



**WHY**  
**TEAMS**  
**WIN**

KEYS TO SUCCESS IN  
BUSINESS, SPORT,  
AND BEYOND

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**DR. SAUL L. MILLER**



## More Praise for *Why Teams Win*

“Dr. Miller has really hit on the basic principles of building a successful team. The Nine elements provide the blueprint for all coaches.”

—*Mark Messier, Former NHL Star, and Stanley Cup Champion*

“Saul Miller is an expert on building winning teams. As I have learned more and more about Toyota it is clear that the key to their success is building winning teams, from the close-knit board of directors at the top to the working-level team member on the shop floor. The company is a collection of teams that are aligned through a very strong set of common values, a vision of benefitting society at the top, and aligned goals and metrics from top to bottom. This book provides important insights on how you can develop winning teams from top to bottom.”

—*Jeffery K. Liker, Professor of Industrial and Operations Engineering, University of Michigan; Author, The Toyota Way, Toyota Talent, Toyota Culture: The Heart and Soul of the Toyota Way*

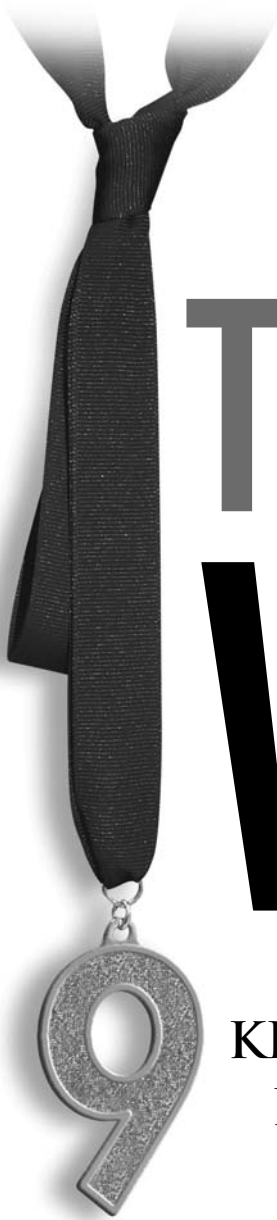
“In *Why Teams Win* Dr. Miller describes 9 key elements of team success including fundamentals like leadership, commitment, and chemistry. This book is full of excellent information for anyone wanting to build a winning team.”

—*Kelly Hrudehy, NHL Veteran, Broadcaster, Analyst Hockey Night in Canada*

“In *Why Teams Win*, Dr. Miller generously shares many insights, discoveries, useful tools, and a lifetime of helpful information, distilled from the front lines of many professions.”

—*Al Secunda, Author (Ultimate Tennis, The 15 Second Principle), Consultant, Musician*





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AND BEYOND

**DR. SAUL L. MILLER**

**JB JOSSEY-BASS™**

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***Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication Data***

Miller, Saul, 1942-

Why teams win : 9 keys to success in business, sport, and beyond / Saul Miller.

Issued also in electronic format.

ISBN 978-0-470-16043-5

1. Teams in the workplace. 2. Teamwork (Sport). 3. Success. I. Title.

HD66.M54 2009

658.4'022

C2008-907845-4

**Production Credits**

Cover and interior design: Adrian So

Typesetting: Thomson Digital

Cover photos: Adrian So

Printer: Friesens

**Editorial Credits**

Editor: Karen Milner

Project Manager: Elizabeth McCurdy

John Wiley & Sons Canada, Ltd.

6045 Freemont Blvd.

Mississauga, Ontario

L5R 4J3

Printed in Canada

1 2 3 4 5 FP 13 12 11 10 09

*To all those who put their team first*

# CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	vii
Introduction	1
The Nine Qualities of Winning Teams	11
Chapter 1: A Sense of Purpose: A Meaningful Goal	15
Chapter 2: Talent	25
Chapter 3: Leadership	33
Chapter 4: The Game Plan	49
Chapter 5: Commitment	59
Chapter 6: Feedback	77
Chapter 7: Confidence	95
Chapter 8: Chemistry	107
Chapter 9: Identity	119
Chapter 10: Character and a Winning Formula	131
Chapter 11: Different Teams, Different Demands	157
Chapter 12: Applications and Team Exercises	169
References	191
Bibliography	199
Index	203



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Why Teams Win* is all about teamwork, and I was fortunate to have a team of talented individuals whose efforts and ideas helped make the book possible. I wish to acknowledge Karen Milner, Elizabeth McCurdy, Jennifer Smith, and the team at John Wiley and Sons for their vision and editorial support. I also wish to acknowledge Garfield Lindsay Miller and Dr. Laara K. Maxwell, my home team, for their trusted, critical feedback. Garfield's insight and feedback, and his *kai-zen* attitude over the past three years, have been invaluable.

Also, much thanks to the following who contributed both personally and indirectly by providing comments, insights, and the opportunity that led to the writing of *Why Teams Win*: Dan Allen, Steve Ballmer, R. Meredith Belbin, Ken Blanchard, D'Arcy Boulton, Bill Bradley, Alan Brahmst, Bev Brown, Michael Campany, Bruce Castoria, Craig Channell, Annemarie Chapman, Richard Church, Brady Clark, Shaun Cloustan, James Co, Matt Cohen, Jim Collins, Kevin Constantine, Geoff Courtnall, Stephen Covey, Marc Crawford, Mark D'Silva, Willie Desjardins, Robert Dirk, Derek Dorsett, John Dowling, Peter Drucker, Team Fenson, Michael Goldberg, Forest Gregg, Glen Hanlon, Bret Hedican, Darby Hendrickson, Clark Higgins, Ken Hitchcock, Larry Huras, Gord Huston, Clark Higgins, Dick Irvin, Phil Jackson, Shiv Jagday, Davey Johnson, Mike Keenan, Robert Keidel, Alan Kerr, Steve Kerr, Bob Knight, Rich Kromm, Nadira Laing, Tom Landry, David Lanphear, Rick Lanz, Greg LeMond, Rick Ley, Jeffery Liker, Vince Lombardi, Ed Lukowich, Morris Lukowich, Bas Lycett, Lorna

MacDougall, Joe MacIlvaine, Sharon MacKay, Len McNealey, John Maxwell, Scott Mellanby, Gary Meredith, Mark Messier, Henry Mintzberg, Mike Moore, Joe Namath, Harry Neale, Andrea Neil, Roger Neilson, Merlin Olsen, Charles Ottewell, Bill Parcells, Sam Perlozzo, Even Pellerud, Bryant Perrier, Jim Poling, Pat Quinn, F. David Radler, Vic Rapp, Joseph Ravitch, Doug Reisborough, Branch Rickey, John Robinson, Gervais Rioux, Cliff Ronning, Bill Russell, Kris Russell, Jerrid Sauer, Johan Sauer, Dave Scatchard, Rodger Schmidt, Don Shula, V.J. Singh, Marshall Starkman, Roger Staubach, Casey Stengel, David Thielen, Joe Thornton, Y.A. Tittle, Barry Trotz, Bruce Tuckman, Bob Tunstead, Bill Walker, Tom Ward, Karen Watson, Tom Webster, Charlie Weis, Dave “Tiger” Williams, David Wolfe, Mitchell Wolfe, Eric Wright, Martin Wright, and Steve Yzerman.

# INTRODUCTION

*When a group of people come together and dedicate themselves towards a common goal, incredible things are possible.*

For over a quarter of a century, I've had the good fortune to work with teams of dedicated individuals . . . all kinds of teams. I've worked with professional sport teams in the National Football League, National Hockey League, Major League Baseball, the National Basketball Association, and with national, Olympic, and collegiate teams in over thirty different sports. While I was consulting with them, these athletes and teams won championships like the World Series and the Stanley Cup, as well as national and conference titles and Olympic medals.

During this time I've also consulted with corporate teams in sales, service, management, and manufacturing in a variety of industries across North America. Some of these groups increased their sales volume 100 percent, some doubled shareholder value, and others not only exceeded profit targets but were repeatedly listed nationally as a top 50 company to work for. I've also run medical and rehab teams in which the focus was helping people regain their health and return to productive life. In every case, the challenge involved helping people

work together and perform to the best of their abilities. As such, I find the team experience an exciting and meaningful challenge.

Growing up, I played a lot of team sports. I was fortunate to play for teams that won city championships in high school and a national championship in college, and later to work with elite sport, corporate, and health service teams as a professional. Being part of a winning team is a satisfying and exhilarating experience. People often compare the feeling of winning to sex. Indeed, neuropsychologists tell us that for competitive people winning triggers a release of dopamine, a feel-good hormone and neurotransmitter that creates pleasurable emotions and contributes to the intense sense of satisfaction that winning provides.

Personally, I think being part of a successful team is a spiritual experience. It requires faith, and giving or surrendering something of oneself for the collective good. In so doing one can become part of something greater than oneself, and bond with others doing the same. In making that investment I have found the team experiences I participated in as a player, consultant, and coach to be challenging, enjoyable, and very rewarding.

What sparked the idea of this book was a synchronicity of events over a span of a few weeks. I had been on the road for a month, working with a couple of sport teams. One, the Nashville Predators of the NHL, was battling for a spot in the playoffs. The other, a US Olympic team, was getting ready for the Winter Games. Not surprisingly, my thoughts were charged with recent team experiences and some of the issues and factors that contribute to team success. The process of strengthening qualities like intention, commitment, identity, focus, and mental toughness was very much on my mind. Furthermore, I was just finishing a book, *Hockey Tough: A Winning Mental Game* on the psychological side of sport and had recently defined several factors critical to team success.

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While traveling through Chicago on my way home, I ran into Kevin Constantine at O'Hare airport. Kevin is a well-known NHL coach. After clearing security we sat down and had a conversation about team success. I mentioned to Kevin that I was working on a book about winning and discussed with him our impressions as to why teams win. He shared his experience and insights on team success, highlighting the importance of focus, commitment, and preparation . . . all of which reinforced my thinking on the subject.

Immediately on my return to Vancouver, I had a meeting scheduled with Gord Huston, the CEO of Envision Financial, a very successful credit union in the Pacific North West. The organization had recently merged and was dealing with issues relating to identity and culture. In preparation for the meeting I reflected on some core issues as to why organizations and teams in business and sport are successful . . . in effect, why and how teams win. As I organized my thoughts for the meeting, it became increasingly apparent that sport, with its clear and fast bottom line and commitment to continuous improvement, is an excellent performance model for many forms of human endeavor. And that many of the characteristics that contribute to team success in sport are applicable and would be of interest to a wide range of team leaders and players in business—and life.

So I began to write. Yet, as sometimes happens, after a brief inspired beginning, circumstance and seemingly more pressing commitments put the project on hold. A couple of years passed during which my work with sport and corporate teams took me coast to coast across North America, from California to Newfoundland, and abroad, to Switzerland, Italy, Austria, and Norway in Europe; to Korea, Malaysia, and China in Asia; and to South Africa. In that time, I helped sport teams prepare for the Summer and Winter Olympic Games, hockey's Stanley and Memorial Cups, plus a half dozen World Championships and World Cups. At the same time I

consulted with a variety of corporate teams helping them improve teamwork, hit sales targets, strengthen team identity, and increase profitability. The consistent enthusiastic response of all these groups to my input on *Why Teams Win* sparked me to resume, in earnest, the challenge of writing this book.

*People who work together will win, whether it be against complex  
football defenses or the problems of modern society.*

—Vince Lombardi <sup>1</sup>

Today there is a considerable emphasis on winning and on people working together effectively in teams. This is true in business, sport, and life. In this book we are going to explore nine basic reasons or keys that characterize winning teams and successful organizations. These keys touch on the make-up of the team, its talent, leadership, focus, attitude, chemistry, and sense of self. We'll explore each of the nine keys, discuss why they are important, and offer suggestions on how to strengthen them.

Most of us live and work in teams of one sort or another. In reviewing the nine keys, I encourage readers to reflect on their past and present experience with teams and consider what they and their associates can do to enhance both their individual and team's performance in these areas.

Before we begin exploring why teams win, let's define exactly what we mean by the terms *team* and *win*. What is a "team"? And what do we mean by the word "win"?

Over the last quarter century I've asked dozens of groups, "How do you define *team*?" The most common response from people in all walks of life is, "A team is a group of people working together to achieve a common goal." I then explain that while that may be the popular use

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of the word, the word originally referred to a group of *animals* hitched together pulling in a common direction to a common goal . . . as in the case of a team of horses or a dog team. Expressed in this manner it becomes graphically clear that if one of the horses strays and wanders off course, all the other horses have to pull harder to keep the team in line and enable it to achieve its goal. Or, if one of the dogs falls asleep in its traces, all the other dogs have to work harder to move the team along. And so it is with teams of people.

A team requires a dynamic shared commitment where *everyone makes a difference*. As a team player, what you do either contributes to moving the team in the desired direction, or what you do impedes the group's progress and everyone has to work harder to move you and the rest of the team towards the desired end. In this respect the team challenge is a personal one. And a commitment to enhancing individual performance can enrich both the player's and the team's experience.

*Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.*

—Helen Keller <sup>2</sup>

A team is the embodiment of the concept the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In *A Brief History of Everything*, Ken Wilber<sup>3</sup> uses water as a metaphor in discussing the evolution of consciousness. He explains that looking at hydrogen and oxygen as two distinct separate elements, one simply wouldn't predict that they would come together to produce something as different from themselves as water. It is the same with teams in which the distinct and separate elements of the players come together to create something that is more complex and more evolved than any of their individual parts. In *Why Teams Win* we will explore the team process and describe the forces that act on and

contribute to a collection of individuals evolving into a successful high functioning team.

As for the word *win*, a definition that I believe captures the spirit of winning is, *to win is to gain through effort or struggle*. In the late eighties I was working on a book on high performance. At the time, my son was ten years old and an enthusiastic Little Leaguer. One day he came into the room where I was writing, watched me typing away, then asked what I was doing. I explained I was writing a book. He asked what the title of the book was going to be. I replied that I was thinking of calling it *Winning With Ease*. Hearing the title he immediately shook his head and curled up his nose in displeasure.

“What’s wrong?” I asked, “Don’t you like that title?”

“No Dad,” he said still shaking his head, “it’s not right. Everyone knows winning isn’t easy. To win you’ve got to hustle.”

Winning isn’t easy. The world is becoming more and more competitive.

In sport, competition is intense, with everyone vying for the same prize, and training all year long to achieve it. When Lorenzo Neal, a fifteen-year veteran of the NFL, was asked how he survived the violence and played so effectively over the years, he said, “I train hard in the preseason.” Then he paused and said, “Actually there is no preseason.”<sup>4</sup> Training is all year long. And as for security and longevity, the word in sport is that you are only as good as your last game, that champions rarely repeat, and relatively successful coaches can be fired if they don’t win it all.

In business, all the screws are being tightened. People want things done better, faster, and cheaper. And as corporations compete with businesses from around the globe, many workers are challenged to become online accessible day and night.

The definition of winning as achievement through effort or struggle reflects the challenging process of setting a goal, and then working



with determination, diligence, and perseverance in a highly competitive forum to make that goal a reality.

Not everyone is excited by the word *winning*. When I discussed the *Why Teams Win* program with the vice president of human resources of a large energy corporation he surprised me by saying, “We’re not interested in winning here. I think the concept is destructive to cooperation and the team-building process.” He went on to describe winning in the primordial sense of combatant versus combatant . . . where only one person walks away at the end of the battle.

His experience was clearly very different from mine. I explained that teams compete and win through an integration of talent, focus, and effort. Within the context of a high-performance team, winning is not as much about individuals competing with each other as it is a cooperative synergistic (win-win) process, where team members learn they can accomplish more by working together than they would by creating on their own. Winning is everyone working together and achieving together.

## **TEAM = Together Everyone Achieves More**

Davey Johnson is an innovative and successful major leaguer who won the World Series both as a player and manager and was American League manager of the year. Davey once defined the process of winning as follows, “When I say winning, I mean getting the maximum potential out of a group of individuals so that they can accomplish more than anyone thought was possible.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, that’s what winning teams are all about.

Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer also believes competition can produce a win-win. Ballmer has said, “Competition drives everybody to do their very best work, and it’s the very best work of competitors that winds up being the very best value to customers.”<sup>6</sup>

The synergy of intelligence, energy, talent, and spirit is a phenomenon I've observed again and again with successful teams in sport, business, health care, and the arts . . . and the keys to making it happen are what this book is about.

## **Parallels . . . Sport and Business**

Throughout the book I refer to observations and experiences I've had working with teams in both sport and business. There are similarities between these challenging forums of human expression.

### **1. *Bottom-Line Consciousness***

In sport, the bottom line is very clear and fast. You can see in an instant what wins and what loses. The story or the explanation pales next to the score. Excuses are irrelevant. Indeed, Charlie Weis, a four-time Super Bowl winner, entitled his biography, *No Excuses*.<sup>7</sup> In sport, it's the bottom line that matters.

Business is not only driven by the bottom line, it defined the concept. And while it invariably takes longer than today's box-score to assess corporate performance, the corporate season is endless, and with today's sophisticated technological communication, the pressure to perform can be 24/7.

### **2. *A Commitment to Continuous Improvement***

In sport and business the status quo is never good enough. What won last season rarely repeats. To win, there needs to be an ongoing commitment to continuous improvement, and an ongoing search for new ideas, new talent, and new systems of delivery.

The intense pressure to win is exemplified by a Nike television commercial that appeared during the Olympics a few years ago. To

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be an Olympian is a great achievement. To win an Olympic medal is an outstanding accomplishment. Yet Nike's commercial charged, "You don't win silver, you lose gold."

Over the years I have worked with many successful teams who strived to be the best. Whether it was in professional football or hockey or in the telecommunications or pharmaceutical industries, second place was not good enough. The push was and is to be the best. And the push is continuous.

### ***3. Different Strokes for Different Folks***

Make sure you're coaching the right game. It's important to note the different team sports (football, baseball, basketball, soccer, and hockey) demand different styles of coaching or leadership to maximize performance. It's the same in business. Different business functions (manufacturing, marketing, human resources, and sales) present different coaching challenges and demand a different coaching emphasis to maximize results.

What is especially relevant is the parallel between certain business functions and certain sports. For example, the way you coach a sales team is different from how you would coach a marketing or human resources group. Similarly, the way to coach winning in baseball is different from how you would coach winning in football or hockey. However, coaching winning in baseball is similar in many respects to how you would effectively manage a sales team. These parallels between effective leadership styles in business and sport are discussed in Chapter 11.



# THE NINE QUALITIES OF WINNING TEAMS

Why do teams win? Basically, *winning teams are about people working well together*. Successful teams are comprised of people with purpose, vision, and skill. Winning teams are groups of people who are wisely led, motivated to work hard, work together, and persevere to make something meaningful happen.

In working with over a hundred teams I've consistently observed nine distinct qualities or keys that are present within successful teams. These qualities or keys are at play regardless of the kind of team I am working with (e.g., sport, business, health care, or the arts) and are also somewhat independent of the team's level of development.

## THE NINE QUALITIES OF WINNING TEAMS

1. A Sense of Purpose: A Meaningful Goal
2. Talent
3. Leadership
4. Strategy/Plan
5. Commitment
6. Feedback
7. Confidence
8. Chemistry
9. Identity

All of us have some team experience. We live and work with others in teams. As you review these nine qualities of winning teams, take time to reflect on your personal experience. Consider to what extent the team you are currently with, or the teams you have been a part of in the past, incorporate these qualities. And, perhaps most relevant, ask yourself, “What can I and my present team do to enhance performance in each of these nine areas?”

Although the nine keys are presented and discussed in separate chapters, they are interrelated. One quality affects another. As the strength in one key area increases, it strengthens other areas as well. For example, preparation builds confidence and confidence strengthens performance, chemistry, and identity.

We have defined a team as a collection of individuals pulling together in a common direction to a common goal. A constant challenge in the quest for success is the need to balance the needs of the individual with the needs of the team. Both elements must be considered in the development and maintenance of a successful organization. Each chapter has both a group/team and personal component for you to explore.

Our discussion of these nine keys begins with a sense of purpose. That is where great ventures begin. Chapter 1 describes the first key, a meaningful goal. Winning teams are engaged and enrolled by the meaningfulness of their pursuit. In Chapter 2 we look at talent, the human resource that comprises the team. I considered the possibility of leadership, a key that provides vision and direction, preceding the talent factor. However, in the end, I chose to go with talent before leadership. On most teams I have been a part of, leadership inherits and plays on an existing talent pool.

Leadership is discussed in Chapter 3, both the top down leadership provided by coaches or an executive group and core leadership provided from within the rank and file. There is no key that better

demonstrates the interconnectedness of the nine keys than leadership. Leadership selects and shapes talent, creates the game plan, provides feedback, and builds confidence, chemistry, and team identity. Chapter 4 explores strategy. That is followed by commitment, in Chapter 5, where we discuss the importance of individuals' "buying in," both their dedication to "paying the price" (doing what is necessary to create the desired end result) and their willingness to subordinate their personal "me" for the "collective "we."

In Chapter 6 we consider the importance of team feedback and personal acknowledgement in shaping winning team behavior. This chapter highlights the challenge of balancing the needs of both the individual and the team for continuing success. Chapter 7 explores confidence and underlines the importance of preparation as well as success in building confidence. Chapter 8 looks at team chemistry, specifically the respect and support that flows between winning team members. Chapter 9 describes the importance of a winning identity, both a winning team identity and a successful personal self-image.

Chapter 10 looks at character, the ABCs of winning, and it compares and contrasts winning and losing teams in regard to the nine keys. Chapter 11, "Different Teams/Different Demands" compares various sports with various business processes and illustrates how leadership style should be varied according to the specific nature of the challenge, as well as the team's stage of development to maximize team performance. Finally, Chapter 12 describes a number of team-building exercises that provide insight and increase team effectiveness.