**The Ideal Team Player (How to Build Better Teams)**

The 1st stage of building better teams is recruiting the right people. Therefore, the priority is to recruit first on behaviours, then on skills, as skills are easier to teach than behaviours.

Humility

The Bull-dozer

The Skilful Politician

The Lovable Slacker

The Accidental Mess Maker

The Charmer

The Pawn

The ideal team player

Work Efficacy (Effectiveness/Ethic)

People Smart (EI)

**Humility** - Ideal team players are humble. They lack excessive ego or concerns about status. Humble people are quick to point out the contributions of others and slow to seek attention for their own. They share credit, emphasize team over self and define success collectively rather than individually:

* Compliments or praises team-mates without hesitation.
* Easily admits to mistakes.
* Is willing to take on lower-level work for the good of the team.
* Gladly shares credit for team accomplishments.
* Readily acknowledges his/her weaknesses.
* Offers and accepts apologies graciously.

**Work Efficacy** - Ideal team players are hungry. They are always looking for more and are effective in what they set out to do. More things to do. More to learn. More responsibility to take on. Hungry people almost never have to be pushed by a manager to work harder because they are self-motivated and diligent. They are constantly thinking about the next step and the next opportunity:

* Does more than what is required in his/her own job.
* Has passion for the “mission” of the team.
* Feels a sense of personal responsibility for the overall success of the team.
* Is willing to contribute to and think about work outside of office hours.
* Is willing to take on tedious or challenging tasks whenever necessary.
* Looks for opportunities to contribute outside of his/her area of responsibility.

**People Smart** - Ideal team players are people smart and have high Emotional Intelligence. They have common sense about people. Smart people tend to know what is happening in a group situation and how to deal with others in the most effective way. They have good judgment and intuition around the subtleties of group dynamics and the impact of their words and actions:

* Generally understands what others are feeling during meetings and conversations.
* Shows empathy to others on the team.
* Demonstrates an interest in the lives of his/her team-mates.
* Is an attentive listener.
* Is aware of how his/her words and actions impact others on the team.
* Adjusts his/her behaviour and style to fit the nature of a conversation or relationship.

1. **The Ideal Team Player** – equal measures of humility, high work efficacy and EI most of the time. Have little ego when comes to needing credit for their contributions and comfortable sharing accolades and occasionally missing out on them. They work with a sense of energy, passion, personal responsibility and taking on what they can for the good of the team. They also say and do the right things to help team-mates feel appreciated, understood and included. Generally uses the term “we” rather than “I” or “you”.

The tough ones are those who have **two** of the values, but not all **three**.

1. **The Accidental Mess Maker** – They genuinely want to serve the team and not that interested getting lots of attention and credit. However, their lack of understanding of impact of their words on others will lead to interpersonal problems. We find ourselves saying things like, “If you only knew her…she’s a great person.”
2. **The Lovable Slacker** – They often do just enough to secure their spot on the team. They aren’t looking for undeserved attention and can be good at working with and caring about colleagues. However, they rarely take on more work or volunteer for extra assignments. These need considerable management and motivation to do much.
3. **The Skilful Politician** – The most toxic team member. Cleverly ambitious and can work very hard, but only in as much as it will help them personally. Because the politician is so smart, they can be good at portraying themselves as being humble, so hiding their destructive behaviours. Can manipulate, discourage and scare more humble colleagues and will rise in businesses that reward individual performance over teamwork. What do you get when you hire a politician? Politics, Complications & Ego. Don’t ever hire a politician if you want good teamwork!

Then there are those who lack two of the values, and tend to be easy to spot.

1. **The Pawn** – pleasant, kind, unassuming, though don’t have a great need to get things done and can get left out of conversations and activities.
2. **The Bulldozer** – will get things done, but with no understanding how their actions impact others so can leave a trail of destruction behind them. Focused on their own interests.
3. **The Charmer** – can be entertaining and likeable, though contribution to team can be negligible. They can know what to say and when to say it.

**How to Interview for the right person:**

Questions to check Humility:

1. **Describe your current team. What do you like and dislike?** By asking a team related question, it may be apparent if he or she values a team effort and is willing to do what is necessary for the good of the team. Encourage the candidate to describe specific interactions with colleagues and experiences working on a team.
2. **What are the most important accomplishments of your career?** Look for more mentions of “we” than “I”. Of course, it isn’t about being so simplistic as to count the responses. In the event that someone refers to himself or herself individually more than as a member of a team, probe for whether he or she was working alone or with others.
3. **What was the most embarrassing moment in your career? Or the biggest failure?** Look for whether the candidate celebrates that embarrassment or is mortified by it. Humble people generally aren’t afraid to tell their unflattering stories because they’re comfortable with being imperfect. Also, look for specifics and real references to the candidate’s own culpability.
4. **How did you handle that embarrassment or failure?** Look for specifics about how the candidate accepted responsibility, what they learned from it, and if they actually acted on what was learned.
5. **What is your greatest weakness?** Yes, this is a seemingly tired question, but it’s still a useful one. The key is to look for answers that are real and a little painful. Candidates who present their weaknesses as strengths (“I take on too much” or “I have a hard time saying no”) are often afraid to acknowledge real shortcomings. To avoid this, it’s a good idea to coach candidates with prompts like: “I really want to know what you’d like to change about yourself, or better yet, what your best friends would say you need to work on.” The key to the answer is not what their weaknesses are (unless of course the candidate is an axe murderer), but if they’re comfortable acknowledging something real.
6. **How do you handle apologies, either giving or accepting them?** Look for and ask for specifics. Humble people are not afraid to say they are sorry, and they accept other people’s genuine apologies with grace. People who do this usually have specific stories.
7. **Can you tell me about someone who is better than you in an area that really matters to you?** Look for the candidate to demonstrate a genuine appreciation for others who have more skill or talent. Humble people are comfortable with this. Ego-driven people often are not.

Questions to check Work Efficacy:

1. **What is the hardest you’ve ever worked on something in your life?** Look for specific examples of real but joyful sacrifice. In other words, the candidate isn’t complaining, but is grateful for the experience.
2. **What do you like to do when you’re not working?** Look out for too many time-consuming hobbies that suggest the candidate sees the job as a means to do other things. That’s not to say that there is one specific kind of activity that is an indicator of not being hungry. And it’s certainly not to say that you’re looking for someone who has no interests in life outside of work. But a long list of hobbies like extreme skiing, sled dog racing, storm chasing, and shark hunting might just be a red flag when it comes to someone who is not going to put the needs of the team ahead of personal pursuits.
3. **What was your work ethic like as a teenager?** Look for specifics, usually relating to schoolwork, sports, or jobs. And when it comes to sports, it’s not about participation and having fun. Look for examples of difficulty, sacrifice, and hardship. Ask the candidate about how hard they worked in high school. Did they really strive to do well? Did they have a job? Did they train extraordinarily hard in a sport? You’re not looking for one particular answer, but rather for something real that indicates the person has a work ethic. And a work ethic usually, but not always, gets established early in life.
4. **What kinds of hours do you generally work?** Hardworking people usually don’t want to work nine to five, unless their unique life situations demand it. They are usually happy to be flexible and do additional work when it is needed, or do additional work at home. If a candidate is satisfied with a predictable schedule and talks too much about “balance,” there’s a chance he or she isn’t terribly hungry. Again, not a litmus test, but a red flag. None of this is to advocate that people should prioritize their work over their families. It’s just that when a candidate focuses a lot on the hours that they’re expected to work, they may not be the kind of hungry team player you need. Flexibility here is the key to getting the work done.
5. **Explain an area where you have improved your working environment?** Effectiveness at work is not all about doing the hours, it is also about improving the way things are done so that the job is more efficient. Someone who can explain a number of instances of improvement, may be more valuable in their job than someone who puts in a lot of hours. This is a big area of difference between UK and US working culture where many in the US can value the hours put in rather than the effectiveness of what is done when someone is working.

Questions to check People Smart (EI):

1. **Have you ever worked with a difficult colleague or boss? How did you handle the situation?** By asking the candidate about a difficult work relationship, you will learn if he or she can read situations and people and handle them skilfully.
2. **How would you describe your personality?** Look for how accurately the person describes what you are observing and how introspective he or she is. Smart people generally know themselves and find it interesting to talk about their behavioural strengths and weaknesses. People who seem stumped or surprised by this question might not be terribly smart when it comes to people.
3. **What do you do that others in your personal life might find annoying?** Everyone annoys someone, sometimes. Especially at home. Smart people are not immune to this. But neither are they in the dark about it. And they tend to moderate these behaviours at work.
4. **What kind of people annoy you the most, and how do you deal with them?** What you’re looking for here is the candidate’s self-awareness and self-control. Smart people know their pet peeves, and they own the fact that some of those pet peeves are their own issues. They also know how to deal with annoying people in a productive, constructive way.
5. **Would your former colleagues describe you as an empathetic person? -OR- Can you give an example of how you’ve demonstrated empathy to a team-mate?** The issue is whether the candidate seems to understand what others are feeling. Now, there are certain personality types that are less empathetic than others, and that’s fine. What you’re looking for here is an indication that the person values empathy and whether he or she has an understanding of his or her own strengths or weaknesses in this area.