

**FREE GUIDE**

# **CREATING A STRONG TEAM COVENANT**

**BRYAN D. SIMS, Ph.D.**

# BUILDING HEALTHY TEAMS

Rather than having a team leader dictate covenantal commitments and expectations to a team, there is great power in giving team members a role (and thus ownership) in this process. SLI uses four questions to guide the process of building a covenant that will work for any type of team. **For a sample covenant, see the end of this guide.**

## Four Questions to Build Covenant

1. **What are the characteristics of great leaders?**
2. **What are the characteristics of great teams?**
3. **What are our team's non-negotiables?**
4. **How will we refine our non-negotiables into a team covenant?**

**Questions 1 and 2: SLI assumes that the members of teams will become spiritual leaders over time, so there is both a spiritual-leader emphasis and a team emphasis here.**

Given these emphases, the opening two questions in our covenant-building process focus on the ideal by asking people to think about the characteristics of great leaders and great teams. Brainstorming these questions encourages dynamic team interaction, which is key for adaptive leadership. We simply ask these questions and then take notes on a whiteboard while a team throws out every idea that comes to mind. Typically, these opening questions net long lists of potential characteristics that seed the next question.

**Question 3 focuses on identifying team non-negotiables.**

This question invites critical thinking and discernment around what individuals are willing to commit themselves to. I often introduce it like this: "This is the only point in the entire adaptive leadership process where I encourage you to be selfish. I want you to think about your own personal non-negotiables that would enable you to be "all in" with your commitment to this team and purpose. They may come from your own convictions of what you desire, or they may result from previous hurts or betrayals. Either way, write down your own non-negotiables."

Once each person has written down their personal non-negotiables, each is invited to share those with the team. There are often striking similarities in what is shared, and this vulnerability of sharing fosters trust. We again simply capture this list of non-negotiables on a whiteboard.

**The 4th final question/step to building covenant is to refine those non-negotiables into clear commitments that the team can be accountable to.**

This often begins by grouping the non-negotiables into categories of three to five larger ideas. Then we make sure to clearly define each category and specify how we will be accountable to it. Some groups do this in simple bullet points while others craft more of a short narrative. One example of a category would be “love and respect for one another,” under which one of the bullet points could be “confidentiality.” Confidentiality must be clearly defined, so a group might decide on something like “keeping personal sharing in the group.” Not everything in a team will be confidential, so it is important to determine what must be kept within the group in such a way that the team has clear commitment and expectations. *(See the sample covenant at the bottom of this document.)*

Building a covenant can create the environment for healthy relationships, but **the key is relational accountability**. Because of this, the covenant must be reviewed in each meeting. This review is often merely a brief check-in to make sure all hearts are clear. The check-in, though, is always also an opportunity for deeper sharing and even confession that deepens trust and commitment. If covenant is ignored, over time the commitment of a team will wane. If covenant is broken, this objective written document gives the team a way to have hard conversations. If covenant is kept, over time the team will grow into greater interdependence and unity.

When people are working together, it is common for relational conflicts to emerge. When there are differing expectations or values on the team, this can erode into dysfunction. As we have discussed, having a clear and shared purpose is critical in forming a team. However, even with shared purpose, conflict can arise. This is precisely why we form covenant together in the opening team session because the importance of a healthy environment cannot be overstated.

When we have a clear covenant that articulates our shared commitment and expectations, then the covenant itself can be used to navigate our relational conflicts. For instance, when conflict arises, we can look together at the covenant we have created to help us discern how to proceed. Rather than subjectivity, the covenant provides a lens to objectively review our interactions with one another.

If they are well facilitated, these conflict conversations can serve to develop deeper trust, respect, and understanding as teams discuss what might have otherwise been undiscussable. The covenant, in this case, keeps us from a mere “culture of nice” and instead gives us boundaries and guidelines for how to speak the truth in love. Doing this well takes practice, and sometimes the help of a coach or facilitator can be beneficial. However, the covenant reminds us of the promises we have made to one another and helps us keep those commitments.

***Keep scrolling for a sample covenant.***

# Sample Covenant

We want to be a church that purposefully glorifies Christ together and in the surrounding community. To do this we adopt the following commitments and practices:

- Live in freedom and grace, as individuals and as a congregation.
- Generate new church ministries.
- Hold each other accountable in our personal discipleship.

**In support of these commitments and practices, we make these covenants:**

## **Prayer**

- Focus on a specific prayer need as a team each session.
- Pray weekly for other group members as, together, we seek God's leading and direction.

## **Presence**

- Commit to full engagement in the process by attending every session, notifying.
- Members in case of an absence.
- Offer grace and trust to each other.
- Complete homework prior to attending team meetings.
- Begin and end meetings on time.

## **Confidentiality**

- Use discretion when sharing details from team discussions.
- Keep confidential all personal concerns and accountability plans.
- Refrain from intentionally saying words that could hurt or be perceived as hurtful.

## **Throughout the journey, we commit to:**

- Encourage each other.
- Celebrate all accomplishments, big or small, personal or congregational.
- Enjoy the journey of growth on which God has called us.

*\*This document should be used as a sample; it contains only general ideas of what a Covenant could look like.*

# BRYAN D. SIMS

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Bryan D. Sims is a pioneer, coach, writer, and professor and is the author of *Leading Together: The Holy Possibility of Harmony and Synergy in the Face of Change* (100Movements Publishing, 2022). For more than two decades, he has been a Leadership and Change Coach with Spiritual Leadership, Inc. (SLI) where he has walked with leaders, teams, churches, and organizations to bring spiritual awakening and missional effectiveness. He also serves in leadership with the Movement Leaders Collective and is a professor of Leadership at Asbury Theological Seminary. He and his wife MyLinda have been happily married since 1997 and have four children: Isaiah, Luke, Silas, and Lydia.

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