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In 2004, Greece surprised the world by winning the European Championship, the toughest tournament in international soccer. Despite not even being a dark horse in the competition, and with a team of mostly peripheral and unremarkable players, they overcame France and hosts Portugal (twice) to lift the trophy. Even hardcore soccer fans would be unable to name more than two players in that Greek squad, yet few will forget the remarkable collective achievement of a team that faced odds of 150/1 for winning the trophy.

What allows a team of B players to achieve A+ success? A great deal of scientific evidence suggests that the key determinants are psychological factors — in particular, the leader's ability to inspire

trust, make competent decisions, and create a high-performing culture where the selfish agendas of the individual team members are eclipsed by the group's goal, so that each person functions like a different organ of the same organism. In the famous words of Vince Lombardi: “**Individual commitment to a group effort – that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.**” This is true for all teams, of course, but if you're leading a team of B players (people who are just average in terms of competence, talent, or potential), your leadership matters even more. In fact, if you are leading a team of B players, you have to be an A-class leader; otherwise, your team will have no chance.

Although effective leaders can have a wide variety of styles, they do tend to share some common personality characteristics. First, they have better judgment than their counterparts, meaning they can make good decisions, learn from experience, and avoid repeating mistakes. Second, they have higher EQ, which enables them to stay calm under pressure, build close and meaningful relationships with their teams, and remain humble even in the face of victory. Third, they are insanely driven and tend to have very high levels of ambition, remaining slightly dissatisfied with their success: this is why they stay hungry and continue to work hard, as opposed to getting complacent.

In addition, there are four important tactics *any* leader can use to make their teams more effective. These key management elements have been found to work even with B players, and could transform a team of average individual contributors into an over-performing team. They are:

Vision. The first component needed to turn B players into an A team is vision, that is, a winning strategy that represents a meaningful – and attainable – mission for the team. Yes, it's true that all teams need a vision, even teams of A players. But with A players, you might be able to skate by with a hazy picture of the future, or a goal that shifts over time, or an endpoint that doesn't include a strategy of how to get there. If your players are not amazing, then you need to ensure that your goal is clearly defined and doesn't waver. It should be something that stretches them, but doesn't demoralize them by being unattainable. And it should include a plan of attack – milestones and tactics that will allow the team to figure out their next steps. When the strategy is right, success will be less dependent on the individual brilliance of the players (and you can always rely on the competition making a few mistakes).

Analytics. No matter how smart and experienced leaders are, they will make smarter and better decisions if they are armed with data. Data can cut through the biases and politics and create a culture of fairness and transparency. It can also highlight the key individual drivers of team performance, breaking down success into molecular factors that can be easily manipulated. Of course, intuition is still needed to translate any data-driven information into useful knowledge, and there are many problems data won't solve (see point 4). But a team with better monitoring systems for quantifying performance will always have an edge, and the power of feedback will always depend on the accuracy of the analytics (see point 3).

Feedback. Meta-analytic [studies](#) have shown that individual and team feedback improves performance by around 25%. This margin is substantial enough that it lets less skilled teams who get a lot of feedback outperform more skilled teams that aren't getting feedback. Why is feedback so important? Because it allows both individuals and teams to regulate their efforts – the essence of motivation is self-regulation, but self-regulation only works with accurate feedback. Of course, feedback is also essential to correcting mistakes and getting better, and leaders who fail to provide it risk coming across as indifferent and disinterested in the welfare and performance of the team. When you have a team of B players it is particularly important to be honest with them about their relative limitations. Instead of making them think that they are better than they actually are, tell them they will need to work hard to close the talent gap between them and their rivals because on skill and potential alone they would lose.

Morale. Leaders own the job of creating engagement. Although individual engagement is critical, team morale is the key. You might have a team of B players, but when they share common values, drivers, and motives, and care about each other much like friends, they will raise their performance *for* each other. Thus any leader should focus a great deal on helping his/her team members bond. If they fail to cohere, intragroup competition will trump any collective success, leading to intergroup failure. This may seem like common sense, but too many managers are so focused on managing processes and attending to the formal aspects of task performance that they forget to build an engaging culture. In addition, when leaders are interested mostly in their own career, and success is not defined in terms of their team's performance, they will tend to neglect and eventually alienate their teams.

In short, good leaders can turn B players into an A team, by following the right strategy, gathering precise performance data, giving accurate feedback, and building and maintaining high morale. Since few leaders manage to achieve this even when they have a team of A players, there is much hope for those who do.

As Greece's soccer coach Otto Rehhagel explained when asked the secret to his team's success, he [noted](#) it was mostly about his relationship with the players: "I cherish them, I hold them in the highest esteem. I know what makes these boys tick. I don't lead by committee. I take the responsibility for my choices."

Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic is the Chief Talent Scientist at ManpowerGroup, a professor of business psychology at University College London and at Columbia University, and an associate at Harvard's Entrepreneurial Finance Lab. He's the author of [Why Do So Many Incompetent Men Become Leaders? \(And How to Fix It\)](#). Find him on Twitter: [@drtcp](#) or at www.drtomas.com.
