The Senior Leadership Team Can Make or Break CEO Success

Brief Insights for CEOs

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This brief is based on the article “Turning Superheroes into a Super Leadership Team.”

A senior leadership team is pivotal to a CEO’s success. When nimble and aligned around the path forward, the team can mobilize the organization effectively to execute the chief executive’s vision. But when it’s not on the same page—or worse, when it’s dysfunctional—the odds of steering the company to peak performance and keeping it there sorely diminish.
Talented individuals alone do not guarantee effectiveness. As many CEOs can attest, it’s one thing to lead a business unit successfully, and quite another to operate as part of a senior leadership team that moves together quickly to deliver continuous growth, break new ground, and stay ahead of the competition.

The problem is often rooted in the very qualities that tend to vault managers into the top ranks. Many carve their path by pursuing bold plans for an individual domain where standout results can pivot on guarding resources and putting their team’s interests first—even before the organization’s. This mindset can become even more ingrained in corporate cultures that reward individual “heroics,” such as putting out fires or navigating successfully through a crisis.

**Many corporate cultures reward individual heroics. But to be an effective team, senior leaders must put the overall enterprise above their own domains.**

Simply put, many companies have superheroes. Few have super teams.

Standard fixes, such as jetting off to an attractive location to engage in immersive team-building exercises, can inject a renewed sense of optimism into an underperforming senior leadership team. It may even get team members to start thinking about enterprise-wide priorities. But it’s unlikely to stick.

Embedding an enterprise-first mindset means changing how the team engages with each other and the rest of the company. The team needs to reframe every decision to determine if it’s right for the whole enterprise and consistent with its purpose, strategy, and priorities. Incentives may need to be revisited and aligned to discourage siloed thinking and reward actions that lift the entire organization.

Building a leadership team also requires sacrifice. There will be times when a senior leader will need to pause or sunset a pet project, or possibly eliminate positions in their domain, for the good of the whole company.

This is hard stuff, but when organizations are guided by “The Head, Heart, and Hands” of holistic, human-centric transformation, it is possible to turn a group of individual superheroes into an unbeatable super team.
It starts by identifying the most pressing priorities the team should focus on, the decisions that should remain in its purview, and those that can be delegated down. The team must build mutual trust, understanding, and transparency so each member feels supported by their peers and people throughout the organization feel empowered and inspired to work collaboratively in the service of the greater goals. This is crucial—when the Head and Heart are in the right place, the senior leadership team can put the Hands to work by developing a roadmap that translates enterprise-wide priorities into actions.

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Super teams don’t thrive on autopilot. They need a sustained and sometimes uncomfortable level of individual and collective self-reflection to stay on top of the team’s current state, where the team needs to be, and the behaviors that stand in the way of progress. They need to maintain their commitment to common goals and practice unlearning old habits, all of which take vigilance.

Most senior leadership teams are comprised of incredibly smart, talented individuals. They know when the team is not delivering like it should. Where they get stuck is letting go of the mindsets and behaviors that undermine effectiveness. But with the right approach, reflection, commitment, and practice, superheroes can indeed become a super team.

Turning Superheroes into a Super Leadership Team
In a complex, fast-changing world, team members must shift from championing their own domains to putting the enterprise first. Here’s how to make it happen.

Explore the article that informed this brief

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Experts

Jim Hemerling
MANAGING DIRECTOR & SENIOR PARTNER
San Francisco - Bay Area

Jennifer Thomas
PARTNER AND DIRECTOR, EXECUTIVE COACHING
Boston

Brittany Heflin
PROJECT LEADER
Houston

Megan Lindley
SENIOR KNOWLEDGE ANALYST
ACC – Chicago