

# The CMO And HR, Part 1: Attributes Of High-Performance Teams

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**By Peter Bryant and Nicky Friedman**



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As the marketing landscape continues to transform at warp speed, it has fundamentally changed the way organizations need to approach talent. Yet we still tend to rely too much on industry experience and a feeling of “fit,” vs. problem-solving capabilities and rounding out a team.

Beth Comstock, vice chairman and former CMO of GE, always ahead of the curve, perfectly speaks to where we need to be headed as she describes how her hiring criteria has changed over the years in an [interview](#): “I’m trying to hire more people who have a ‘figure-it-out’ skillset... who have a tolerance for ambiguity.”

Marketing leaders, feeling the pain, are beginning to form tighter alliances with their HR teams to redefine an approach to sourcing, building and nurturing high-performance teams.

The first step in reengineering the process is identifying what a high-performance team looks like. In this two-part series on high-performance teams, we’ve outlined some ideas to help marketing organizations reach their full potential. In part one, we explore the attributes that provide the foundation for successful teams. In part two, we speak to nurturing talent and driving retention.

The insights herein are culled from Clareo’s CMO Forum meeting earlier this year, including a presentation by Forbes Publisher Rich Karlgaard, who discussed his book, *Team Genius: The New Science of High Performing Organizations*.

## **The Physical Attributes: Size And Diversity**

### **Size**

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In a world where speed matters more than ever, having a team that is too big creates noise and complexity that slows things down. More people in a network creates exponentially more connections among its members. Communication, speed of decision making, accountability and trust all become compromised as the team grows. The optimal size seen across high impact teams, (e.g. rock bands, sports teams, military units, etc.) is four to 12 people.

## **Diversity**

Diverse perspectives are important because they lead to better outcomes. But efforts to curate diverse teams often focus too narrowly on criteria like age, gender and ethnicity. True diversity is achieved from building whole-brain teams. While the demographic dimensions are important, the ultimate goal should be achieving the sweet spot between analytics and intuition.

Managing a diverse team is not as simple as hiring and putting together the right people. Diverse teams are successful because they often avoid groupthink and uninspired outcomes. They achieve this by engaging in healthy conflict. Yet too often people avoid conflict. Managers need to take an active role encouraging and managing conflict productively.

Diverse teams also bring a more diverse set of working styles. Managers need to ensure they have set everyone up for success. For example, consider the variations in office space needed for an introvert vs. an extrovert.

## **The Cultural Attributes: Adaptability And Strong Values**

### **Adaptability**

In today's fast-paced world, companies must operate as living organisms, growing and adapting to an ever-changing landscape, responding automatically to new threats and opportunities. This means hiring people with a—as Comstock calls it—figure-it-out skillset, or as Jacob Morgan writes, shifting from employing knowledge workers to learning workers. It also means having a culture that encourages self-forming of teams. The spontaneous creation of teams is where you get holistic solutions that most effectively solve problems.

### **Values**

It's important to have an enduring set of values that you live by and hold people accountable to. While values will differ across organizations, some key elements are important to making teams thrive: equality, openness and acceptance.

*Equality – No one person is bigger than the team.*

The All Blacks rugby team is known for having the best winning record of any professional sports team, and their success has outlasted changes in players and managements. One of the things they believe makes them so successful is a focus on the good of the team. No one individual is allowed to rise above the team. One way they live this is by having the best players clean the locker room and carry the bags. This engenders humility.

*Openness and Acceptance – A high-performing team is built on absolute trust.*

Diversity will bring added perspectives and new viewpoints. This will deliver value only if the team is open and accepting to new ideas. If the team is dismissive of people and ideas outside the norm, not only will the team not function, but the organization will suffer from having an insular perspective prone to blind spots.

Changing company cultures and processes is no easy task, but the close collaboration of progressive marketing and HR leaders willing to rewrite the rules will undoubtedly create compelling competitive advantages for their organization.

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