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Do You Have a Staff or a Team?

BY:

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DO YOU HAVE A STAFF OR A TEAM?

The world of business founders is full of rugged individualists who've achieved success by working harder and longer than anyone else. As their businesses grow, they hire people to help them get their work done, people they refer to as their staff. Owners often feel frustrated that their employees don't seem to care enough about the success of the business. But that's not what's really going on. It's not that employees don't care about the business. It's that businesses lack clarity about the expected roles and contributions of employees, a confusion magnified by the use of the term "staff." As an immigrant whose native language is not English, I was puzzled by the financial services industry's widespread use of "staff" to label people they counted on so greatly for the success of their businesses. So, I looked up the term "staff" in the dictionary.

According to Merriam-Webster, a staff could be:

- a group of people who work for an organization or business
- a group of military officers who help a commanding officer but *who do not take part in active fighting*
- a long stick that you carry in your hand for support while walking



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Once I understood the definition of the word staff, it became clear why there was such a disconnect between owners and their employees when it came to engagement in the business. Owners expected their employees to act like part of a team, but they didn't refer to them as a team. Employees are smart. They understand what the term staff means. Just as the dictionary said, being a member of staff means you work for an organization. Not much more than that. In leadership and culture, words *matter*. The way you talk about your people influences how you and others perceive them, which in turn influences how you and others treat them and how they feel about their roles.



As best-selling author Simon Sinek, in a viral 2013 Facebook post aptly points out,

“A TEAM IS NOT A GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO WORK TOGETHER. A TEAM IS A GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO TRUST EACH OTHER.”¹

Sinek is famed for highlighting one of seven key ingredients that my work as a business transformation coach has proven essential to the development of elite teams. We'll get to those critical seven team characteristics shortly. But first, for all of you Lone Ranger founders or owners out there, struggling with the need to accelerate growth or ready your business for a generational transition, there are some cold hard facts you need to accept:

- You can't go it alone.
- You may need to change the way you think about your people.
- You must be willing to invest in developing an *elite* team.

If you're prepared to buy in to these three principles, then you're ready for the paradigm shift from accomplished solo producer, supported by a staff, but with finite revenue upside, to leader of an elite team with unlimited growth capacity and high readiness for a generational transition when the time is right.

Creating an elite team is a matter of instilling a culture that supports unflagging loyalty to a shared purpose and aligned values. At the top of the list of elite teams is the United States Navy SEALs. Their primary operating tactic is “Cover and Move.” As Leif Babin, a former Navy Seal and co-author of *Extreme Ownership*² explains this maneuver:



One shooter covers for another by laying down suppressive fire so the other shooter can move. Then, they swap roles and leapfrog to the objective. Sometimes one covers, sometimes one moves. Both are crucial to mission success. The concept works for a single shooter pair of two SEALs or for large teams supporting other large teams.³

How does Cover and Move apply in the business environment? At its simplest, Cover and Move is the essence of teamwork. Everyone depends on one another, and their commitment to supporting one another as conditions and roles change ensures the best possible outcomes in the most challenging circumstances. Cover and Move represents the adaptive actions that elite teams take to help one another, to work together and support each other to the greatest extent possible. That behavior, that culture, is what propels a business to grow exponentially, and to be best positioned for a generational transition.



In other articles, we detail how to build an elite team as opposed to hiring staff. We describe seven critical elements of an elite team. Together they propel business growth and position your organization for a generational transition when the time is right. As a preview, think about how your organization would flourish if you established these conditions as part of your business culture:

- Know your business's purpose
- Infuse your business with good people
- Create a trusting environment
- Embrace conflict
- Establish team rituals
- Cultivate an adaptive mindset
- Accomplish outstanding results

Look for my articles on the subjects above to learn more about how these elite team elements can accelerate your business growth and readiness for a generational transition.

Finally, let's keep in mind a famous quote that captures the importance of teamwork vs. solo performance:

**IF YOU WANT TO GO FAST
GO ALONE.**

**IF YOU WANT TO GO FAR
GO TOGETHER.**

AFRICAN PROVERB



Ironically, no one knows the author of this quote.
Given its profound message,
I like to think it was developed by an elite team.



Contact Saša Mirkovic at Inspire Network to learn more about strategies for creating transformational growth or positioning your business for a successful generational transition.

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¹ <https://www.facebook.com/simonsinek/posts/a-team-is-not-a-group-of-people-that-works-together-a-team-is-a-group-of-people-/10153681664721499/>

² Jocko Willink and Leif Babin, *Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win*, St. Martin's Press, October 20, 2015.

³ Leif Babin, "Ex-Navy SEAL Leif Babin: Winning teams know how to 'cover and move' -- Does yours?" [foxbusiness.com](https://www.foxbusiness.com/business-leaders/ex-navy-seal-leif-babin-winning-teams-know-how-to-cover-and-move), October 15, 2019.
<https://www.foxbusiness.com/business-leaders/ex-navy-seal-leif-babin-winning-teams-know-how-to-cover-and-move>