



# Power of the collective

“The best leaders are apt to be found among those executives who have a strong component of unorthodoxy in their character.

Instead of resisting innovation, they symbolise it.”

Although these words were uttered by a grand czar of advertising, it rightly applies to every industry when it comes to managing and leading a large team. It is not as simple as inculcating ownership and responsibility to encourage each team member to be a leader in his or her own right. It is more than that.

- You need to connect to each and every team member to lead effectively
- Your actions speak louder than words and will create a lasting impact
- Once you are clear on what values matter to you, it will reflect on your team's performance
- Attitude is the bedrock of a team that consistently achieves, so make sure it encompasses strategy more than positive thinking

A broad framework to start with, I agree. But let us begin with what it takes to lead a small team to achieve maximum efficiency. An example of this is to take a leaf from Bill Bernbach's book

*A History of Advertising That Changed the History of Advertising*. He was one of the three founders of the acclaimed international advertising agency Doyle Dane Bernbach. His strategy on restructuring creative teams made a lasting impact on how creative team structures are built even today.

Before Bernbach's team model, copywriters and art directors worked in different departments. A copywriter would write the copy for an ad with a headline and it would be passed over to the art department where it would be assigned to an art director. The art director would [then] apply the appropriate visuals and graphic treatment. Bernbach saw the value of getting both the copywriter and the art director together, the insight being that one could not work in isolation from the other. This collaboration resulted in campaigns that won awards. The copywriter and art director working in tandem, and as a team, was seen to create incredible work, as Bernbach realised two heads are indeed better than one.

This is a very industry-specific solution to [achieve] better efficiency and in this case, creativity. However, as a general rule to observe while leading a team of ten or more people, it is advised to focus on values, solving problems, and create guiding principles to follow—when a team reports to one leader.

**To deal with weaknesses, give each team member an opportunity to have a SWOT analysis done by seniors.**

To manage larger teams, it is advisable to set up operating practices and ensure they are implemented, in addition to people management. If you treat your team as an extended family, then it leads to a change in attitude. Ownership and capability growth increases once you establish

the strategy of assigning tasks based on team skills. Simply put, this means it gives you an opportunity to connect better. In terms of communication strategy, activities or events that involve members doing things together encourage bonding and teamwork, like

taking the team out for a tree plantation drive or even a picnic. It reinforces team strength built on culture differences. Yes, communication is the key. Keeping the peace to avoid ego clashes requires taking control of the situation to hold open discussions about the challenges team members face, and obstacles that hold them back from giving their best.

Teams of forty or more call for implementing hierarchy. Talented individuals do not matter because if they work at their own pace, deadlines are unable to be kept, in addition to some

doing more work than others, or just waiting for the rest of the team to catch up. This is where hierarchy comes in. Managing this large a team needs you to delegate organisational and operating processes to those who can enable and keep the team working in synchronisation with the broader vision and goals of the project.

Identify strengths and weaknesses, and assign tasks based on skills and capabilities. This is a vital cog of an efficient machine. If this is put into practice, as an example, those with time-management skills can efficiently comply with urgent deadlines and putting them under pressure will only increase their ability to manage tasks more efficiently. To deal with weaknesses, give each team member an opportunity to have a SWOT analysis done by seniors. This is a constructive way of identifying limitations.

Bridge skill limitations with training workshops that give team members an opportunity to catch up. These workshops also offer a boost of confidence to those who feel they are trailing behind due to lack of experience. Give them an opportunity to learn and you will be amazed at the increase in efficiency.



**Some may have a rule-less approach, but in the long run it creates dysfunction and paralysis, where no one takes responsibility or ownership of tasks.**

**Empowering the team**

It is important for team members to have their say. By empowering all team members to make decisions on their own, you get a team that not only feels trusted and valued but know they have a say as well. So, keep those

lines of communication open and trust your team to decide what is to be done on a day-to-day basis—as they would be at the frontlines of the battle so to speak, and would know some of the best suggestions on what can be done to tackle problems.

It was Leo Burnett—named one of the 100 most influential people of the 20th century—who famously said, “What helps people, helps business.” And it is true. Successful team management reflects in an organisation’s profit margins. Take Google for example. This behemoth’s success came about through not just innovation but collaboration. Its management enabled better and easier ways to converse by even removing the psychological barriers of being on different floors. Teams that interact with each other help grease the wheel of productivity. We need to focus on the collective instead of the individual. Another company to be taken as an example is Pixar. It designed all its bathrooms in the centre of the building, while the centre of its atrium housed the food and coffee [area]. The reason for doing this was that Pixar’s screen writers, animators, coders, music people, and artists would constantly meet each other at random times, enabling conversations that would trigger new ideas. The mixing and mingling of ideas can offer a creative jolt. Sharing what you know as an individual and as a team beats conventionality any day.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Vrutika Dawda**  
is Director,  
IdeateLabs.

**The right balance**

Yet, finding the right balance between collaboration, innovation, and conventionality is the key. Create opportunities for interactions,

for sharing new thoughts and ideas. It lays the groundwork for better company policies, efficiency, higher team performance, and better output.

Initiate a mentoring programme. It does not just help the junior team members but the seniors as well, as this gets the juniors up to speed on the mentor. By working side by side, workloads are reduced; although it could get time-consuming at first, in the long run, the benefits are numerous. Mentors will be able to shift some of the workload to the mentees. Constructive feedback given by the mentors will help junior employees work better and more efficiently. This also grooms senior team members for a leadership role.

Some may have a rule-less approach, but in the long run it creates dysfunction and paralysis, where no one takes responsibility or ownership of tasks. The right balance between providing structure and offering freedom must be set. And it can be done without stifling creativity. Some ground rules can even spark creativity. Define where responsibilities lie and the rules of operation, and see this grow in to a disciplined and focused, yet proactive workforce. By setting operation rules you can also make optimum use of each team member’s skill sets, enabling them to work in sync. Like David Ogilvy, known as the father of advertising, once said, “A well-run restaurant is like a winning baseball team. It makes the most of every crew member’s talent and takes advantage of every split-second opportunity to speed up service.”

So, reinforce your vision and values every time you hold a team meeting. Encourage diversity and conversations; it is amazing what eclectic teams can do. Agree to keep disagreeing and challenge one another with productive disagreement. It will bring progress, growth, and change. It is not just what a single individual can do, but how you can change that thinking into a team mindset—to uncover untapped potential, and in the end, reveal a sense of belonging and team spirit. ■