



# How to Create a Winning Leadership Team

What can the CEO and HR director do to ensure the senior executives are aligned and high performing? **Dawn Murden** finds out

**I**t is relatively easy for a CEO to agree a strategy with the board. The hard part lies in deciding the mix of skills and personalities the ExCo requires to deliver it, and then galvanising those functional experts into a cohesive team.

**Tom Beedham**, Director of Programme Management at Criticaleye, comments: "The CEO has a responsibility to build

an executive team that is aligned to shared goals and motivated by a clear sense of purpose."

A wise chief executive won't attempt to do this on their own, but will seek the counsel of a HR director who understands how to link leadership skills to the business strategy.

How should they go about it? We asked four business leaders from within the Criticaleye Community to tell us. Here's what they had to say. >

Find out more about our upcoming [Human Resources Director Retreat](#), where leadership capability will be a key focus.



**Ian Bowles**  
CEO, Tribal Group

## Encourage Collaboration

*Ian Bowles, CEO at Tribal Group, discusses how he encourages collaboration and a shared understanding of the business among functional experts.*

High-powered and experienced functional experts can struggle when it comes to driving overall company performance as a team.

The executive team needs to take an enterprise-wide view. Acknowledge the unique talents and contributions of each team member by communicating functional goals and their interdependencies across the company. This encourages mutual understanding and allows executives to hold each other to account in an open and constructive manner.

Yet this is not always easy. Most have a view on the shortcomings of other functions and their leaders, believing things should be done differently.

As a first-time CEO, I had an executive colleague who, while they had 30 years' experience in their function, did not have 30 years' experience in the environment we were working in. Despite this, they would opine about every executives' area, then fiercely resist criticism of their own function.

**My key tip:** You must remove any executive who undermines others, lacks integrity and transparency, or cannot take others' perspectives into account.

“The executive team needs to take an enterprise-wide view”



**Diana Breeze**  
Group HR Director, Land Securities

## Build a Unified Team

*Diana Breeze, Group HR Director at Land Securities, reveals how she supported the CEO in his quest to build a united executive team.*

When I joined the business in 2013, it's fair to say there wasn't a properly constituted executive team for the whole organisation. That might sound odd, but the main board oversaw the business while three executive directors, plus the company secretary, met once a week to handle broader business issues.

The real decision making took place in committees – one for the London business and another for the retail business. While we had strong governance, we weren't maximising the potential of operating as one organisation.

When we first put the executive team together, it morphed into just taking collective decisions and managing issues

that weren't specific to the two businesses. It took us a while to realise this wasn't the most efficient way to operate.

As a result, the CEO and I sat down and drew up a terms of reference document for the executive committee, which made it clear that it was not there to do people's jobs for them. The ExCo existed as an advisory group to the CEO and every member of the team. Being clear on the purpose of a team is the right starting point, but we came to that slightly late.

**My key tip:** I had to spend as much time as I could with the CEO and be receptive to ideas. We spent quite a lot of time closeted away – I was there to listen and challenge when it was appropriate. You must build a constructive and supportive relationship.



**Howard Kerr**  
CEO, BSI

## Never Stop Developing

*Howard Kerr, CEO at BSI, explains why constant reflection and development are essential to the company's growth.*

When I joined BSI in 2008, I saw an organisation that was full of managers, but very few leaders. Consequently, the leadership team required a fundamental rebuild. I brought in six people to the ExCo – a mixture of internal and external hires.

I believe in continuously thinking about how to remould the team for the future. One needs to map the leadership behaviours and capabilities as the business strategy evolves.

An important part of this was realising that we didn't have a clear picture of our ExCo's competencies or the team dynamics. We had to be more honest about our individual and collective strengths and weaknesses. I worked closely with the Group HR Director to assess that. At first, there were some who found that type of evaluation a little bit challenging – even me.

To this day, I regularly talk with my Chairman about whether I am still the right leader to take the organisation forward. At times, it's taken me to some new areas. I've had to reflect on my experiences and leadership capabilities, and examine whether the learnings and skills can be applied to present situations.

“If you don't self-assess, somebody's going to do it for you”

**My key tip:** If you don't self-assess, somebody's going to do it for you. You need to anticipate that. Once you get used to healthy critique, it becomes easier. It also sends a message to your team that you expect them to be doing it with their people too.



**Anne Stevens**  
Board Trustee, Over The Wall

## No One is Too Senior for Praise

*Anne Stevens, Criticaleye Board Mentor and former Vice President for People & Organisation at Rio Tinto Copper, suggests that more leaders need to know they are valued.*

Leaders need reassurance that they are doing a good job. It's unfortunate because in many cases they may be greatly appreciated, but no one tells them. When you reach the ExCo level it's assumed leaders don't need that feedback anymore, but I think the opposite is true.

If you've got ambitious senior executives, it's important they understand their worth to an organisation and can see opportunities down the line, otherwise they'll get demotivated. That's why succession planning and development are important – and the HR Director can help with this.

However, don't substitute unrealistic promises for articulating an individual's value. Never make anyone a promise you can't guarantee to deliver, such as putting them on the 'chief executive track'.

Succession plans must adapt to changing business directions and knee jerk reactions should be avoided at all costs.

**My key tip:** Sometimes the most difficult part of the HR Director's role is helping the CEO see that executive development is required. A key role of a HRD is to ensure that the CEO is equipped and supported to do this equitably.