

Where it all starts

Your team is the generating force, the heartbeat, behind your new venture. The strength of your team determines how thoroughly you analyze the problem, how many different angles you see, and how complete and competent your solution will be.

Teams 101

As a student, you may not have a lot of background in building teams. College tends to be a solo experience. While some of your professors may have given you group assignments, you may still feel like a team-building beginner. With student entrepreneurial projects, determining who's responsible for what is often a big challenge at the beginning of a project. Sit down with your team and try to resolve some basic issues. You don't have to put formal titles to your names, but make sure everyone is fairly clear about her or his role(s).

What makes teams work?

[Teams: A formula for success](#)

Be strong. Be diverse.

An excellent team is diverse. If you're an idea person with an eye on the big picture, fill out your team with detail-oriented people. If you're an expert on the technical aspects of your idea, find teammates with business experience. If you know a lot about the business end, but aren't sure how machines work, look for teammates with technical training. A creative guru, a numbers-cruncher, a people-person with loads of natural charm...all of these personalities add strength and dimension to your team, and enhance your chances for success. And working with people who are different than you, in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, background and personal traits, will broaden your scope and help your team prepare for the real world.

[Be a star performer.](#)

Starting solo

Are you a team of one? Your situation may not be ideal, but it may also not be impossible. Maybe the nature of your project lends itself better to working alone in the initial planning and production stages. Just don't limit yourself. Build a network of mentors and advisors, keeping in mind the skills and knowledge that they, and possibly additional team members, might bring to your new venture. Get to know faculty members who might be interested in your work. Contact your college's innovation incubator, technology development office, or entrepreneurship club. Reach out beyond your college and find out who else is working on the same type of project as you. Beat the streets for people whose interests are similar, or complementary, to yours.

Leadership

Your team may come together in a very democratic way, and for some teams, relationships necessitate keeping that democratic feeling intact. But leadership is also critical--someone has to make sure that the team keeps its momentum going and that the work stays on track. Start reflecting early on whether you're the best person for that role, or whether someone else needs to take charge.

Clarify your purpose

Know why you're creating a team, and begin with a vision of how you want the team to work. Jon Katzenberg, Senior Partner in Katzenberg Partners, LCC, says,

On diverse teams

"Divergent thinking is an essential ingredient of creativity. Diverse groups produce diverse thinking. Ergo, diversity promotes creativity. This logic applies to corporations, research teams, think tanks, and other groups of creators. Those who rely on diverse people are more likely to innovate than those who rely on platoons of similar people."

From "Mighty is the Mongrel," by Gregg Pascal Zachary. *Fast Company*, July, 2000.

"If I could solve all the problems myself, I would."

Thomas Edison, on why he had twenty-one assistants

"Ideally, your team should have 7 to 9 people. If you have more than 15 or 20, you're dead: the connections are too hard to make."

Ray Oglethorpe, President, AOL Technologies
The Myth of the Lone Ranger

"Great groups have shaped our world, from the gathering of young geniuses at Los Alamos who unleashed the atom, to the youthful scientists and hackers who invented a computer that was personal as well as powerful. That should hardly surprise us. In a society as complex and technologically sophisticated as ours, the most urgent projects require the coordinated contributions of many talented people. Whether the task is building a global business or discovering the mysteries of the human brain, one person can't hope to accomplish it, however gifted or energetic he or she may be. And yet, even as we make the case for collaboration, we resist the idea of collective creativity. Our mythology refuses to catch up with our reality. And so we cling to the myth of the Lone Ranger, the romantic idea that great things are usually accomplished by a larger-than-life individual working alone..."

We must turn to great groups if we hope to begin to understand how that rarest of precious resources--genius--can be successfully combined with great effort to achieve results that enhance all our lives. It is in such groups that we may also discover why some organizations seem to breed greatness, freeing members to be better than anyone imagined they could be."

From "The Secrets of Creative Collaboration," by Warren Bennis and Patricia Ward Biederman, *Inc. Magazine*, December 1, 1996.

“Teams work when they are created for the right reasons, and when they are created in the right way...The critical decision for any manager or leader who wants to get higher performance from a small group of people is determining whether the group should try to work as a team, or whether they should be satisfied with what I call ‘single-leader unit’ discipline...Most organizations proliferate with groups that call themselves teams but aren’t... it’s disturbing how many managers and leaders assume that being a team is what a group effort is all about. If a group tries to become a team when the performance challenge requires a single-leader approach, performance and morale suffer. The opposite is equally true.”

Be real

Find at least one ally who is also a helpful critic—someone who will react honestly to your work, and give you realistic, constructive advice. The last thing you want is to pour huge amounts of time, money and passion into an idea with flaws that are obvious to everyone in the world except you.

Building an effective team ([audio file](#)) ([pdf transcript](#))