

WE CAN ALL BE LEADERS; WE ALL NEED TO BE, TO REALLY SUCCEED



On the evening of January 16, 1938, Benny Goodman took the stage at New York's famous Carnegie Hall with his big band. It was a big risk and there was some nervousness among the band members because it was the first time that a swing band played there, and many critics felt they didn't belong in such a prestigious venue. The opening number was one of their regular numbers, "Don't Be That Way," which was normally very popular. But it fell flat. The band was stiff, and the audience reserved. This was not a good start.

Then, midway through the song, the drummer, Gene Krupa, started dropping strong drum accent "bombs" that stood out. He then played a two-bar break that lasted only three seconds, but brought the audience in. As Krupa [said later](#), "I knew I had to do something. So, I had my drum breaks. So, I just hit everything I possibly could. Made a lot of noise. It woke everybody up. From then on it was smooth sailing." He was right; that shook up the band, they loosened up, and the audience responded. If you listen to the recording now, you can hear, and feel, this change happening. The concert went on to become a success and proved that swing music belonged.

This illustrates the power of having a member of a team realize things aren't as they should be and step up to move things in the right direction. I asked Allyson Briggs, singer and band leader of [Fleur Seule](#), about the role played by each member of a band.

"A strong team is not one thing, it is many individuals keeping things flowing to appear as one," she said. "When I come off a three-gig day, the guys know I need a little extra energy and support on that brunch gig the next day. If we get into a tune and someone is lost in the chart, we all sense it and rally to pick them up where they are to get back on track, while not letting the audience know."

Being part of a team is holding your own yet knowing when to jump in to help."

While [Agile Scrum](#) teams may have a "scrum master," every member has a responsibility. They cannot rely on only one person to provide leadership. Effective teams follow these practices:

- **Be aware.** Members of effective teams sense their surroundings, not just what is in front of them. The team is more than you and your task; both you and your code need to fit with others. Team members need to be aware of what others—and their code—are doing.
- **Communicate.** Everyone must contribute; each member has a part to play. If developers see an area that could be improved, or something that they feel is wrong, they need to say something to the team and then decide together how to make things better. When small problems are found later, they may have become bigger problems—unspoken problems can't be resolved.
- **Focus on commitments.** Teams make [commitments](#) during each sprint at the planning stage. When stories are dependent on one another, any lateness creates a ripple effect that affects the team and possibly other teams, the organization, and end users. Find blockers and let the necessary people know if your commitment deadlines cannot be met, and remember to honor your commitment to your team members first.
- **Offer support.** This can occur in two places. One is during the daily standup when developers might mention impediments they are facing. This is an opportunity to offer assistance if you have the ability to do so. The other is during the [sprint review](#), when you can show appreciation for your team members' contributions.
- **Know your teammates.** While all team members may have common skills, each also has areas where they excel or can improve, such as a comfort level with certain languages and especially with areas of the code. Knowing your teammates can also help with task assignments and when deciding whether to leverage the skills of the person in the best position to succeed or give someone else a chance to gain experience. During code reviews, prior to looking at the code, keep notes on potential problem areas the team has been facing.

A great development team should be like great jazz musicians. They should play well off of each other, with each picking up where others left off and focusing on the whole group, as well as their role within it. Only by combining their individual talents and roles can they produce something that will really matter in the long run.