

Team-Team-Team

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Our friend, Zach Shulman is a partner at Cayuga Venture Fund. In this recent blog post, he talks about the importance of the entire team, not just the management group or the superstars.

You all likely know that most VCs consider the management team to be the top measure of potential success of the venture. This post is not about that point, at least not directly.

I want to instead focus on the importance of the entire team (not just management) and the importance of making sure that the team can play together. I am going to use my past weekend's soccer experience as an analogy.

I organized and played on an Over 40 soccer team this past weekend in a small tournament in Ithaca. There was no Over 50 bracket or I would have played in that! So, there were 4 total teams in the Over 40 bracket. Two teams from Ithaca (one of which was mine) and then one team from Vermont and one from Binghamton. You are going to have to trust me that no matter how in good shape you might be, playing 4 soccer games in one weekend when you are over 40 means that you can barely walk come Monday. Advil turns into candy.

When organizing the team, I managed to get this one guy who is an exceptional player – better than anyone else on the team. I will call him Jim for purposes of this post. On Saturday, we tied both of our games (against Vermont and Binghamton). The catch was that Jim could not play on Sunday. I knew this going in. And to make things even more interesting, Vermont outplayed us and we literally tied the score on a questionable call that resulted in us getting a penalty kick, which Jim converted. Time ran out and we tied 2-2. Vermont team was pissed, but that is soccer. We knew that the top 2 teams in the group would play for the championship Sunday afternoon.

Well, you guessed it....the top 2 teams were mine and Vermont. Vermont wanted revenge, clearly. We were without Jim. I was a bit concerned. But we ended up playing exceptionally well – better without Jim! We won 2-0. It was kind of unbelievable.

Relating back to startups – it is not good to rely on one person. Not the CEO, not the head of engineering, not the head of sales. You get the point. Playing together as a team is the path to the best results. CEOs who don't realize this will often get fired or just fail. I think one of the primary roles of the CEO is to make sure that the team dynamics are as good as possible and get the entire company pulling in the same direction. This is not to say that there cannot be stars on the team, but it is WAY better if the stars end up rotating around. The larger the group of people that feel like they contributed to a win, the better off the company will perform. And the successes will keep coming.

My entire Over 40 soccer team all felt that they contributed – we only had one sub for our last game so that is an understatement. Team play captured the championship. Make it happen!

Zach writes a Blog about business, entrepreneurialship, and startups at www.ithacavc.com

