

Putting the Ideal Team Together

Looking to build a cohesive, productive team? The book *The Ideal Team Player: How to Recognize and Cultivate the Three Essential Virtues* by Patrick Lencioni is a business fable that explores the essential qualities that make an effective team member. The ideal team member is humble, hungry, and smart: a deficiency in one area can undermine the effectiveness of a team member and, consequently, the team.

The Ideal Team Player

Humble

Lencioni defines humility as the most critical virtue for an effective team member. Humility, in this context, involves several key characteristics:

- **Lack of Ego:** Humble team players do not have an inflated sense of self-importance. They do not seek attention or recognition for their contributions and are more focused on the success of the team as a whole.
- **Acknowledging Others:** They are quick to praise and acknowledge the contributions of their teammates. They readily give credit where it is due and are genuinely appreciative of others' efforts.
- **Self-Awareness:** Humble individuals have a realistic understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. They are open to feedback and willing to admit when they need help or when they make mistakes.
- **Team-Oriented Mindset:** They prioritize the team's goals over their own personal goals. Success is viewed in terms of the team's achievements rather than individual accolades.
- **Low Maintenance:** Humble team players do not require constant validation or reassurance from others. They are confident yet unassuming, and their primary motivation is to contribute to the team's success.

Hungry

Being hungry encompasses several important characteristics:

- **Strong Work Ethic:** Hungry team players are consistently willing to put in the time and effort needed to achieve their goals. They are proactive in seeking out tasks and responsibilities and are diligent in their work.
- **Self-Motivated:** They do not need external motivation or constant supervision to stay productive. Instead, they are driven by an internal desire to excel and contribute meaningfully to the team.

- **Passionate and Enthusiastic:** Hungry team players are genuinely passionate about their work. This enthusiasm is not just for show; it fuels their persistence and commitment even in the face of challenges or setbacks.
- **Continuous Improvement:** They are always looking for ways to improve their skills and performance. Hungry team players seek opportunities for growth and development, whether through learning new skills, taking on additional responsibilities, or finding more efficient ways to complete tasks.
- **Ambitious:** They have a healthy ambition that pushes them to set and achieve higher goals. However, this ambition is balanced with the interests of the team, meaning they do not pursue personal success at the expense of the team's success.
- **Willingness to Go Above and Beyond:** Hungry team players are willing to step outside their defined roles when necessary. They are ready to help teammates, take on additional projects, or stay late to meet deadlines without being asked.

Smart

For Lencioni, being “smart” refers to emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills rather than intellectual ability. Key characteristics of being smart include:

- **Interpersonal Awareness:** Smart team players have a keen sense of how their words and actions affect others. They are attuned to the emotions and dynamics within the team, which allows them to navigate social interactions smoothly.
- **Good Judgment in Relationships:** They possess good judgment when dealing with people. This means they can assess situations and respond appropriately, understanding the nuances of social interactions and the impact of their behavior on others.
- **Effective Communication:** Smart individuals are articulate and able to communicate their ideas clearly and persuasively. They are also good listeners, paying attention to what others say and responding thoughtfully.
- **Constructive Conflict Resolution:** They handle conflicts maturely and constructively. Rather than avoiding disagreements or allowing them to escalate, smart team players address issues directly and diplomatically, working towards resolution and consensus.
- **Team Harmony:** They contribute to a positive team atmosphere. By being considerate and respectful, they help foster a collaborative and supportive environment where team members feel valued and understood.

- **Empathy and Understanding:** Smart team players show empathy towards their colleagues. They are capable of putting themselves in others' shoes, understanding their perspectives, and providing support when needed.
- **Building Relationships:** They excel at building and maintaining strong, positive relationships within the team. This involves not only being friendly and approachable but also being trustworthy and dependable.

How to Interview for an Ideal Team Player

Hiring for the above qualities at the onset will help you build your summer and auxiliary staff and culture. The following interview questions aim to assess a candidate's behavior, attitude, and past experiences related to being humble, hungry, and smart in a team environment. Asking situational questions allows the candidate to provide concrete examples of their teamwork skills and helps the interviewer gauge their suitability as an ideal team player. Consider using some of the following interview questions.

Assessing Humility:

- Can you tell me about a time when you shared credit for a successful project or achievement with your team?
- What constructive feedback have you received from teammates or supervisors and how did you react?
- Describe a situation where you prioritized the success of the team over your own personal goals or recognition.
- How do you create a positive and supportive team environment?
- Can you give an example of when you made a mistake and took responsibility for it? How did you address it with your team?
- Discuss a time when your integrity was challenged. How did you handle it?
- Describe a team project of which you are particularly proud.
- Can you describe a situation where you had to step outside your comfort zone to support your team or achieve a shared objective?

Assessing Hunger:

- Tell me about a work situation where you had to go above and beyond to get the job done.
- Can you describe a time when you took the initiative to seek out additional responsibilities or challenges? What motivates you?
- How do you stay updated with industry trends or advancements in your field?
- Tell me about a goal you set for yourself recently. How did you work towards achieving it?
- How do you handle periods of high workload or tight deadlines? Can you provide an example?
- What has been your most difficult or challenging accomplishment?
- Describe a time when you had to work under pressure or stress. How did you deal with it?
- How do you improve your skills or performance? In which areas do you feel you would like to develop?

- What challenges are you looking for in a position? What opportunities?
- Tell me about a time that things didn't go as planned. What did you do?

Assessing Smarts:

- How do you approach building relationships and collaborating with teammates?
- Can you share a situation where you successfully resolved a conflict within your team? What approach did you take?
- Describe your communication style when working with diverse groups of people. How would they describe your communication style?
- How do you adapt your communication style when explaining complex concepts to others?
- Can you give an example of a time when you had to navigate a challenging or difficult interpersonal dynamic?
- Describe a difficult or sensitive situation that required careful communication.
- Tell me about the best supervisor you ever had. What made them the best? Now tell me about the worst supervisor you ever had. What made them the worst and how did you work with them?
- Give me an example of a time when you gave delicate feedback to another person. What was your approach?
- How do you ensure that everyone's voice is heard and valued during team discussions or meetings?

Building an ideal team takes attention and work. The best way to start is to make good hires and foster humility, hunger, and smarts.

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