



Jon R. Katzenbach

The Wisdom of Teams
ISBN13: 9780060522001

In your introduction, you discuss how organizational landscapes have changed since you wrote *The Wisdom of Teams*. How has the evolution to team-based models affected corporate America overall? What are your long-range predictions for teams in the face of increasing globalization, technological advancements, and mergers and acquisitions?

Effective teaming and other group performance disciplines will spell the difference between organizations that succeed and those that fail. Individual performance, too, will continue as imperative. But, today and tomorrow, organizations of all sizes and shapes will depend on teams that know how to apply alternative group disciplines to ensure group performance.

To what extent can the principles outlined in your book be applied to international issues, among widely divergent cultures?

The principles of effective teaming apply to multicultural groups just as much as cross-functional or joint venture groups. Language and culture are huge boundaries to common understanding. But regardless of culture and language, small groups must learn to perform effectively for the institutions they serve. Moreover, culture and language are but one form of boundary that, however important, must be bridged to convert team possibility into higher performance results.

Describe a few of the most surprising comments you've received from readers over the years.

"This book saved my marriage!" "We used this book to strengthen our church's congregation." "You guys don't seem to know much about teamwork." "We have to use the team 'label' for all group efforts or people will feel left out". "Your ideas make sense, but my boss wants everybody to be "on the team". "When we have a real team running a business unit, we can eliminate the General Manager role completely".

Writing is often described as the quintessential solitary experience, yet you acknowledge the members of your team who helped make the book possible. How did the process of writing *The Wisdom of Teams* reflect the concepts in the book?

We used our own medicine. We had a small number of people with complimentary skills who committed ourselves to a common purpose, common set of goals, and a commonly understood working approach to all of which — purpose, goals and approach — we held ourselves mutually accountable. We focused on producing a useful book instead of on becoming a team. At the same time, we will never forget Peter Drucker's comment to us that "writing a book is not a team task". It was hard work.

The transition to the twenty-first century was marked by plunging stock prices and revelations of lapsed ethics among some of the corporate world's most high-profile leaders. What can teams learn from these headlines?

Not to cheat, lie, steal and otherwise be unethical. The Marines motto says it best: **do the right thing in the right way for the right reasons**. Or as Marvin Bower often reminded us, "the most important trait of great leaders is character; it supercedes intelligence, decisiveness, charisma, and wisdom".

Family demographics have shifted considerably over recent generations. What is your advice for parents seeking to enhance the lives of their children through teamwork? In what ways can families operate as high-performance teams?

True high-performance teams are very rare, and are driven by very compelling performance imperatives. Hence, families should not expect to operate at that level except in times of critical need. They can, however, often function as real teams — but not all the time. Team performance (inside or outside a family structure) flows from a legitimate "team task", and families have many tasks that do not warrant team performance. Nonetheless, as Mr. Smith more fully explores in *On Value and Values*, teams are one form of "shared path" — a small group of people who know each other by name and persistently interact over some open ended time frame. Families, of course, are the original and longest running shared path of all. Many aspects of the discipline and practice of teams can help families, including be conscious about when to choose the "single leader" approach versus the team approach.

What goals are your various teams working toward at the moment?

Succeeding in the midst of severe economic crisis, revitalizing neighborhoods, finding a way to apply the democratic experience of citizenship to organizational performance and success, commercializing a radically new story-telling architecture in the fields of entertainment and education. At Katzenbach Partners LLC, we have a number of teams and single-leader units that work on internal challenges like building a new information system, and launching a new office in Texas. We are also working in teams with our clients to redesign organizations, achieve peak performance, and instill pride as a primary motivator within their workforces. (Mr. Katzenbach's new book, *Why Pride Matters More than Money* contains a number of case studies and illustrations of pride-driven leaders and teams).