones tend to take care of themselves.
  - 4) *They Perform with Consistency*
- **To improve your competence...Focus yourself professionally.** Pick an area in which to specialize. What is the one thing that brings together your skills, interests, and opportunities? Whatever it is, seize it. **Sweat the small stuff.** Get all the details right. That doesn't mean becoming a micromanager or a control freak. It means doing the last 10 percent of whatever job you're doing. **Give more attention to implementation.** How can you improve the gap between coming up with ideas and putting them into practice? Get your teammates together and discuss how you can improve the process.

## 6) **DEPENDABLE**

### TEAMS GO TO GO-TO PLAYERS

- Fear not those who argue but those who dodge. Wolfram Von Eschoenbach
- Teammates must be able to depend on one another.
- Dependability may not always be a matter of life and death, but it is certainly important to every team's success. You know it when you have people on your team upon whom you cannot depend. Everyone on the team knows it. Likewise, you know the ones you *can* depend on.
- The essence of dependability:
  - 1) *Pure Motives*  
If someone on the team continually puts himself and his agenda ahead of what's best for the team, he has proven to be undependable. When it comes to teamwork, motives matter.
  - 2) *Responsibility*  
In the final analysis, the one quality that all successful people have...is the ability to take on responsibility. Michael Korda
  - 3) *Sound Thinking*
  - 4) *Consistent Contribution*  
If you can't depend on teammates all the time, then you can't really depend on them any of the time. Consistency takes more than talent. It takes a depth of character that enables people to follow through. – no matter how tired, distracted, or overwhelmed they are.  
It is not enough that we do our best; sometimes we have to do what's required. Winston Churchill
- *Find someone to hold you accountable.* You are more likely to follow through and develop dependability if you have a partner to help you. Find someone you respect to help you keep your commitments.

## 7) **DISCIPLINED**

### WHERE THERE'S A WILL, THERE'S A WIN

- What we do on some great occasion will probably depend on what we already are; and what we are will be the result of previous years of self-discipline. H.P. Liddon
- Gordon MacDonald tells a story about the difficult workouts he did with a teammate named Bill. "When those Monday workouts ended, I would stagger in exhaustion to the locker room." But Bill was different. Undoubtedly those workouts were demanding to him too. When he was finished, he would rest on the grass near the track. But after about twenty minutes, while Gordon showered, Bill would repeat the entire workout.  
Bill was none other than Bill Toomey, the decathlete inducted into the Olympic Hall of Fame in 1984. He set a world record in the decathlon in 1966, won the gold medal in the Tokyo Olympics in 1968, and won five national decathlon championships in a row – an accomplishment that has yet to be matched in his sport. What elevated Toomey to such high accomplishment was his discipline. Gordon MacDonald's insight says it all: "The difference between the two of us began

on Monday afternoons during workouts. He was unafraid of discipline and did the maximum; I was afraid of discipline and did the minimum.”

- Discipline is doing what you really don't want to do so that you can do what you really want to do. It's paying the price in the little things so that you can buy the bigger thing.
- *1) Disciplined Thinking*  
You can't get far in life if you don't use your head. If you keep your mind active, regularly take on mental challenges, and continually think about the right things, you will develop the disciplined thinking that will help you with whatever you endeavor to do.
- *2) Disciplined Emotions*  
People have just two choices when it comes to their emotions: they can master their emotions or be mastered by them. You shouldn't let your feelings prevent you from doing what you should or drive you to do things you shouldn't.
- *3) Disciplined Actions*  
Action separates the winners from the losers. Parties who want milk should not seat themselves on a stool in the middle of the field and hope that the cow will back up to them. Albert Hubert
- ***Strengthen your work habits.*** Biologist and educator Thomas Huxley remarked, “Perhaps the most valuable result of all education is the ability to make yourself do the thing you have to do, when it ought to be done, whether you like it or not,; it is the first lesson that ought to be learned, and however early a man's training begins, it is probably the last lesson that he learns thoroughly.” Discipline means doing the right things at the right time for the right reason. Do something necessary but unpleasant every day to keep yourself disciplined.
- A person lacking discipline is in a prison without bars.

## 8) ENLARGING

### ADDING VALUE TO TEAMMATES IS INVALUABLE

- The purpose of life is not to win. The purpose of life is to grow and share. When you come to look back on all that you have done in life, you will get more satisfaction from the pleasure you have brought to other people's lives than you will from the times that you outdid and defeated them. Rabbi Harold Kushner
- **The most important measure of how good a game I played was how much better I'd made my teammates play. Bill Russell**
- *1) Enlargers Value Their Teammates*  
Your teammates can tell whether you believe in them. People's performances usually reflect the expectations of those they respect.
- *2) Enlargers Value What Their Teammates Value*
- *3) Enlargers Add Value to Their Teammates*  
An enlarger is able to take others to a whole new level.
- *4) Enlargers Make Themselves More Valuable*  
Enlargers work to make themselves better, not only because it benefits them personally, but also because it helps them to help, others. If you want to increase the ability of a teammate, make yourself better.
- How do your teammates see you?
- It takes a secure person to add value to others. If you believe deep down that helping others somehow hurts you or your opportunities for success, then you'll have a hard time enlarging others.
- When a team member unselfishly enlarges others, he also enlarges himself.
- **If you want to be an enlarging team player, then do the following: Believe in others before they believe in you.** Ask yourself, *What is special, unique, and wonderful about that teammate?* Then share your observation with the person and with others. **Serve others before they serve you.** One of the most beneficial services you can perform is helping other human beings to reach their potential. Whenever possible, give credit to others for the team's success. **Add value to others before they add value to you.** A basic truth of life is that people will always move toward anyone who increases them and away from others who devalue them.

## 9) ENTHUSIASTIC

### YOUR HEART IS THE SOURCE OF ENERGY FOR THE TEAM

- I feel sorry for the person who can't get genuinely excited about his work. Not only will he never be satisfied, but he will never achieve anything worthwhile. Walter Chrysler
- Nothing great was ever accomplished without enthusiasm. Ralph Waldo Emerson
- People can succeed at almost anything for which they have enthusiasm. Charles Schwab
- There is no substitute for enthusiasm. When members of a team are enthusiastic, the whole team becomes highly energized.
- *1) Take Responsibility for Their Own Enthusiasm*  
Positive people are positive because they choose to be. If you want to be positive, upbeat, and passionate, you need to take responsibility for being that way.
- *2) Act Their Way into feeling*  
To get over fear, you've got to get started. Likewise, if you want to be enthusiastic, you need to start acting that way. If you wait for the feeling before acting, you may never become enthusiastic.
- *3) Believe in What They Do*  
Think about all the positive aspects of your work. That helps to spark the fire of enthusiasm inside you, and once that starts, all you need to do is keep feeding the flames.
- *4) Spend Time with Other Enthusiastic People*
- Microsoft chairman Bill gates remarked, "What I do best is share my enthusiasm." Enthusiasm increases a person's accomplishments while apathy increases his alibis.
- A good way to fire up your own furnace is to do things with greater urgency.
- Go the extra mile with others. This week when someone asks you to do something, do what's required and then some. Then quietly observe its impact on the team's atmosphere.
- Elbert Hubbard said, "The best preparation for good work tomorrow is to do good work today." Nothing breeds enthusiasm like a job well done.

## 10) INTENTIONAL

### MAKE EVERY ACTION COUNT

- What does it mean to be intentional? It means working with purpose – making every action count. Focus on doing the right things, moment to moment, day to day, and then following through with them in a consistent way.
- Successful individuals are intentional. They aren't scattered or haphazard.
- *1) Have a Purpose Worth Living For*  
Willis R. Whitney, the first director of General Electric's research laboratory, said, "Some men have thousands of reasons why they cannot do what they want to, when all they need is one reason why they can."  
You can't be intentional if you don't have a strong sense of purpose.
- *2) Know Your Strengths and Weaknesses*  
People like to do what they're good at. Playing to your strengths rekindles your passions and renews your energy.
- *3) Prioritize Your Responsibilities*  
Once you know the *why* of your life, it becomes much easier to figure out the *what* and the *when*. Henry David Thoreau observed, "One is not born into the world to do everything, but to do something."
- *4) Learn to Say No*  
You can't accomplish much without focus. If you try to do every good thing that comes your way, you won't excel at what you were made to do.
- *5) Commit Yourself to Long-Term Achievement*  
A short-term, all-or-nothing approach to life works against many people. They have a kind of lottery mind-set: either they want to win big, or they don't want to make any effort at all. However, most victories in life are achieved through small, incremental wins sustained over time.
- If your teammates don't detect a sense of intentionality in you, they won't know what to expect from you, and they will be unlikely to count on you when it really counts.

- Take an inventory of your strengths and weaknesses. Then survey family members, friends, and colleagues for additional insight. The more information and honest feedback you can get, the better.
- Spend 80 percent of your time and effort on what brings high return to you and your team.

## 11) MISSION CONSCIOUS

### THE (BIG) PICTURE IS COMING IN LOUD AND CLEAR

- He who has a “why” to live for can bear almost any “how.” Friedrich Nietzsche
- *1) They Know Where the Team Is Going*  
W. Clement Stone stated, “When you discover your mission, you will feel its demand. It will fill you with enthusiasm and a burning desire to get to work on it.”
- *2) They Let the Leader of the Team Lead*  
Any time a team member hinders the leader, it increases the possibility that the team will be hindered in its goals.
- *3) They Place Team Accomplishments Ahead of Their Own*  
Teamwork always requires sacrifice.
- *4) They Do Whatever Is Necessary to Achieve the Mission*  
If success can come to the team only by your compromising, trying something new, or putting your agenda on hold, then that’s what you need to do.
- Do you and your teammates keep the big picture in mind? Or do you tend to get so bogged down in the details of your responsibilities that you lose sight of the big picture?
- Truthfully a team isn’t really a team if it isn’t going anywhere!
- Once you’re sure of the team’s mission and direction, determine to contribute your best in the context of the team, not as an individual.
- Good team players see more than the details of the moment. They are always conscious of a team’s mission and act to help achieve it.

## 12) PREPARED

### PREPARATION CAN MEAN THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WINNING AND LOSING

- Spectacular achievements come from unspectacular preparation. Roger Staubach
- It’s better to prepare than to repair. John C. Maxwell
- *1) Assessment*  
Preparation begins with knowing what you’re preparing for. Determine where you and your team are headed. You need to examine what the conditions will be along the way. And you need to determine what price you will have to pay to get there.
- *2) Alignment*  
You’ll never get to your aligned destination if you’re not lined up right. Good alignment makes success possible.
- *3) Attitude*  
To succeed in any endeavor, you must do your homework to take care of the mental aspects of your game.
- *4) Action*  
Courage has no greater ally than preparation, and fear has no greater enemy.
- Henry Ford observed, “Before everything else, getting ready is the secret of success.”
- You can claim to be surprised once; after that, you’re unprepared. Ray Charles
- Preparation may not guarantee a win, but it sure puts you in position for one.

## 13) RELATIONAL

### IF YOU GET ALONG, OTHERS WILL GO ALONG

- Relationships are the glue that holds team members together – the more solid the relationships, the more cohesive the team.
- *1) Respect*  
When it comes to relationships, everything begins with respect, with the desire to place value on other people. The funny thing about respect is that you should show it to others, even before they have done anything to warrant it, simply because they are human beings. But at the same time, you should always expect to have to earn it from others.

### 2) *Shared Experiences*

When Brian Billick, coach of the 2001 Super Bowl Champion Baltimore Ravens, was asked about a team's chances for repeating a championship season, he commented that it would be very difficult. Why? Because 25 to 30 percent of the team changes every year.

### 3) *Trust*

Trust is the foundation of leadership. Scottish poet George MacDonald observed, "To be trusted is a greater compliment than to be loved." Without trust, you cannot sustain any kind of relationship.

### 4) *Reciprocity*

One-sided personal relationships don't last

### 5) *Mutual Enjoyment*

When relationships grow and start to get solid, the people involved begin to enjoy each other.

- Few things will pay you bigger dividends than the time and trouble you take to understand people.
- **To better relate to your teammates...Focus on others instead of yourself. Ask the right questions. Share common experiences. Make others feel special.** People will connect with you when you show them you care about them.
- Teammates seldom go along with someone they can't get along with.

## 14) SELF-IMPROVING

### TO IMPROVE THE TEAM, IMPROVE YOURSELF

- Perfection is what you're striving for, but perfection is an impossibility. However, *striving* for perfection is not an impossibility. Do the best you can under the conditions that exist. That is what counts. John Wooden
- *1) Preparation*  
Napoleon Hill remarked, "It's not what you are going to do, but it's what you are doing now that counts." Self-improving team players ask themselves, *What are my potential learning moments today?* At the end of the day, they ask themselves, *What have I learned today that I need to learn more about tomorrow?*

### 2) *Contemplation*

If you study the lives of the truly great individuals who have influenced the world, you will find that in virtually every case, they spent considerable amounts of time alone – contemplating, meditating, listening.

### 3) *Application*

Bruce Springsteen said, "A time comes when you need to stop waiting for the man you want to become and start being the man the man you want to be." That is sometimes difficult because it requires change. Most people change only when one of three things happens: they hurt enough that they have to, they learn enough that they want to, or they receive enough that they are able to.

- There is nothing noble in being superior to someone else; progress is becoming superior to your previous self. George Knox was right: "When you cease to be better, you cease to be good."
- Ask questions anytime you don't understand something. Adopt the attitude of a learner, not an expert.
- **Plan your progress. Value self-improvement about self-promotion.**

## 15) SELFLESS

### THERE IS NO I IN TEAM

- When you stop giving and offering something to the rest of the world, it's time to turn out the lights. George Burns
- No team succeeds unless its players put others on the team ahead of themselves. Being selfless isn't easy, but it is necessary.
- *1) Be Generous*  
If team members are willing to give of themselves generously to the team, then it is being set up to succeed.

### 2) *Avoid Internal Politics*

Albert Einstein observed, "A person first starts to live when he can live outside himself."

### 3) *Display Loyalty*

Loyalty fosters unity, and unity breeds team success.

### 4) *Value Interdependence Over Independence*

- **To become more selfless...Promote someone other than yourself.** Find positive things to say about people's actions and qualities, especially to their superiors, family, and close friends. **Take a subordinate role. Give secretly.** John Bunyan maintained, "You have not lived today successfully unless you've done something for someone who can never repay you."

## 16) SOLUTION ORIENTED

### MAKE A RESOLUTION TO FIND THE SOLUTION

- Don't find fault; find a remedy. Henry Ford
- Alfred A. Montapert observed, "The majority see the obstacles; the few see the objectives; history records the successes of the latter, while oblivion is the reward of the former."
- *1) Problems Are a Matter of Perspective*  
Obstacles, setbacks, and failures are simply parts of life. You can't avoid them. But that doesn't mean you have to allow them to become problems. The best thing you can do is to meet them with a solution-oriented mind-set. It's just a matter of attitude.
- *2) All Problems Are Solvable*
- *3) Problems Either Stop Us or Stretch Us*
- How do you look at life? Do you see a solution in every challenge or a problem in every circumstance? When it comes to approaching problems, you really have only four choices: flee them, fight them, forget them, or face them. Which do you usually do?
- **Refuse to give up. Refocus your thinking.** No problem can withstand the assault of sustained thinking. **Rethink your strategy.** Albert Einstein observed, "The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them." Brain-storm absurd ideas. Redefine the problem. Do whatever it takes to generate fresh ideas and approaches to the problem. **Repeat the process.**

## 17) TENACIOUS

### NEVER, NEVER, NEVER QUIT

- To finish first, you must finish. Rick Mears
- Tenacity is crucial to success. Even people who lack talent and fail to cultivate some of the other vital qualities of a team player have a chance to contribute to the team and help it succeed if they possess a tenacious spirit.
- *1) Giving All That You Have, Not More Than You Have*  
Some people who lack tenacity do so because they mistakenly believe that being tenacious demands from them more than they have to offer. As a result, they don't push themselves. However, being tenacious requires that you give 100 percent – not more, but certainly not less.
- *2) Working with Determination, Not Waiting on Destiny*  
Trying times are no times to quit trying.
- *3) Quitting When the Job Is Done, Not When You're Tired*  
Robert Strauss stated that "success is a little like wrestling a gorilla. You don't quit when you're tired – you quit when the gorilla is tired."
- A. L. Williams says, "You beat 50 percent of the people in America by working hard. You beat another 40 percent by being a person of honesty and integrity and standing for something. The last 10 percent is a dog-fight in the free enterprise system."
- **Work harder and/or smarter. Stand for something.** To succeed, you must act with absolute integrity. **Make your work a game.** Nothing feeds tenacity like our natural competitive nature.