



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

## What Happens When Your Talented Team Lacks Direction?

**Shannon Waller:** Do you feel as though you have a really, really talented team, but that not everyone is aligned on the direction you're going? Stay tuned as I talk about how a lack of leadership can really be the undoing of Unique Ability Teamwork.

Hi, Shannon Waller here, and welcome to Team Success. Today, I want to point out an issue that I've mentioned briefly before, but it's becoming incredibly apparent to me that this is something worth paying attention to. And that is what happens when there's a lack of leadership with respect to Unique Ability Teamwork.

And I am all for Unique Ability Teamwork. I love every person to be focused on what they love to do and do best, where they can make their biggest and best contribution, things that they find endlessly fascinating and motivating, where they can put their intelligence and their training and their volition and their heart into what it is that they love to do. I am all for it every day. And I want to work with other people who also want to do that.

Knowing that I'm doing my Unique Ability and someone else is doing theirs, frankly, can be a bit of a disaster. If there is no clear goal, if there is no clear intention, if there is no clear end or purpose, let me just say that, purpose to their Unique Ability Teamwork, it actually ends up sabotaging it. And I'm just calling this, you know, ability to provide direction—leadership—because that is what it is in Strategic Coach's way of thinking about things.

Leadership is providing direction. And I'm very, very clear that you can have incredibly talented people who are committed and engaged and smart and all the things, but if there is not a clear enough direction as to the use of their Unique Ability and how they can apply it, it goes awry.

And so this is what I've been seeing. And as soon as I saw it in one circumstance, all of the other examples in my history just cascaded into my mind. You know, everything from teams years and years ago to something that's happening now with our company, with other people's companies. So it's like, oh, I need to talk about this.

So, I just want to give you a few kind of clues, you know, if something's happening, this actually could possibly be the cause. And it's why leadership is such a key point. It is something that is worth focusing on. Expecting that just identifying everyone's Unique Ability



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and thinking that it will self-organize to provide the exact results you want: It's not going to happen. I'm shaking my head if you can't tell. You're unrealistic. It needs a focus. It needs an intention.

Dan Sullivan is genius at doing that, and people love being in teamwork with him because he is so clear on his thinking. He knows what he wants. He's clear on his intention, and there's always an Impact Filter to go with it. So, giving you the punchline early, yes, this is a huge part of the secret to success.

So, how do we know where there's a lack of leadership? What's the process? What happens? So, from my perspective, what I've seen is that Unique Ability starts to go its own way. Because if we love to do it and we find it fascinating, it's like, oh, maybe this would be fun. This would be cool. I want to talk to this person. I want to do this project. I want to explore over here. And sometimes that is something that will benefit the overall organization.

You know, I love when companies like Google allow you to take like a day a week to work on your own project, but there is a point where you actually bring it back to the team and they go, yes, no, or you kill it yourself, or you raise it up to the next level for more teamwork. So it's not that you can't be creative or brainstorm, but it still is with the purpose of moving the company ahead.

So when there's no direction, when there's no clarity, especially when it comes specifically to that person's role—hopefully we all have a purpose to our organizations, but when it doesn't make it down to that individual level, things get a little weird. So Unique Ability starts to go its own way. And the other thing that happens is when that's taken place over time, where people are used to not having any—I was going to use the word “supervision,” but that just makes me want to cringe. When they don't have any direction or leadership is they start to get an entitlement attitude, especially if someone says, oh, hey, there's been no direction here. They're like, “I'm fine. Thank you very much. I want to keep doing what I'm doing.” And they resist and they push back.

So, what happens is when people get resistant and rebellious and someone new comes in saying, “Hey, we have a lack of direction,” they actually start to resist aligning with that bigger



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purpose because they haven't had to for a long time. And they thought they were trusted with what they were doing. And so they kind of look at this as like, "I don't wanna do what you're telling me to do. I don't really wanna do that."

And it's interesting, because when I was writing the Entitlement Attitude Questionnaire, which is really what the *Team Success Handbook* is about, I used to jokingly say, maybe alignment should be number one. Align with what the company's doing, align with what your team is doing, align with what your role requires, or what the project is. And if you can't align with it, you really have to look at whether or not you should be there. If it's not something you can align with, for whatever reason, be it values, be it how you problem solve, be it whatever kind of a fit or wrong fit it is, that is so, so critical.

So alignment is vital. Because if you don't, it actually ends up with a lack of Unique Ability Teamwork. You've got people who, if you squish them, they'll just contribute their intellect, but not really their will or their hearts, which is never the most productive. You end up with projects that slow down. You end up with projects that don't actually have creativity. Or you just, as I said, have people going off and doing their own thing. Imagine a rowing team, no one is rowing in sync. Your boat's not going really fast, just saying.

So, I just see this pattern a lot, and I think it's crucial that we, as team members, as team leaders, as business owners, are kind of astute to this. And again, leadership may be so much a part of who you are, you're like, "Doesn't everyone get it?" The answer is no. You also have some people who are really good at being self-managing themselves; they just need a little bit of direction and they're off and running. Those are the people you don't have to worry about.

But for most people, it requires some ongoing conversation and clarity. And if you've been listening to this podcast, you know just how much I love tools, things like profiles to help identify when someone is operating according to what is important to them. The PRINT profile, which is available to anyone connected to Coach—we'll put the special offer in there for you—really tells what are people's underlying motivations. And I have to tell you, if people's underlying motivations are not being met, they are not long for your company, or they



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shouldn't be because they need to be somewhere else. If their role requires different striving instincts—aka Kolbe—then that's probably a misfit as well.

But we're going a step up to Unique Ability. So, imagine you've got someone who's talented, committed, interested, all the things, but if that goal is missing, if that intended purpose is fuzzy or not clear, if there just hasn't been any direction, because you've got a really nice leader, but not a very effective one, then that's also going to be a bit of a disaster.

I was rereading or flipping through *Radical Candor* by Kim Scott again. It's so good because Radical Candor is when you both care deeply and communicate directly. You know, if you just care deeply but don't hold people accountable, that's just inauthentic and it doesn't give anyone any clarity about how they can best contribute. And last time I checked, most people in their Unique Ability really actually do want to make a contribution. So I think it's just something to make sure that you articulate and are clear about and make sure everyone in your company is really good at this because some people are not. They just want to be nice and want to be liked. And that does not work. It's actually called "Manipulative Insincerity" in the Radical Candor book. Well worth a read if you have not picked up that book.

So, again, the costs of not paying attention to this are incredibly high. And the challenge is it's really not obvious sometimes. It's subtle. It's people going, "Oh! Oh, I didn't know that was the deadline." "Oh, is that what you really wanted this project to be about?" They're questioning. Deadlines are missed. Creativity isn't put into it. People do things by rote. You just don't have, again, everyone moving in the same direction, propelling the boat forward. They're all off doing their own rhythm and their own thing.

So, how do you get this thing back on course? Number one is double check. First of all, get really clear with yourself. Do I know what I want in this situation? We were doing a little bit of a history of Coach for a new website, which I'm excited about. And the very first book, the very first quarterly ambition series book that Dan ever wrote was called *Wanting What You Want*. If you don't know what you want, incredibly hard to give direction to other people about how they can help you get there.



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So, you spending a few minutes figuring out what you want, again, from the micro to the macro. What impact do you want your company to be making? How do you want people to show up in terms of your culture? What does success look like compared to what failure looks like? Make it crystal flipping clear so that people know how to win. Otherwise, they will not, and they will be doing something different. So, spending a few minutes getting clear on what you want.

Miscommunication is endemic in most companies. Most people do not know what they want. In the course of a meeting, it could change three or four times, which is why Dan has a personal rule, which is pretty much adopted, which is if you want to have a meeting with Dan, it has to be preceded by an Impact Filter. So, Impact Filter is a fabulous Coach tool—I talk about it often, downloadable in the show notes. It's available to everyone, which is great.

So, it's the purpose, the importance, and the ideal outcome of your project. This is the intellectual sale. This is why this is a good idea. Then you've got the Best and Worst, and this is the emotional sale. So, the Best is, "Okay, if we just achieve this ideal result, what does that mean? How positive is our future?"

Worst is—in my case, I always make it twofold—Worst if we do not take action; if we maintain the status quo, then what? Now, if the status quo is kind of okay and the best result is good but not flipping amazing, then you're going to be like, "Okay, maybe this project isn't so hot as I thought it was." Good. Kill the project. This is an Impact Filter, so you want to filter out those things that don't make sense.

Or the Worst is if we do it and it turns out horribly. So sometimes if the cost is too high to your reputation or cost-wise, what have you, you're like, "Bit too risky for this one. Let's pick another idea." So it's okay to filter things out. If you're not sold after purpose, importance, and ideal outcome, good, stop. Don't tell anybody else about it. If you're not sold emotionally, if you don't get excited or slightly terrified from Best and Worst, also stop there.

Now, if your project does make it through—company idea, innovation, whatever it is does make it through—purpose, importance, ideal outcome, Best and Worst, then you want to determine the eight success criteria. And this is to ensure the Best and to prevent the Worst.



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And I have to tell you, it's easy to break down. You'll have written parts of it already throughout your whole Impact Filter, but it's phenomenal when you do that because it lets people know incredibly clearly what success looks like, and it becomes a bit of a checklist. Most people I know love checklists, right? They're like, oh, it makes them feel very good, very gratified. (Most people have more Kolbe Follow Thru than I do.) But very, very powerful. And then you're clear.

And this is why Strategic Coach tools are thinking tools versus forms. And I love them—I've said this often—because I always end up being smarter, feeling smarter and being smarter at the end of filling out one of our thinking tools than I was when I started. How cool is that? You know, a 10-, 15-minute exercise and I feel more intelligent at the end? Sign me up. I'm game for that.

And then it becomes a way, as I'm gonna talk about in a future podcast, how to pass the baton. You have stated your intention clearly and people know and they can go, yes, I'm in, or I'm not the right Unique Ability for that. So if you have not done this for a while and you're thinking, oh, maybe things are going a little astray and I wanna, herd my cats a little bit more effectively. And by the way, with really talented, Unique Abilities, it kind of is like herding cats, but still you do want them going in the same direction, at least trying to accomplish the same result, let's be clear.

So you wanna share this with them and say, hey, is this what you thought we were up to? And be open, like pause. After that question, they're like, "Actually, no, I thought our main goal was this, not that." You're like, okay. How'd you come up with that impression? "Oh, well, when you said blah, blah, blah." You're like, right, I did say that. Here's what I've gotten clear on since then, and here's what I think our purpose is now. Is this something you are willing to align with?

And the word "will" is really important. You could say, "Is this something you can align with?" which means it's a choice. A "can" is a statement of capability, intellectually, usually. "Is this something you feel like aligning with?" That's talking to their hearts. Hopefully the answer there is yes. But then "will" is a commitment of effort. This is where all the work happens. And so you really want to make sure that people are willing and will commit is very different than I want to



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commit, I can commit. But I will commit; “will commit” has so much more gravitas to it. You need to, and we’ll be asking for people’s will, you know, are you willing to commit to this?

And have that conversation. I guarantee there’ll be some surprises in that, but it will probably uncover some of the messiness or the confusion. And some people are like, “oh my gosh, I am so happy we had this conversation. I kind of thought that was what we were up to, but now I know for sure.” It will be like you unleashed them. They’re like, “Yes, full steam ahead!”

Other people who are much more committed to doing their own thing rather than your thing, they may have a choice to make. You may not have to make it for them, which is also great.

So it’s powerful. It’s powerful being willing to put what you think is important on paper, what you’re willing to commit to, sharing that with other people, making it an open conversation. Is it negotiable? Maybe, maybe not. But people, I know, often expand thinking.

I love how Babs talks about collective intelligence (Babs, co-founder of Strategic Coach). So other people might go, hey, I really appreciate this direction you’re taking. What does it mean for that? Does it include this? What happens if? And you’re like, oh, didn’t think about that. Let’s include that too, right? So your idea will get better through conversation, through collaboration, if you’re truly open, because it’s a starting point. Your Impact Filter is a starting point, and then other people can flesh it out and make it even more rich and more full. But you need to get that commitment. If you do, I think you will experience a boost in terms of commitment and success and speed—something super important to me.

And I think it will probably solve a couple of underlying niggly problems where you’re like, how come this is feeling harder than it needs to be? Or what’s going on? And then if someone in your organization or a leader resists doing this, that may require a separate conversation. Ask them, what is your resistance to providing clear purpose to people’s efforts? Because that’s our job as leaders. You know, people have a ton of capability. And what we need to do is help provide clear direction and purpose for how they can make a great contribution. If someone’s not willing to do this, they’re really not willing to be a leader. Maybe they want to be a contributor. Maybe that’s a better fit for them. Good. Make that easy.



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But I just do think it's a crucial, crucial conversation that I know when I think, "Oh, everyone's working their Unique Ability. Everything's great." Wrong. Unique Ability without clear direction, without clear purpose, without clear intentionality, does not end up with Unique Ability Teamwork and will not get you to the goals that you're so desperately trying to achieve.

So that is my learning. That is my lesson. Just wanted to share that with you. Love to know if this is something that you have experienced; I'm super curious. I don't think I'm the only one. Talked to enough team members and team leaders to know that it's not unusual, but I haven't really heard about it talked about this way before, especially with the context of Unique Ability. So, please let me know.

And, as always, here's to your team's success. Really grateful to be having this conversation with you.