

CASE 8 Teams Drive the Fast Cars

When you think of auto racing, do you think of teamwork? Watch any televised race, and the better majority of the camera time is dedicated to the drivers and their cars. But in each of the three major forms of auto racing, the driver is simply one member of a larger team that works together to achieve maximum performance. And when the driver wins, the team wins as well.

In the world of competitive auto racing, the drivers are the sport's rock stars. They're courted by sponsors, adored by fans, and portrayed as the subject of interview upon interview by the racing press. It goes without saying that drivers are absolutely essential to earning a trophy, but racing enthusiasts, teammates, and especially drivers will tell you that they can't win the race by themselves—it takes a successful team to win a race.

Furthermore, while the driver is the most visible member of the team and certainly the one responsible for guiding the car, he's not always calling the shots. The most successful teams rely on multiple sets of eyes to assess track conditions and identify opportunities to advance that drivers themselves can't see from the cockpit.

Ray Evernham, crew chief and team manager for Hendrick Motorsports's DuPont car, describes teamwork this way: "We're all spark plugs. If one doesn't fire just right, we can't win the race. So no matter whether you are the guy that's doing the fabricating or changing tires on Sundays and that's the only job responsibility you have, if you don't do your job then we're not going to win. And no one is more or less important than you."¹ Although three of the major forms of professional auto racing—NASCAR, Formula One, and rally car racing—each utilizes different vehicles, rules, and team structures, teamwork is the common denominator among them.

What are the qualities of successful racing teams? Let's take a look.

Nascar

NASCAR is the most widely known and watched racing sport in the United States, and the popularity and success of Jeff Gordon has more than a little to do with that. Gordon has the most wins in NASCAR's modern era, has the third-most all-time wins, and has become a spokesperson for the importance of teamwork in NASCAR racing.² NASCAR has come a long way since its origins in the late 1940s in racing stock cars purchased directly from auto dealerships. Today's NASCAR vehicles are custom

fabricated from the ground up, although their thin metal bodies are molded in the shape of popular American sedans to reflect the sport's heritage. While most fans would be quick to point out the driver, manager, and pit crew as racing team members, shop mechanics, parts fabricators, and even aerodynamics experts are just as essential to a team's performance.

It's impossible for a car to complete a NASCAR race without multiple visits to the pit, and these pit stops are often the best example of teamwork in the sport. Pit crew members practice routine maintenance tasks like tire changes and refueling until they can execute them with lightning speed and the utmost precision. Aside from the skill and muscle memory of the pit crew members, other teammates contribute by modifying parts and equipment so they can be changed out in less time. Pit stops that would take mechanics twenty minutes or more to complete happen in less than twenty seconds.

Two-time Sprint Cup winner Jimmie Johnson cites the importance of cohesive teamwork even before a car is assembled and tested on the track. "If you really get inside each other's heads, as the car is developed, you're looking to split hairs," Johnson said. "If you really know each other, then you know what each other is looking for, you've built that foundation and belief on the teammates [and] the engineers, you can split those hairs and get it right."³

Formula One

Formula One drivers, team members, and fans have one quality that sets them apart from other racing participants: the need for speed. Formula One vehicles are the fastest circuit racing cars in the world, screaming down the track at top speeds as high as 225 miles per hour.

But there's another buzzword that equally defines Formula One racing: *performance*. Because of the high speeds racers achieve and the intense G-forces drivers and cars are subjected to, ensuring that Formula One cars perform efficiently and successfully throughout a race is literally a life-and-death matter.

The term *formula* refers to a strict set of regulations teams must abide by when building their cars in order to keep the races competitive. Unlike in other racing sports, Formula One teams have been required to build their own chassis since 1981, so although teams procure specialized engines from specific manufacturers, they are primarily responsible for building their cars from the ground up.

Each formula has its own set of rules that eligible cars must meet (*Formula One* being the highest and fastest of these designations), the idea being that these limitations

will produce cars that are roughly equivalent in performance. Of course, that won't always be the case, as teams work furiously to seek out every last bit of efficiency and performance while adhering to sport guidelines.⁴ Team members often lean heavily on aerodynamics, racing suspensions, and tires to achieve maximum performance.

The McLaren team is one of the most successful Formula One teams, and engineering director Paddy Lowe understands the behind-the-scenes dynamics that help great racing teams succeed. Speaking on the challenge of incorporating a new component into an existing car, he noted, "There weren't actually that many issues, but we kept experiencing a variety of failures with our new exhaust system. We'd come into the circuit each morning thinking we'd fixed the problems of the previous day, only to be met with a fresh series of trials the next day. Those days were very difficult for the team.

"You have to factor in the skill of the team to work together in a very short period of time to push in a completely different direction; to understand all the different issues. The reliability, the performance, the skills of the team, all the tools they've created over the years—they all came through to our profit. In those instances, there's not a big discussion about who's going to do what; there are very few instructions. Everybody moves seamlessly. They know what they've got to do."⁵

BMW Motorsport Director Mario Theissen put it simply: "Teamwork is the key to success," he said. "Of course the basis is formed by a competitive technical package, but without a well-integrated, highly motivated team, even the best car will not achieve prolonged success."⁶

Rally Car Racing

Whereas NASCAR and Formula One racers speed around a paved track, rally car racing frequently heads off the circuit and into territory that would make Dale Earnhardt step on the brakes: Finnish rallies feature long, treacherous stretches of ice and snow. The famed French *Méditerranée-le Cap* ran 10,000 miles from the Mediterranean to South Africa. The reputed Baja 1000 Rally ran the length of the Baja California peninsula, largely over deserts without a road in sight.

In rally car racing, drivers race against the clock instead of each other. Races generally consist of several stages that the driver must compete as quickly as possible, and the winning driver completes all stages in the least amount of time.⁷

You could argue that of all racing sports, rally drivers are the most reliant on teamwork to win. Unlike other forms of circuit racing, not only is the driver not racing on a fixed track, but he does not get to see the course before the race begins. Instead, he is wholly reliant on a teammate, the navigator, for information on upcoming terrain.

Part coach and part co-pilot, the navigator relies on page notes (detailed information on the sharpness of turns and the steepness of gradients) to keep the driver on course from his place in the car's passenger seat.⁸

Turkish driver Burcu Çetinkaya had already made a name for herself as a successful snowboarder before she decided to take up rally car racing at the age of twenty-four. "I grew up with cars," she said. "After visiting my first rally when I was twelve, I made up my mind to be a rally driver."⁹

"The thing that hooked me about rally driving was working together with a team for a common goal with nature working against you," she said. "I love cars, first of all—I grew up with them and I love every part of them. And I love competition. I have been competing all my life. In a rally, these things come together: nature, competition, teamwork and cars."¹⁰

You Can't Have One Without the Other

Though they may receive the lion's share of the notoriety and adulation, racing drivers are only one member of a larger team, wherein every team member's performance contributes to the team's success. The best drivers don't let the fame go to their heads. As Jeff Gordon—who knows a thing or two about success—put it, "The only way I can do my job correctly is to be totally clear in my mind and have 100 percent confidence in every person's job that went into this team so that they can have 100 percent confidence in what I'm doing as a driver."¹¹

Review Questions

1. What types of formal and informal groups would you expect to find in a racing team? What roles could each play in helping the team toward a winning season?
2. Racing teams and their leaders have to make lots of decisions—from the pressures of race day to the routines of everyday team management. When and in what situations would you see teams making decisions by authority rule, minority rule, majority rule, consensus, or unanimity? Are all of these decision approaches acceptable at some times and situations, or are some unacceptable at any time? Defend your answer.
3. Assume you have been retained as a team-building consultant by a famous and successful racing team whose performance fell badly during the prior season. Design a series of team-building activities you will lead the team in performing to strengthen their trust in each other and to improve their individual and collective efforts.

4. Choose a racing team of interest to you. Research the team, its personnel, and its performance in the most recent racing season. Try to answer this question: What accounts for this team's success or lack of success—driver talent, technology, teamwork, or all three? Can you find lessons in the racing team that might apply to teams and organizations in any setting? If so, list at least three that you believe are valuable and transferable insights. ■

CASE 9

Decisions, Decisions, Decisions

Developed by John R. Schermerhorn, Jr., Ohio University

The Case of the Diamond Ring

Setting—A woman is preparing for a job interview.

Dilemma—She wants the job desperately and is worried that her marital status might adversely affect the interview.

Decision—Should she or should she not wear her diamond engagement ring?

Considerations—When queried for a column in the *Wall Street Journal*, some women claimed that they would try to hide their marital status during a job interview.¹ One said, "Although I will never remove my wedding band, I don't want anyone to look at my engagement ring and think, she doesn't need this job, what is she doing working?" Even the writer remembers that she considered removing her engagement ring some years back when applying for a job. "I had no idea about the office culture," she said. "I didn't want anyone making assumptions, however unreasonable, about my commitment to work."

Wellness or Invasive Coercion?

Setting—Scotts Miracle-Gro Company, Marysville, Ohio.

Dilemma—Corporate executives are concerned about rising health-care costs. CEO Jim Hagedorn backs an aggressive wellness program and anti-smoking campaign to improve health of employees and reduce healthcare costs for the firm. Scott employees are asked to take extensive health-risk assessments; failure to do so increases their health insurance premiums by \$40 a month. Employees found to have "moderate to high"

health risks are assigned health coaches and given action plans; failure to comply adds another \$67 per month. In states where the practice is legal, the firm will not hire a smoker and tests new employees for nicotine use. In response to complaints that the policy is intrusive, Hagedorn says, "If people understand the facts and still choose to smoke, it's suicidal. And we can't encourage suicidal behavior."

Decision—Is Hagedorn doing the right thing by leading Scotts's human resource policies in this direction?

Considerations—Joe Pellegrini's life was probably saved by his employer. After urging from one of Scotts's health coaches, he saw his doctor about weight and cholesterol concerns. This led to a visit with a heart specialist who inserted two stents, correcting a 95 percent blockage. Scott Rodrigues's life was changed by his employer; he is suing Scotts for wrongful dismissal. A smoker, he claims that he was fired after failing a drug test for nicotine even though he wasn't informed about the test and had been told the company would help him stop smoking. CEO Hagedorn says, "This is an area where CEOs are afraid to go. A lot of people are watching to see how badly we get sued."²

Super Saleswoman Won't Ask for Raise

Setting—A woman is described as a "productive star" and "super-successful" member of an eighteen-person sales force.³

Dilemma—She finds out that both she and the other female salesperson are being paid 20 percent less than the men. Her sister wants her to talk with her boss and ask for more pay. She says, "No, I'm satisfied with my present pay, and I don't want to 'rock the boat'." The sister can't understand how and why she puts up with this situation, allowing herself to be paid less than a man for at least equal and quite possibly better performance.

Considerations—Women still earn only about 75 cents on the average for each dollar earned by a man. Some claim that one explanation for the wage gap and its growing size is that women tolerate the situation and allow it to continue, rather than confronting the gap in their personal circumstances and trying to change it.

Firm Goes Public with Annual Bonuses

Setting—Executives released to the public information on the annual bonuses paid to store employees.

Dilemma—The bonus program has been in place for a number of years. The goal is to link employee motivation and performance with the firm's financial success. In the past each person's bonus was considered a private