



21 THE THREE CS

It took me nearly thirty years to figure out a plan for how to build a kingdom dream team—a collection of colleagues with whom I could joyfully do effective, God-honoring ministry over the long haul. I tried all sorts of mental grids for prioritizing people-qualities along the way, but the only one that stuck was made up of three simple Cs: character, competence, and chemistry.

*I tried all sorts of mental grids for prioritizing people-qualities along the way, but the only one that stuck was made up of three simple Cs: character, competence, and chemistry.*

It's no accident that "character" is up first. When new staff members come on board, I need *maximum* energy, *maximum* effort, and *maximum* help from them. Most likely, the reason the person was hired in the first place is because there are problems that have to get solved in order for kingdom ground to be gained. If the first ninety days of a person's employment are frittered away because I'm forced to do a character reclamation project on his or her life, then we're all in big trouble.

Good character is tough to discern in a fifteen-minute interview. You have got to do your due diligence to be sure the person you're about to invite onto the team has a proven track record of being a truth-teller, a covenant-keeper, a person who seeks to be conformed to the image of Christ, someone who manages relationships well, and one who credits the efforts of others when a victory is won.

After a person passes the character test, and *only* afterward, I check for competence. When I'm working to fill a key role, I think through the competency requirements. If I need someone with a teaching gift, then I make no apologies for scouring the planet for the best teacher I can find, and then I go after that person with great determination.

I've found that persistence is often the key here. If someone tells me no, I can't let it deter me. I must keep the conversation alive by seeking to truly

teamwork and communication | 75

understand the other person's perceived obstacles and then, depending on how badly I need them on board, doing everything in my power to help overcome them. I counsel senior leaders in this regard all the time. They ask me how long they should pursue the person who is "perfect" for a particular role, and my response is the same every time: "How many lunches are you willing to buy?"

Unless God gives you a clear signal to stop, my advice is to keep extending the invitation.

John Ortberg was one of the finest team members Willow ever had, but when I first approached him with the teaching pastor opportunity, he said no. I probed a little further, and he said, "Bill, the main reason I can't come is because I have only been at my present church for two years. To leave now would be unfair to our people."

I told him that was the best news I'd heard all day. "Great! I understand perfectly. So in twelve months, then, you'll join us? We would be delighted to wait that long. We believe that you are the best fit for our needs."

A little over a year later, John joined us and served heroically for almost ten years.

Never apologize for looking for maximum competence in your new teammates, gifts and talents and capabilities that will take your ministry to the next level of effectiveness. But before you agree to hire them, be sure to run them through the chemistry screen.

I used to be a doubter when it came to emphasizing "fit" when hiring a new staff person. If they nailed the character requirement and had competence to spare, I was quite sure they would do fine. They'd learn to mesh with the existing team and me once they were on board. Not always so. I learned the hard way to trust my gut on this: if I get negative vibes the first two or three times I'm in someone's presence, it's likely I'm not going to enjoy working with that person day in and day out. Sounds crass, I know, but I have learned this painful lesson too many times.

I presented this framework at the Leadership Summit one year, and in response I got a batch of letters from pastors and business leaders who totally disagreed with what I'd said. "You shouldn't decide about a person based on how well they fit with the other team members," one said. Another claimed that "competence ought to go first, because you can smooth out the character stuff over time."

Within a few years, however, most of them had written to me again—this time to ask for a copy of that Summit talk. Nearly all of them had charged

the

ahead and hired someone who didn't fit the three-C grid—or who didn't fit the three items in the right order—and had paid dearly for the decision. I smiled when I got that second batch of letters because I could relate all too well to what these leaders were walking through. After cleaning up my share of royal messes, I finally reached the point where I decided I would never knowingly violate the three Cs again.