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5 Things That Set Great Teams Apart

What top teams do—and how to become one

By Julie Genjac
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When I'm coaching advisory teams, one question comes up again and again: What are the best teams doing that others aren't?

People often assume becoming a great team requires sweeping changes. It doesn't. Great teams don't do dramatically different things—they do them more intentionally.

Most advisory teams spend their days focused on clients, meetings, service requests, and the countless demands of running a practice. But the best teams don't leave the way the practice operates to chance. No matter how busy things get, they make time to examine how they work together, identify pain points, and look for ways to improve.

This guide explores five areas where practical changes can help your practice run more effectively today and position it for future success.

What We'll Cover:

1. Defining Roles
2. Strategic Hiring
3. Leveraging Technology
4. Communicating Internally
5. Succession Planning

1 Defining Roles

Defining roles goes beyond titles. It means making the responsibilities within each role clear.

On a good team, people often step in wherever they're needed, reflecting strong commitment and shared responsibility. But relying on flexibility alone can mean work gets duplicated, delayed, or handled inconsistently depending on who takes it on.

Great teams preserve that flexibility while making responsibilities and ownership clear.

What Great Teams Do

- Give each key responsibility an owner and clear expectations
- Align responsibilities with what people do well and where they want to grow
- Give owners room to improve how the work gets done

Apply It to Your Team

Where does work tend to get delayed, revisited, or passed between multiple people?

What responsibilities have evolved over time without being formally assigned?

Where could an owner do more than complete the task and improve how the work gets done?

Action Steps

If needed, ask each team member to track their recurring activities for 30 days. Compare the results to uncover duplication, work without an assigned owner, and opportunities to better match responsibilities with people's strengths and development interests.

Based on your assessment, identify one responsibility that would benefit from clearer ownership:

Assign a primary owner:

Assign a backup/secondary owner (if applicable):

What should improve once this responsibility is clarified?

Be sure to document the updated roles and responsibilities and revisit them as the work changes. Clear ownership helps people move beyond completing tasks to improving the areas they own, creating greater consistency and deeper expertise over time.

2 Strategic Hiring

When a key team member leaves, good teams move quickly to restore capacity and minimize disruption. But looking for the same type of candidate may not fully address what the team needs now or in the future.

Great teams pause to consider whether a different mix of skills and capabilities would better serve the practice going forward.

What Great Teams Do

- Identify where limited capacity or expertise is holding the team back
- Anticipate the skills the practice will need as it evolves
- Determine whether the next hire should add capacity, capability, or both

Apply It to Your Team

Where is the team experiencing the greatest strain today?

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What opportunities are difficult to pursue because of limited time, skills, or capacity?

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If your next hire could strengthen one area of the practice, what capability would create the greatest value?

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Action Steps

Identify what the next team member should help the practice accomplish.

- ☐ Elevate client experience
- ☐ Support business development
- ☐ Add specialized expertise
- ☐ Increase team capacity
- ☐ Other: ____________________

The most important skill or expertise this person should bring is:

____

____

The growth goal or business priority this hire would support is:

____

____

Adding capacity can solve today’s challenge. Adding capability can shape what the team becomes tomorrow.

3 Leveraging Technology

Good teams leverage technology, with people using systems in ways that help them get things done. But when useful features go untapped, work may take longer or require more effort than necessary.

Great teams share knowledge, help each other use their systems effectively, and continue exploring ways to get more from them.

What Great Teams Do

- Give one person responsibility for improving how the team uses technology
- Agree on how core systems and workflows will be used
- Build technology learning into team meetings

Apply It to Your Team

Which systems or processes aren't widely understood across the team, and where could training or shared knowledge help?

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What features or capabilities of existing tools aren't being used today?

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Action Steps

Identify a technology owner and determine what they'll oversee. Then select one or more areas to address:

- ☐ Improve consistency in how an existing system is used
- ☐ Explore an underutilized feature or capability
- ☐ Host a technology training or knowledge sharing
- ☐ Document an important workflow or process
- ☐ Other: ______________________

What should improve as a result?

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Getting more value from technology doesn't always require new tools. It often comes from taking full advantage of existing systems and helping others use them more effectively.

4 Communicating Internally

Good teams communicate regularly through meetings, quick check-ins, and informal conversations. But when information is shared in different places, it's easy to assume everyone's on the same page.

Great teams use focused meetings to bring people, information, and ideas together and turn "we should" into a clear commitment.

What Great Teams Do

- Assign someone to organize the meeting and build the agenda around priorities
- Confirm ownership of action items before the meeting ends
- Review open action items at the next meeting

Apply It to Your Team

Which team meetings consistently create value? Which do not?

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Where do ideas or commitments tend to stall after they're discussed?

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Where are meeting decisions, notes, and action items currently tracked?

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Action Steps

Identify one meeting or communication practice to improve:

- [ ] Clarify the purpose of a meeting or planning session
- [ ] Assign a meeting organizer to create the agenda and track takeaways
- [ ] Eliminate or redesign meetings that no longer add enough value

Meeting organizer: ________________

Timing or cadence: ________________

A consistent rhythm helps ensure the right conversations happen at the right time and lead to action.

5 Succession Planning

When a seasoned financial professional begins to scale back, good teams focus on maintaining client comfort and continuity. Other team members are gradually introduced in supporting roles, but clients may still view the seasoned professional as their primary connection to the practice.

Great teams build continuity before a formal transition is needed. Over time, clients come to know and trust other team members, so the eventual change feels like a natural progression rather than a disruption.

What Great Teams Do

- Give future leaders meaningful roles in client meetings and follow-up
- Help future leaders and other team members get to know clients beyond their finances
- Transition responsibilities while the retiring financial professional is still involved

Apply It to Your Team

Which client relationships depend most on the seasoned financial professional?

What client interests, preferences, or relationship history would be difficult for someone else to know?

Which parts of a future transition could begin earlier without disrupting the client experience?

Action Steps

Identify one opportunity to strengthen continuity before a formal transition is needed:

- [ ] Have a future leader lead part of an upcoming client meeting
- [ ] Give another team member responsibility for a client follow-up
- [ ] Begin transitioning one client-facing responsibility

What could you begin doing now to make a future transition feel more natural to clients?

Succession works best when it doesn't feel like succession. When relationships and knowledge are shared over time, transitions become a natural continuation of the client experience rather than a significant change.

“Great teams don’t do dramatically different things. They do them more intentionally.

Changes That Create Far-Reaching Results

In my work with teams across the country, I've seen that an improvement in one area can have an impact well beyond the issue it was meant to address. Clearer roles can lead to stronger performance, better meetings can lead to better follow-through, and broader client relationships can create greater continuity.

Start with one opportunity. Wherever you begin, the benefits can extend across the entire team and practice.

Next Steps

1. Review the five areas and choose the area where change could have the greatest impact

2. Review that section with your team and work through the action steps together

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With over 20 years in the financial services industry, Julie Genjac (Jen Jack) is a Certified Advanced Corporate Coach who's passionate about helping financial professionals and teams optimize their practices. She regularly speaks to financial professionals and clients about emerging trends and opportunities in the industry. She also co-hosts the Hartford Funds Human Centric Investing Podcast, which features thought leaders from both inside and outside financial services.

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