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*Beyond behaviour: How to build a strong
executive team*

by
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There is strength in numbers. But in an executive team, numbers are not all that matter. Building strong leadership in a company requires a collective effort that goes beyond working together to creating a strong leadership alliance.

A well-known but timeless [success story](#) is that of Ford's turnaround. In 2006, Ford Motor Company was in shambles. The organization was in a precarious financial state and set to lose about [\\$17 billion](#). Rife with [regional dealerships](#) and facing a [drop in sales](#) and [falling product quality](#), it was stuck in a working culture that hindered innovation and kept its employees disengaged. Its board hired Alan Mulally, who had successfully maneuvered Boeing through a financial crisis and the consequences of 9/11 on the aviation industry. Mulally didn't know anything about cars, but he brought masterful leadership and a track record of legendary operating results, so he was appointed CEO and accepted to lead Ford's transformation.

In order to turn Ford around, Mulally made deep changes within the company. In collaboration with the company's leadership team, he devised the famous [One Ford plan](#) that everyone could adhere to and was aware of. By doing so, he helped Ford define and deliver its vision. He changed the status quo of the company, transforming copious meetings into weekly [business review plans](#). He tracked progress, creating a collaborative process that encouraged support and accountability. He instilled the value of [radical honesty by practicing it himself](#), admitting to other leaders that he didn't always know what he was doing. He applauded others who were courageous enough to do the same. And today, Ford is one of the world's leading automobile companies.

I met Mulally in 2019 and, of course, had heard about his work at Ford and the phenomenal turnaround he led. What I hadn't realized until then was that he made the transformation happen within the same executive team. The very team that almost drove Ford into the ground, now under the leadership of their new CEO, managed to turn the company into a profitable business once again. It was a clear demonstration of the power a CEO holds. The fascinating man sitting in front of me was living proof that my vision of the Leadership Alliance Culture concept was not only possible but also extremely effective. I am incredibly proud that Mulally has endorsed our Leadership Alliance Culture model.

So, as Mulally did with Ford, it is possible to take executive teams from good to great and from great to phenomenal. This does not come with simple changes in behavior, though. It is about creating an authentic, intentional and committed relationship between members of the leadership team in order to work together toward a compelling vision. The success of your leadership team will be largely dependent on your commitment as a CEO to change the culture of your company, your willingness to make the journey and lead by example and your capacity to make difficult decisions.

Challenges that executive teams face are often expressed through unproductive and toxic behaviors, so we often see companies asking for behavioral interventions. This is understandable, as these behaviors are observable. But it is vital to see behavior as part of a larger system within your company. In his 40 years of research on organizational behavior in teams, J. Richard Hackman [discovered](#) that what matters most in collaboration is not attitudes or behavioral styles but “enabling conditions” that allow teams to thrive. This is why the Leadership Alliance Culture model works with a framework of five driving forces: a compelling vision, a shared purpose, leadership alliance behaviors, a leadership alliance mindset and working-together principles.

Ultimately, forming a true alliance between members of your leadership team is the secret to a strong executive team. If an alliance is the end goal, your team will go beyond working together, because alliances function past silos and individual egos.

Here are some steps you can take to strengthen your executive team:

To begin, it is imperative for your leadership team to come together and begin what I call “reinventing the future.” Along with your executives, define and agree on a compelling shared vision. You can always come back to this vision when tracking your progress, ensuring that you will have a sharp focus and direction in the future. Make sure that you all have a shared purpose, a reason why you are all working together. This will mark the start of an aligned culture, but it is important to practice honesty and authenticity first, as Mulally did, to identify points of tension as well as areas that need attention.

Once you have clarity and alignment on your compelling vision and shared purpose, decide which behaviors no longer serve you as a team and which behaviors are needed to successfully serve your vision and live your purpose. Begin adopting a leadership alliance mindset to support one another, improve yourselves collectively and establish clear working-together principles. I call this “rewiring for success.” Finally, focus on integrating the new vision, purpose, behaviors, mindset and principles you have defined and agreed upon.

It is challenging to change deeply embedded habits, mindsets and learned behaviors. But in repeating these new habits over and over again, new neural pathways can be formed over time. This means you must be committed to a long-term and disciplined process with a high level of commitment and accountability. Work these new skills and competencies until they become natural, fully integrated parts of your team.

With patience, commitment and a strong shared vision, it is possible to build a strong executive team. Mulally’s example is a source of inspiration but also a reminder that these things take time. Focusing on short-term results will limit your ability to create value for the greater good and inhibit deep culture change. With a leadership alliance that is united under one common purpose, your team can go from good to great.