

Chapter Twelve

Pulling it All Together:

The Role of the Team

Captain

Who is the team captain? The team captain may vary from company to company, from event to

event and from year to year. The captain may be the head of a running club, its race director, or an appointee. It may be a small ad hoc group of individuals determined to get to a particular event, someone from the wellness/fitness area of the company, or someone hired by the competitors to coach and captain the team.

Sometimes it's just the person who seems to take on the responsibilities for a given year—or year after year.

What does the team captain do? The job of the captain also varies. In some cases, the captain may be able to focus on the team only, leaving the operational decisions, such as room arrangements, uniforms, transportation, and funding to others. In other circumstances the captain may be in charge of everything, but delegating wherever possible.

Whatever the captain's role, the captain probably needs to know some or all of the arrangements being made. Therefore, you need to make the following arrangements to get a team to a national competition. For local events, some of the arrangements will not be necessary; for some events, arrangements peculiar to those events will be required. Whatever the case, the following list can serve as a guide.

Prerace

Funding: Before you can ask people to join your team, it helps to let them know what their financial outlay will be. Will your company help fund the team? If yes, what will they pay for? If no, will you be involved in some fund-raisers? If you fund-raise, how will you distribute those funds? (For more on fund-raising, see Chapter 11.)

Prepared by Jane Arnold, who has captained and nurtured the CIGNA team through many a track meet.

You also need to know how you will pay the entry fee. Can you get funding for that, or do you have to collect from team members? How about uniforms? Transportation? Housing? Sometimes, if you look, you can get different areas of your company to pay for different costs.

Funding the entry fee is key. Once you find that money, you can tell everyone you are going to the meet and begin to get organized.

If any funding is coming from the company or the team itself, someone needs to apportion the money and advise the team of rules and reporting (if any) connected to getting or spending the funding received.

For example, at CIGNA we have found support in different areas of the company in different years and received varying degrees of funding. For the most recent year, rather than look for large amounts to fund the team, we asked competitors to ask their own managers to fund their trip to the Corporate National Track and Field Event. The amounts and the reporting, then, were between individuals and their management. Those who could get funding or were willing to pay their own way were automatically on the team. Those who could not get funded by their own management or were unwilling to pay their own way were eligible to receive the company funding that was available. These people were picked on the basis of merit (i.e., their potential ability to score) and their prior support of our team's efforts.

For those on the team budget, we paid the lowest airfare from their city of origin—no more—and 4 nights in the dorms, double occupancy. An area of the company that pays for uniforms and entry fees for all our company teams paid for those items.

For the first time, we insisted everyone on the team budget book travel through our budget code—

Summary Checklist for Team Captains and Team Organizers

- Establish recruiting and information system
- Secure adequate funding
- Pay entry fees
- Secure and distribute uniforms
- Arrange transportation
- Reserve and organize rooms
- Make other travel arrangements
- Establish participation rules
- Coordinate regular team communications
- Maintain team roster
- Arrange for tarp at meets
- Organize premeet team meeting
- Distribute numbers to participants
- At track—register teams, time events, check official results
- Conduct postmortem and begin planning for next year!

thus avoiding all but a few travel books to settle.

Recruiting: Some companies have running teams. Other companies just have runners who get together as the spirit moves them for various races.

If the team captain wants to put together the best possible team, then the team captain needs to know where the best competitors are.

At CIGNA, we have people all over the country—and, when we can afford to get them to the States, all over the world—who can contribute to our team.

The trick is to find them and to keep track of them. (See Chapter 3 for a bunch of both practical and creative ideas for recruiting runners.)

We have begun to send notices to our field offices all over the country. It's tough to get the notices into the right hands, but when you begin the process, the team grows as the word spreads.

In addition, some of our team members travel,

recruiting as they meet runners and field athletes in other CIGNA offices.

Several of our team members keep an up-to-date information system on their computers, and a number of us, including the team captain, have discs to update the list. The list includes: name, gender, birthdate, phone number, routing/address, state, times/distances, funding status. We can sort according to age and gender, state, name (alphabetically), and funding status.

Normally, the meet will have a host hotel. It is very important to make reservations as early as possible. The host hotel usually books up quickly.

Note: We always ask for birthdate—not age. Age requirements vary from race to race, so we do the math rather than hope each runner knows the individual meet rules.

Each year our list grows, even though we lose a

few people to injury, other interests, or other companies.

Rooms/travel/housekeeping: Rooms for the meet need to be reserved in advance. Someone needs to take responsibility for deciding where the team will stay and calling ahead for space. If anyone on the team wants to stay away from the team, that person needs to take responsibility for making arrangements (and, on our team, paying for them). At the meet, someone needs to be the liaison—checking the attendee list, answering team and host questions, straightening out areas of confusion, and, eventually, seeing that the bill gets paid.

Travel can be booked by individuals under whatever constraints the team sets. In some instances money can be saved by asking the whole team to travel together. In other circumstances, individuals can make whatever reservations work for them—tying this trip into a business trip, for example, or combining it with a vacation.

Whatever the travel arrangements, some coordination can be helpful in getting team members to the race site more conveniently and inexpensively. Some coordination is essential, however, to know when team members are planning to arrive—so you know when to expect them—and when they plan to leave. You cannot afford to schedule competitors to compete before they are likely to arrive or after they plan to depart!

Communication: As teams grow, it is essential to have a means to get information to team members. A computer information system is helpful, particularly if you can use it to print labels. If your company has E-Mail that reaches most team members, you can use that too.

If you use the phone, prepare to put your job on hold (and maybe, on the line) as the race approaches. Our experience is that it is best to ask team members not to call. Phone calls can never be eliminated—but they can be restricted to relatively reasonable amounts, particularly with the availability of a fax machine.

Some companies or company running clubs have newsletters which can be used instead of or as a supplement to other communications.

You need to communicate a number of matters. First, you need to let people know that you are looking for competitors. We normally send out mailings immediately after the National Meet—when everyone is still inspired—and again at the first of the year.

Around the end of the first quarter, we send out a request for interest in the Nationals, Regionals, and other corporate races. For the Regionals and other races, we try to get different individuals involved in organization and integrate their efforts

into our planning for the Nationals.

Several more notes go out regarding the Nationals: a second request for interest, together with a note regarding funding status; a note announcing team membership or telling competitors that they are welcome to come at their own expense; a note requesting information—flight arrangements (or other travel arrangements) and expected arrival time, need for the team's dorm or hotel rooms, confirmation of funding status, updated competition results; final memo with time and place of team meeting, our expectations of the competitors as representatives of our company, and last-minute housekeeping.

We always remind our team not to check racing shoes with their luggage, since an untoward incident in 1984...

Roster: The last memo should also include the tentative roster and events schedule. People like to know what events they will compete in—and when those events will occur. Ideally, people would like to know this information well in advance of the meet, so they can train properly. Realistically, advance notice is tough, especially with the many gender/age requirements in the corporate track meets. A lot depends on who is coming, who is injured, and who is in the best shape!

Uniforms: Somebody has to order uniforms and get them paid for—in time for the meet. Comfort, price, appearance, and availability are all key.

Protection from the elements: Most teams will need to buy or rent some kind of tarp for protection from rain or rays. A tarp has to be ordered, paid for, and set up at the race.

At the Race

The captain cannot do everything, but the following has to get done!

- **Team meeting and housekeeping matters:** Prior to the race—the night before, in the case of the Nationals—the team needs to get together to become a team.
- Team members from different divisions and locations need to meet each other, meet their relay teams, and understand what needs to get done and who will do it.
- In addition, numbers need to be distributed—and someone needs to be the designated numbers person for people who can't make the meeting.
- Uniforms need to be distributed, if they haven't been already, and someone has to be appointed as the designated uniform person for people who can't make the meeting.
- Final rosters need to be distributed, with the caveat that the roster is never final until the event in question

has begun.

- If you have specific rules to share, this is a good time to share them. There are a few rules that must be stressed (to avoid disqualification).
- Baton Exchange Zones are critical. Makes sure all your participants know where these zones are. The officials will describe the zones. If your athletes are uncertain, have them ask questions of the officials.

We like to know where everyone is each day—if they are not at the track. Last-minute substitutions for injured competitors require our knowing where everyone can be found.

We also feel it is important to recognize that we represent our company, and we should behave accordingly. In addition, because some of our subsidiaries have names different from CIGNA, we remind our team that we represent CIGNA and not, for example, Connecticut General Life Insurance Company or CIGNA Health Plan.

At the track: Someone needs to fill in the proper forms to register the teams, and make sure each relay has the form prior to check-in. Some team members need to time runners—for the data base, for subsequent events, and for the runners' own information.

In addition, someone needs to check and verify results. If necessary, someone may need to file a protest and inquire into apparent infractions. It is helpful to everyone if the team can supply water and essential nutrients for every-one to share. And someone needs to keep track of the batons!

Postmeet Party

After the Nationals Meet, a postmeet party is held. This is a near must for your team, because it captures the spirit of the championships. Dinner and dancing are on tap. We have found that many athletes, even if injured, attend the Nationals just for the postmeet party.

After the Meet

It's time to share results and to get everyone ready for other corporate races and next year's event. After a postmortem, the process begins again. The organization, communication, and plans for streamlining the process begin as soon as the meet is over. In addition, team captains are a chief source of suggestions on how the meets themselves can be improved and run more smoothly. Some of the post-meet energy goes into intercorporate as well as intracorporate work.

The Team Captain

The team captain—volunteer or paid coach, committee or individual, ad hoc or duly elected—has an important role to play. The many facets of the captain's job can be kept or delegated or shared. The team, however, does not get created and does not compete without a driving force.

The team captains are a major part of that driving force—supporting corporate athletics and wellness through time and energy and effort.

