
PART



What Makes This Century Severe?

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CHAPTER

1

**To Be Young Forever
Is No Fun**

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There is a false correctness in how the world celebrates youth and how modern life celebrates individualism.

What makes this world so severe to so many is this over-reliance on youth and individualism. As I now am in my late fifties, I can say this with some force and fascination to those concerned about making teams that last.

To be young forever is no fun. This truth begets a gentler stronger truth. Those who survive across four to nine decades are often those who have fun in teams. Those who outlive the follies of youth engender a nexus of principles that enables the celebration of good teamwork, and these near-future trainers prepare the new kids on the block for this classic understanding of good competition.

What is miraculous to me is how much of this team building happens outside the classic nuclear family.

Why Youth Itself Is Not the Answer

Let us step back first before we continue forward with these book-length claims.

Youth and individualism are leading concepts that form our sense of identity and our faith in competition. They are the modern cornerstones of most of us.

They form the very foundation stones of modern consumerism.

You can see these forms of celebratory youth and individualism from Madison Avenue flip-flops worn by urban male

50-year-olds to those bold yellow-lime swimsuits meant for younger bodies that abound on the Long Island beaches I roam.

The same fashions found on the beaches in Sydney, Australia; Singapore; and Japan can be found on the beaches of Long Island, Brazil, and Los Angeles.

The fashion industry is simply the most extreme case of something we all notice when watching TV, while riding in planes and on trains, or when talking with the suburban educated elites that populate most high-tech firms. The rapid devaluation of Facebook as its billionaire founder brought them into public valuation is another example of this overvaluation of youth. The stock value decline that occurred for months after the initial public offering (IPO) cost the owners of the stock tons. But this devaluation was inevitable, because this bubble of youth cannot last. The firm was not maturely run yet as a coherent team; it was too top-heavy.

Popular industrial culture celebrates youth and the chance for individuals to buy into a consumptive individualism. But the false correctness in all this fancy cannot last long.

Youth Irritates; Teams Mature

If we scratch one skin level deeper than this surface consumerism, we see something else beneath.

Everyone I interviewed for this book can recall the details of how young athletic males got to keep secret sins during their youth while continuing to enjoy sustained family and public praise—all because they were triumphant contenders.

We will call this *The Macho Paradox* (deliberating taking and extending the term in the book by the same title).

The public is often outraged by these behaviors of favoritism and special advantage, and historically, there has been a strong

backlash against these pimpled celebrities when they burn their teams as well as their colleagues. But why is this?

This arrogant license, this self-assured margin of error, assumed by youth outrages many. I think it is because this forms the opposite of team play, and the great masses want to see the bubble of the improbable pop as a grand cultural act of rebalancing.

Resentment against these youths who rapidly rise to the top often feeds further outrage when these same youths hit the marketplace after college. Most newspaper sports sections, for example, are half full of tales of super-competitive individuals caught in scandal. I see this social process—which we can call the MVP paradox—not as sport but as public anthropology. In contrast, over the past several centuries, we have celebrated the hard-fought rags-to-riches stories of folks such as Franklin and Kevin Garnett, perhaps because their success did not happen in a snap.

Our reading of history is really quite simple: the sublime elements of human aspiration often fall into traps rendered anew in this swift and severe world, unless this aspiring individual stands with others, for a few seasons, and matures through the magic of teams.

The Disadvantages of Individual Greatness

The MVP paradox is about the presumed status of past achievements. Here a former most valuable player has trouble adjusting to a new situation, both because of all the baggage he or she carries into the new team and because of unique disadvantages found in individual greatness.

Most of us believe that a way to outlive these bundled problems of youth is through teamwork. Teams somehow mature even the reluctant.

These social value systems in teams seem to help round off that special edge of youth in practice for many of us, into a higher social value. It sharpens our skills and responsibilities. I see this as a clear result of teamwork in my life and firm.

Often during a key staff hire interview, where five or six of us have two finalists in mind, I will relax the interview testing and ask the finalists, "What was your best team experience?" Those whose answers include real context that illustrates the team dynamics, not just their own individual feelings, have often turned out the best hires in our firm.

In the end, we come to understand that to be young forever is no fun compared with winning as a team. My point is as eternal as the stages of humans: youth irritates; teamwork matures.

The Hourglass of Our Short Lives

We learn through teams how to suspend our individual time clocks and flip over the hourglass of our short lives into a state of play where each grain of passing sand adds up to a sense of purpose larger than ourselves.

Notice the change of tone as we move away from the individualistic terms such as *Macho Paradox*, *scandal*, and *hidden errors* to those of teamwork such as coherence, integrity, and captains. Once this shift is made, the world becomes more intelligible, more acceptable, and less stressed.

After writing this section of the book, I took an afternoon off to return to my favorite books. When I flipped through the many biographies of famous men and women, skimming many decades of marginal comments or underlined points of emphasis, I noticed how many of the subjects on my shelves became famous because they had a great supporting team of family and friends.

This is really the main point of most biographies.

Mere mortals become larger players through teams. The sheer nature of most humans thrives on this kind of recognition. How did we allow Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, and Charles Darwin to miss all this for so long?

Near Future Training Tip



We learn through teams how to suspend our individual time clocks, and flip over the hour glass of our short lives into a state of play where each grain of passing sand adds up to a sense of purpose larger than ourselves.

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Another Sense of Time: Social Time

In my management practice, I often work with executives responsible for teams exceeding 1,000. I study why and how they work. Often, the leader says that giving a common direction is the ultimate glue creating team unity.

In this way, teams defy ordinary time. They give us something bigger than individual motivation.

And in the assignments of team tasks and in the rituals of group accountability, we see a kind of energy in teams that gives us a glimpse of eternity, a way to stop ordinary individualistic attitudes and behaviors so that we can transform work time into playtime.

Here are a few introductory examples of how superb team-work changes our perception of time.

The Power in Teams

One way in which teams are magical is that they allow all different types of people to succeed. People who would not normally be

able to succeed on an individual basis can reap the benefits of success and reach peaks they would not be able to climb alone.

For example, the natural-born leader will thrive in a team setting, because he or she has the ability to project the work of their teams contributions to the team out into the public arena, filling the stands and the stadium. The beauty of teams is that even though the born leader may be able to succeed individually as a result of his or her own innate instincts, that same leader feels better and more fulfilled when the success is shared.

The Useful and the Honorable

The rest of the team—the planners and the doers, the specialty players and the substitutes—are often people whose creativity and contributions may go unnoticed because they do not have the internal spark to market themselves or stand out like the natural-born leader.

Nonetheless, the mix of differences meld, and as the group comes together, the team becomes one as it triumphs.

Here is the magic that teams bring to all ranges and types of people. Whether you are studying the 1920 Yankees, the 1950 Canadians, the 1960 Packers, or the 1990 Chicago Bulls, the magic of teams transcends youth and individualism.

The best teams are diverse in age, experience, and abilities. They have an abundance of team integrity and team coherence, which we discuss further in later chapters.

In addition to discussing a team's ability to synthesize differences, this book explores how teams allow even gifted individuals to feel better about themselves. Perhaps one of the reasons literary history is full of tormented storylines of Edgar Allen Poe, John Keats, and even my modern superhero George Orwell is that so many creative greats have worked in relative

isolation, for a patron, or for a distant editor, without the daily pleasures of working as part of a team.

Teamwork allows the gifted and the less than gifted to learn together where they fit. In this book we will explore this fitness in teams, this smoothness we have all felt at times, and look forward to understanding it a bit more.

It was pure pleasure for a decade, for example, to watch how Michael Jordan fit within his court family. Like a true Shakespearean family, his team included not only the multi-faceted talents of Scottie Pippen, whose grace and quieter excellence could withstand the daily scrutiny and praise to Jordan himself. It was a deep family, and a family full of different personalities. Dennis Rodman, who was such a rebounder and such an immense impulse player that his performances allowed thousands to look past his outrageous off-court behaviors. Even today, more than a decade after their amazing feats of competitiveness, I remember those Jordan, Pippen, and Rodman games where the trio made a 10-person team absolutely stunning. I remember, with some hesitation, that Rodman dated Madonna, and I think he had some amazing tattoos. But I more clearly remember his team play and his feats of balance on the court.

The stand-out eccentric genius of Rodman as a great rebounder is often missed when you have Jordan and Pippen playing in tandem, but upon serious examination, you see that the Chicago Bulls went 10 players deep, each with a distinct set of talents and skills known and exploited by a coach who was both a past player and a mentor.




Legacy teams require this depth and this bridging of extreme individualistic differences.

Here is the main point: the great teams allow you to see your strengths and work consistently on your weaknesses, and they allow you to share in the shoulder strength of others moving forward.

In management consulting, this ability to facilitate the shared shoulder strength, what the military calls shared actionable understanding, is the very essence of corporate alignment and change.

Tips for Near-Future Training: An Aside on Sharing Shoulder Strength

Near Future Training Tips

-  All great teams share shoulder strength; they have diversity, depth and range in their talent, not just one or two superstars.
-  Military teams that work best achieve this "shared actionable understanding" with remarkable regularity through extensive training and team building.
-  You can do the same by starting with the arts of competitive frugality, and make your team do more with less.

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The great teams, such as the Dynamo (see the Preamble) and the Jordan, Pippen, and Rodman Chicago Bulls, shared shoulder strength. They have diversity, depth, and range in their talent, not just one or two superstars. The military teams that work best achieve this shared actionable understanding with remarkable regularity through extensive training and team building.

You can do the same. It's best to start with the art of competitive frugality. This will help you battle for balance. But over time, what settles the score for you is finding the right team and swimming in the right ponds that bring you a sense of place. For more on this struggle to achieve freedom and your fate in teams, see www.doingmorewithlessbook.com.

Beyond the Arrogance of Youth

In this book we explore how the life cycle of teams is far more lasting and far more interesting than that of any individual—no matter how heroic or strange. Sociology becomes the only fully accurate biography in this sense.

In teams, we live from game to game, from season to season, and do not, if we measure the success of teams, age as only individuals.

The next chapter makes this point by looking at the stages of an individual life, trying to squeeze out the secret sauce in leading teams. And in the final chapters of this book, we look at the life cycle of teams by applying the first third's principles to teams in action.

Why, for example, did those Jordan, Pippen, and Rodman Chicago Bulls dominate the 1990s, like the Yankees dominated the 1920s? The patterns are recurrent. And what is there today in the Boston Celtics that creates such fascination and chemistry in such a set of different players?

Toward the end of this book, we need to ask the question of all questions: Why is there this fascination with teams if youth and individualism are the preferred characteristics of our popular culture?

At this point, let me fast-forward to a possible answer: this fascination with teams is based on the opposite of existential dread, the dread that we will die.

Instead of the dread and severity found in rampant individualism, the magic and power of teams is based, deep down, in a functional awareness in ordinary time that good teams are common, recurrent, and the very essence of being human. This is nothing super-heavy or unconscious. When we are feeling good watching teams, I think it a celebration of this recurrent human feeling, this sense of a continuum in teams.

Some Self-Reflection

Why has this issue of doing more with teams become so precious to me? Perhaps it is because I have now celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of my marriage, of my firm, and of my books?

No, after some reflection, I do not think the occurrence of this anniversary is sufficient to explain the full depth of the feeling I think we all share in teams.

I think now it is because aging makes sense when seen in the context of society and teams. The passage of time is inevitable, and we first understand how fleeting it is when we do our best in a 48-minute basketball game, for example. But we do not need to feel this anguish as annihilating. In teams we sprout wings and our fight reaches beyond our first expectations.

The next few chapters explore how this notion of extended wings can be understood, both as we age and as we come to know what team play means.

I have learned that there is more lasting satisfaction in being part of teams and peer groups more from the teams themselves than from my own aging process. To be young forever proves no fun compared with being part of the triumph of teams. To be radically alone proves quite dreadful in the end.

This is a set of higher facts in the human experience we all share. But why is this so visible in teamwork?

Animal Magnetism

I live near a town known for its horses, history, and health. Saratoga Springs has many horse stables, plenty of informed horse people, and many tall tales about high rollers and horseplay.

One thing I've learned from this town is that you cannot buy a winner or train a winning horse without having an elaborate support team. Some think they can do it alone, and they often go broke.

People in town tell me that a horse responds to a quiet consistent confidence in its handlers over time, and there is a belief that the more valuable a horse is, the less they respond to immediate demands. Like great athletes or strong soldiers, great horses are built by teams, coaches, and owners over time, not in a season. They know the signals before a race that matters, and they know how to relax after a race.

So when I think about the training and development of great horses, my mind sometimes wanders to the development of high-performing executives. Are they not similar to thoroughbred stallions?

Great business executives often see themselves as the makers of teams. Now, don't get me wrong. Some chief executive officers (CEOs) I've worked for and some whom I have studied are exceptional egoists, and they see the world as if they made the team—with the emphasis on the “I” not only made this team, but I run this team.” But most of the ones who last many races and persist over that fierce test of time are more like thoroughbred stallions. They know how to run among many well-trained competitors. These executives know to take the turns in a measured way, how to sprint when necessary, and how to run hard to the end.

But there is an important characteristic of modern superior executives that is very different from that of the prize-winning colts. They are matured through seasons by team play, and they are very rehearsed in giving credit to the team. The self-aware high performer is also, in my experience, an exceptional team player.

J. Richard Hackman of Harvard on Teams

Without a doubt, the theorists of teams are mounting a robust attack, offering a spectrum of frameworks to appreciate what we all

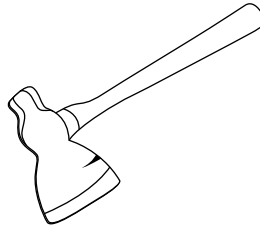
can see. From leadership scholars such as John Kotter to Warren Bennis, everyone is in the game of studying exceptional teams.

One of the best at creating a big-picture framework to see teams form is Harvard professor J. Richard Hackman. His book *Leading Teams: Setting the Stage for Great Performances* is a well-written and well-received scholarly account of the preconditions that allow successful team play.

I like to think we all have dipped our fingers into the real-life glue these five phrases suggest of team success:

1. **The team must be real.** It cannot exist in name only. You cannot dictate teamwork from above or through ownership. *Real* means the team is competitive.
2. **The team must have a compelling direction for it to work.** This is bigger and more immediate than ordinary corporate visioning of purpose. It is compelling to the point of team members not noticing exhaustion and working well beyond ordinary measures of speed, strength, hand-eye coordination, and so on.
3. **The team must have an enabling structure that facilitates teamwork.** I find in corporate consulting that this is a real differentiator. Good governance of owners, coaches, and players allows this, whether you are a senior Navy SEAL or a chief financial officer reviewing cash flow. In Chapter 4, we present a case study on Shaw to underline this feature.
4. **The team must operate in a supportive organizational context where fans and players and owners and coaches mix well.** The smoothness we explore is not one-dimensional. In other words, the team on the field is only one cell in a complex semipermeable membrane of organizations.
5. **The team must have an expert in teamwork coaching.** This is the major missing link in most groups aspiring to be creative teams.

I call this Hackman's hatchet because it cuts through all the competing theories. This five-fingered approach serves many kinds of teams. Like good survivalist gear, it is light enough to carry into the toughest settings.



- Real team
- Compelling direction
- Enabling structure
- Supportive organizational context
- Expert in teamwork coaching

These five bullets can work for team 101 and team 901, but what is missing:

Let me backpedal two minutes.

During the 10 years I played basketball at noon at Clarkson University, bias was everywhere. In general, the engineering faculty I played with expressed a strong bias against my style of “big city B-ball.” They played like engineers, in predictable patterns, and cut all the really wild and exciting quick passes at the core of basketball.

Being an exceptionally consistent free throw specialist during the day, I often had the honor of picking my teammates for the noon pickup games, choosing first from the stray set of players waiting there. I deliberately looked beyond size and the

engineering class, who often were built more like professional offensive linemen than quick, graceful basketball players. Instead, I would “shock the bias” by picking a few girls to be on my team.

In general, I knew these young women were better shots from the corner and from the key, and by watching them, I knew that these unproven ones were competitive in a good pent-up way.

These college girls, some engineers themselves, were just waiting to take on most of the middle-aged engineering faculty out there at noon. Although some of the Clarkson faculty and researchers would prove, again and again, to be quite decent ball players and some were mighty strong going to the baseline and under the boards for their size—overall, for 10 years, they were consistently unable to keep up with my girls. The final scores proved this in a way even male empiricists wished to deny.

Basketball is merciless this way: speed, agility, persistence, and pent-up aggression count. Time after time, the defeated opposing teams let us stay on the court all noon hour and then some.

We would often win five or six pickup games in a row. As if in replay, we’d be beating the new contestants by 5 points in an 11-point pickup game even before some of the senior folks had tied their shoelaces!

Luckily, I had to teach a class every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 1:30, 2:30, and 3:30; otherwise, the other players never would have gotten a chance to roam the courts. It was a very good hour for us spent running full court. We dominated for the better part of a decade.

Such is the bias of men in action. The same pattern can be seen in the history of most professional sports until the 1980s.

Lately, I have been enjoying all the female Olympians from countries such as Turkey and Australia, athletes who are excelling in this new swift century. In the evenings, I spend time reading about historic exceptions that are just now coming to light, having been repressed until this new generation got us

thinking. I began to see how teams empower men and women, boys and girls, the old and the newly aspiring.

Scott Bedbury, who advised Nike on these mounting social changes in his fine book *A New Brand World*, can take some credit for expanding Nike's global marketplace by a factor of 2 when he convinced them that this pent-up interest in sports existed in women. Suddenly, sometime in the 1980s, women needed sports gear ranging from bras and socks to refined high-performance shoes.

Of Redheads and Unexpected Victories

This next example is one for the history books.

On September 9, 2012, the *New York Times* printed a story by Howard Beck about Coach Wilbur Surface and his 1936 All American Red Heads basketball team. The story of these folks is coming to light now because they are being inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Massachusetts, the result of hard work by one man, Molina. You see, Molina was faithful to the tales of his grandmother about these Red Head players, and one picture she had in her attic proved it.

It turns out that his grandmother was one of the 65 players inducted—65 women at once!

The Red Heads once won 96 games in 96 days, and most of the time they beat the rural men they played against. The surprise result was that the Red Heads would move on, and the men had to stay in the town after their humbling defeat!

The strategy was to hit the new town hard and once. Leaving the town for the new contestants was easy; gaining enough fame when constantly on the road was a bit harder.

The Red Heads finally got their night while I was writing this book, the same time the Hall of Fame was being headlined by

“real” greats such as Reggie Miller, Don Nelson, and Jamaal Wilkes.

Nonetheless, the point of my story is they had a real coach, a real team, and some amazing supporting facilitators on and off the court—like all great teams. What lagged behind was cultural recognition of what made them great. (Perhaps in a few years, the story of these Red Heads will be told as a major motion picture starring Scarlett Johansson.)

Let’s keep this bias in perspective. This all occurred in the 1930s—about 60 years before the prime-time coverage of the WNBA. This all came down about 36 years before the political rules that allow female play (Title IX). And it all happened a good many years before I did the same rural basketball trick in Potsdam, New York with the Clarkson crew.

According to Howard Beck and the *Times*, “Years ago, Molina discovered a black and white photograph in his grandmother’s attic in Glastonbury, Connecticut. It featured his grandmother, Bernice Gondeck Molina, and several other women, the 1934 women’s basketball team for the J. B. Williams Soap factory.” After that, he removed the kimono surrounding this idea that girls cannot jump and score.

For the record, Matt Zeysing, the historian of the Basketball Hall of Fame, picks at the edges when he notes that not all of the girls were redheads.

The rest dyed their hair for the season.

Getting Deeper Than Hackett and Harvard

In giving you the list of Hackett’s preconditions, and then in reminding you of the special exceptional teams neglected in the past, such as the Red Heads or our opening aside on the Dynamo of Eastern Europe (see the Preamble), we are still mostly scratching

surfaces, no matter how nice that feels. We are noticing special teams without yet explaining what makes them meaningful.

Near Future Training Tip



It is our contributions to teams—not just our individual achievements—that get best replicated and extended.

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The magic of teams resides in something deeper than statistics. This “something larger” cannot be valued only in terms of individuals, wins, and statistics. Instead it offers a glimpse at a more mature, electric understanding of winning.

To further explore the importance in this point, we next examine the human life cycle of teams in Chapter 2.

In that chapter, we are consciously looking for the spots of sudden rightness when we are matured to enjoy a team. Why? Because there is magic in how we acquire a sense of accomplishment larger than the self.

Why an Aside on Aging

There are many, many good books on teams. But most of them jump us right into the action of teams, without underlining the phases that got them ready to be great as teams. I feared that without fully appreciating how this magic of maturation through teams occurs in a world where infants are born selfish and where new team players are commonplace in their excellence, we would take a wonder for granted and miss the point of it all.

In addition, I feel deeply that we (meaning modern civilization) need to rethink both Freud and Marx in a very out loud way.

Clearly, as we age, we mature way past the imperatives of Freud and Marx, while many corporate and social organizations wrongly keep measuring us by these nineteenth-century individualistic measures.

At the same time, in exploring Cicero's classic on a well-spent life, we explore how and why teams make us suspend our own time clocks, look around in a new way, and enjoy a glimpse at something much larger than ourselves.

To Be Young Forever Is No Fun: Summary

- ★ What makes this world so severe is an over-reliance on youth and individualism.
- ★ To be young forever is no fun compared to winning as a team.
- ★ The way to outline the problems of youth is through teamwork and team building.
- ★ Teams defy ordinary time by providing something larger than individual motivation and accomplishment.