



# REACHING SKY HIGH

How to Create a Winning Culture

ResourceBank Forum, 2014



# LEARNING FROM THE SUCCESS OF TEAM SKY

This year's ResourceBank HR & Business Forum was aimed at identifying the makings of a successful culture. On the 6th of November, senior professionals from more than forty leading UK and international businesses were in attendance at the Brewery in London to hear from the key speaker, Fran Millar, Head of Winning Behaviours at Team Sky and Richard Pearson, Managing Director of ResourceBank Recruitment

The goal of the evening was to address three key questions:

- What are the key ingredients of a winning team?
- What lessons can business & HR leaders learn from sport?
- How can these be implemented in a business environment?

The success of Team Sky may fall primarily under sporting accomplishments, but are there aspects of preparation, implementation and mentalities that can be taken from their achievements? Can the factors that motivate and drive Team Sky be applied to businesses from a range of sectors? Who better to answer the key questions around creating a winning team than a person who has been involved with Team Sky since it was nothing more than an idea.

## A SPEAKER WHO KNOWS WHAT IT IS TO SUCCEED

Fran Millar is one of the founding members of Team Sky, the British pro-cycling team which gave Britain its first Tour de France win. Since formation, the team has become a shining example of how to develop and maintain a winning mentality.

Fran has seen Team Sky through from the early planning stages to the unparalleled success seen today and has been recognised by Management Today as one of the top young executives in the UK. She is responsible for the ongoing performance of Team Sky and believes organisations can take inspiration from the business and performance sides of the team.

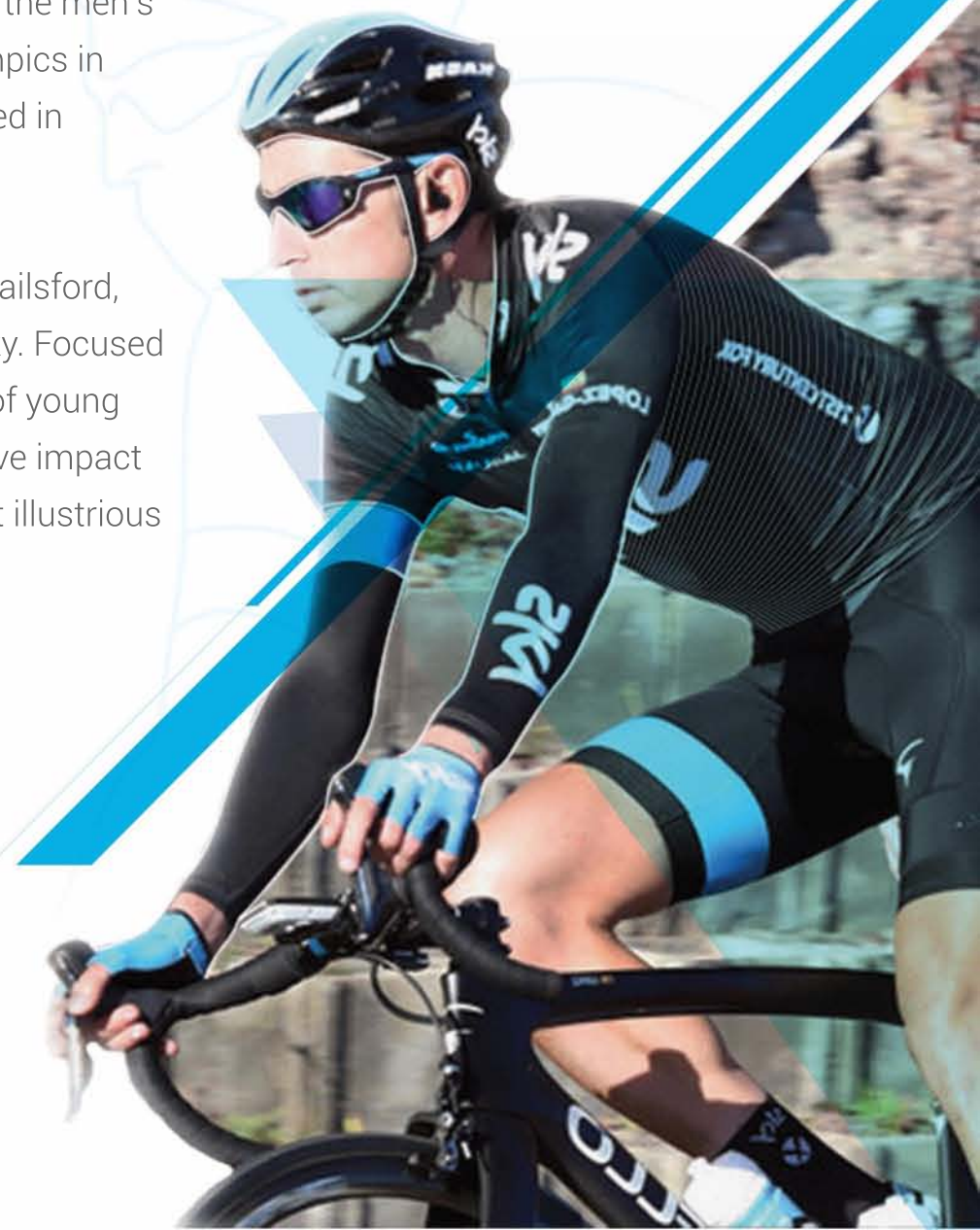
# TEAM SKY'S STORY

## PAIRING AMBITION WITH CLEAR, FOCUSED GOALS

Before lottery funding in 1997, British Cycling had won only one gold medal in 76 years. This simply wasn't good enough and a decision was made to address the balance, to become the world's best. The initial focus on track cycling, the men's endurance events in particular, was a success. A single gold medal in the cycling disciplines at the Sydney Olympics in 2000 was followed up by two in Athens 2004 and eight in Beijing 2008 - a number which was eventually repeated in London 2012.

With British Cycling's dominance of the track secured, a new, bigger challenge was needed. In 2009, Sir Dave Brailsford, then the Performance Director of British Cycling, became the General Manager of what would become Team Sky. Focused on the UCI World Tour, it was decided to build a team with a British core that was focused on the development of young riders with potential. Sky were soon identified as the right backer for the project as they wanted to have a positive impact on the sport and leave a lasting legacy. Crucially, they also bought into the ambition of winning the world's most illustrious tour.

- Win the Tour de France with a clean British rider
- Inspire 1,000,000 more British people to cycle regularly





# TEAM SKY'S STORY



Through careful recruitment, Team Sky built a team of over twenty riders, containing promising British talent and established international stars, before 2010's competitions began.

Team Sky secured 22 victories and 50 additional podium places in their first competitive season. While a success by any measure, it wasn't until 2012, when Bradley Wiggins won the Tour de France two years into the team's five year aim, that Team Sky reached their primary goal.

The first British winner in the Tour's history was soon followed by the second, as another Team Sky member Chris Froome claimed the yellow jersey at the 2013 Tour. The team had achieved their initial objective twice, with two years to spare.

The popularity of cycling within the UK has surged along with Team Sky's success. British Cycling announced in December 2013 that results from Sport England's Active People survey showed that two million adults were riding bikes at least once a week. While the well-documented results of Team Sky will have contributed massively, this was also aided by organised Sky Rides, increased coaching at youth level and partnerships with local authorities. Sky's legacy is undoubtedly taking shape.

Fran Millar believes that Team Sky achieved this success because they found the right people, created the right conditions and established clear, key principles that can be applied to industries far and wide, not just sporting bodies.

# TEAM SKY'S PODIUM PRINCIPLES

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## HOW FAR WOULD YOU GO FOR SUCCESS?

To reach elite performance at all levels, it's important to have the values and focus points that can create a winning culture. There are many factors behind the success of Team Sky and elements of their approach can be applied in the world of business.

## TEAM SKY HAVE 6 PRINCIPLES THAT ARE CENTRAL TO THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS:

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- 1: OUTCOME FOCUS
- 2: PODIUM PEOPLE
- 3: MARGINAL GAINS
- 4: THE HUMAN MIND
- 5: CULTURE AND CORE
- 6: WINNING BEHAVIOUR



# 1. OUTCOME FOCUS

Before moving forward ask yourself, what does success actually look like? What exactly do I want to get out of this? Knowing the goal from day one not only ensures buy in from every member of the team, but can also enable suitable preparation. If you know what you are trying to achieve, you can analyse the demands and focus on every detail to ensure maximum focus.

If you identify the fine details and provide the right support, success can follow. For Team Sky this includes the more obvious, such as recreating event conditions including altitude or humidity in training, but also goes as far as seemingly mundane logistics, such as having the right engine oil in extreme temperatures and knowing the size of athletes' hotel rooms.

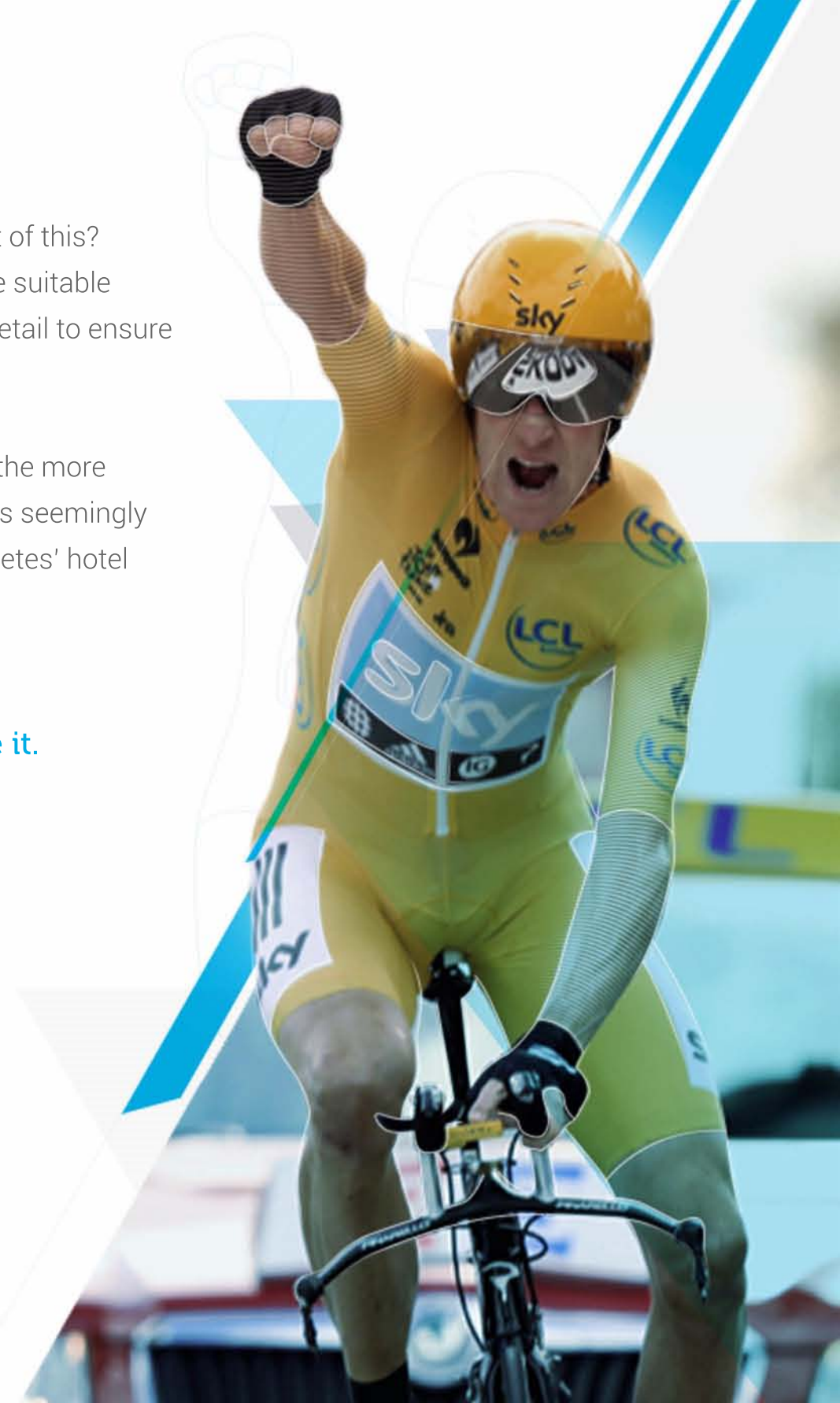
**Having big ambitions is central to elite performance. Adopt an outcome focus by:**

- Planning in reverse, know your goal and work backwards to ensure you achieve it.
- Working hard until the required standard is achieved on a regular basis.
- Having a dream and logically targeting it.

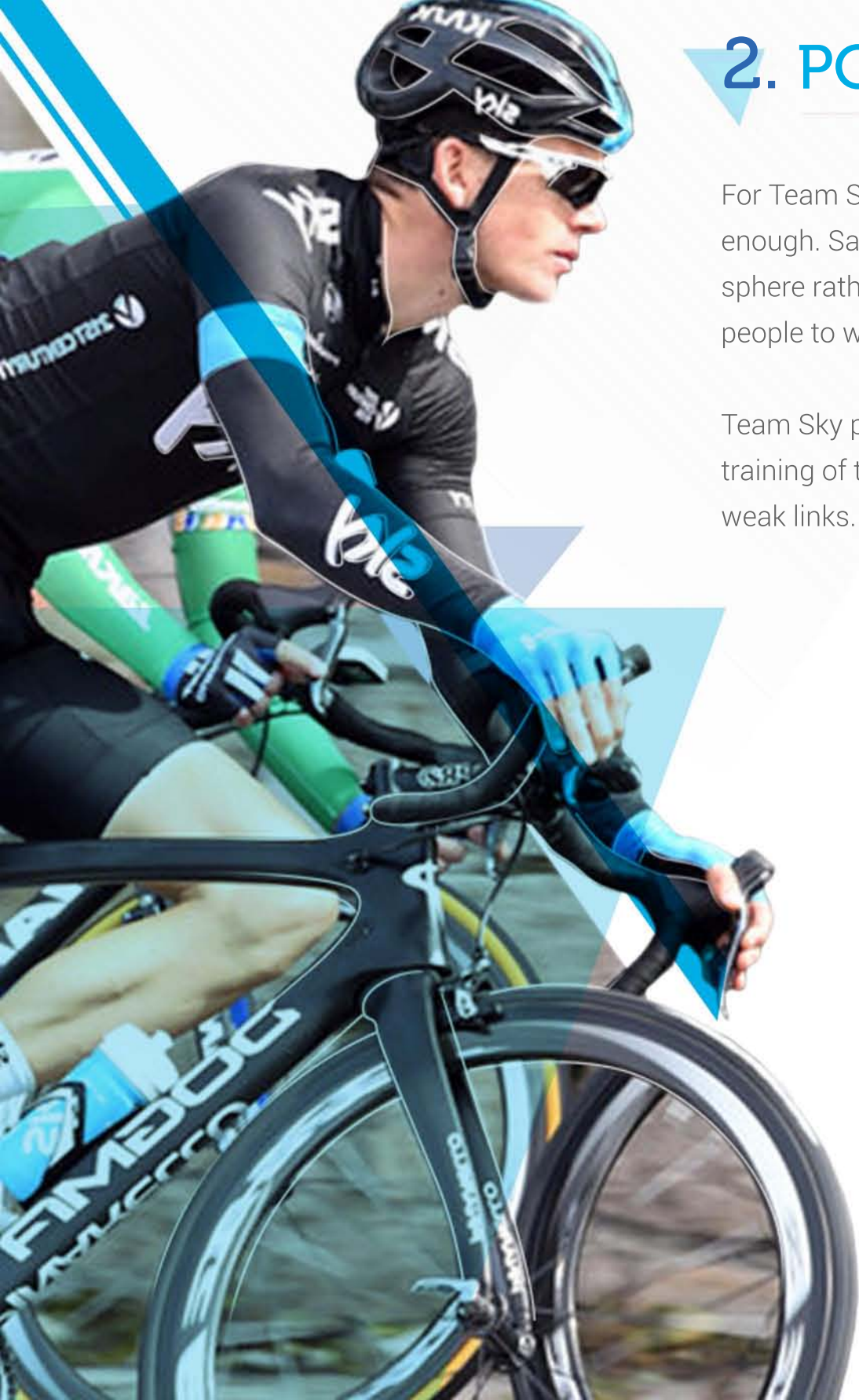
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*Covering every contingency ensures that team members only need to concern themselves with their performance.*

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## 2. PODIUM PEOPLE

For Team Sky and those concerned with being in the elite, merely being involved isn't the point. Average isn't good enough. Satisfactory doesn't cut it. To be the best you need people who excel. This should be an aspirational atmosphere rather than an elitist one. It's unrealistic to expect people to become the world's best overnight, but expect people to want to get there that quickly.

Team Sky put a lot of resource into having the best people in every position, even those not directly involved in the training of the athletes. Every carer, driver, cleaner and chef is of a world class standard. There is no slack rope and no weak links. Team Sky leave their team members with no doubt of the end goal – podiums, medals and yellow jerseys.

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*If you expect your team to be the best in the world then why would you let them be supported by anything less than the best?*

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To turn your team members into podium people:

- Ask them if they believe they are one of the best.
- If they say yes, how are they going to stay there?
- If they say no, how are they going to get there?

If you support ambitious, driven people on their journey, success will naturally follow.



### 3. MARGINAL GAINS

Team Sky's approach to getting every possible gain, regardless of how small they may appear to be, is praised as being one of their best decisions. In a sport where gold and silver can be separated by milliseconds, giving your rider every advantage you can could be the difference. These gains are achieved by identifying crucial areas, analysing them and developing them wherever possible.

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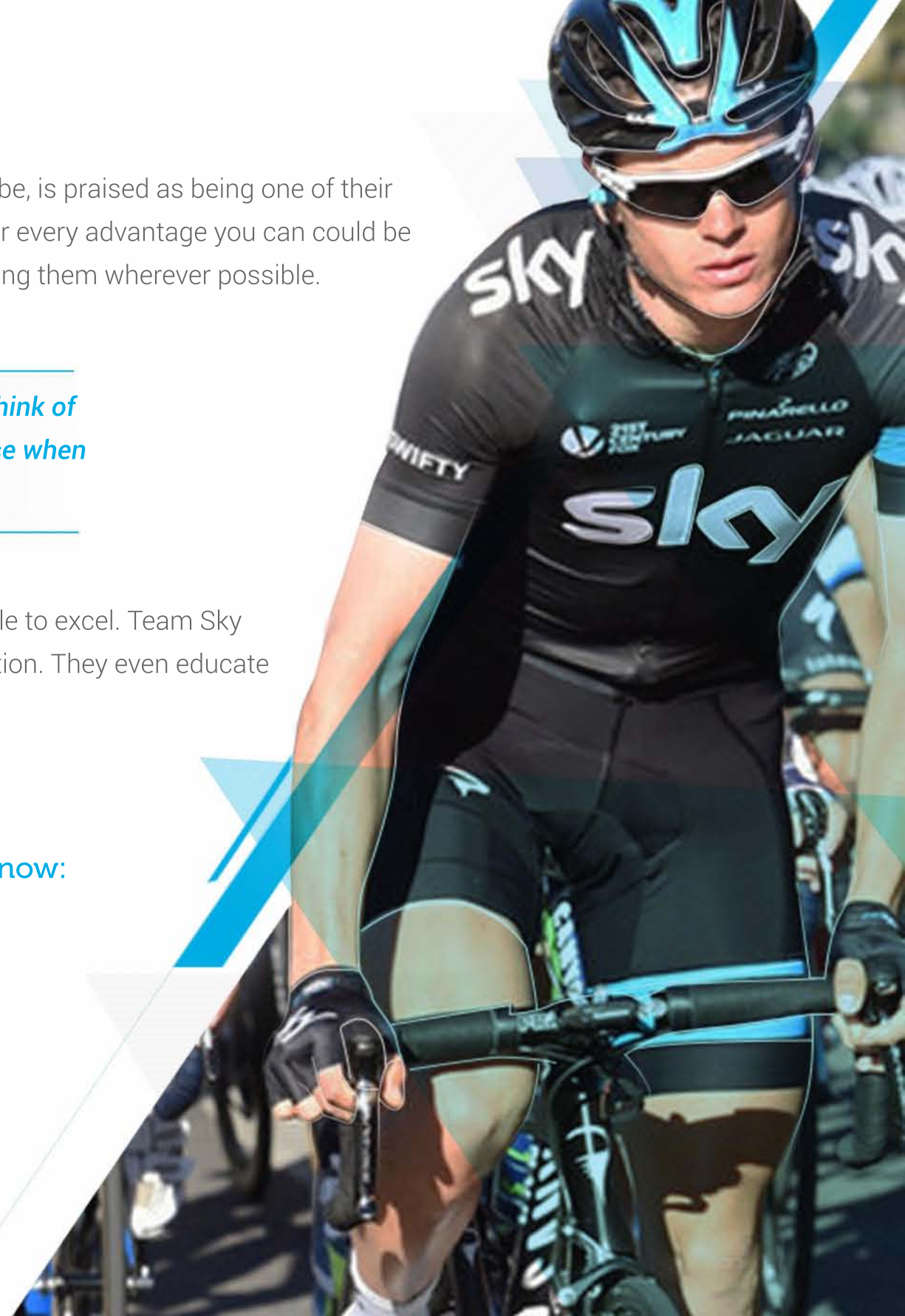
*"The whole principle came from the idea that if you broke down everything you could think of that goes into riding a bike and then improved it by 1%, you will get a significant increase when you put them all together." – Sir Dave Brailsford*

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On their own, marginal gains may be inconsequential, but when accumulated they make it possible to excel. Team Sky consult with aerodynamics experts and dieticians to improve their team's performance by a fraction. They even educate on hygiene to minimise the risk of illness, which in turn reduces the potential for missed training.

**Achieving marginal gains is dependent on having the right mentality and never thinking you couldn't have done better. To realise these gains it is important to know:**

- There is no improvement not worth the effort, no benefit too small.
- That without small progressions, you would never reach your goal.
- That records are there to be beaten.





## 4. THE HUMAN MIND

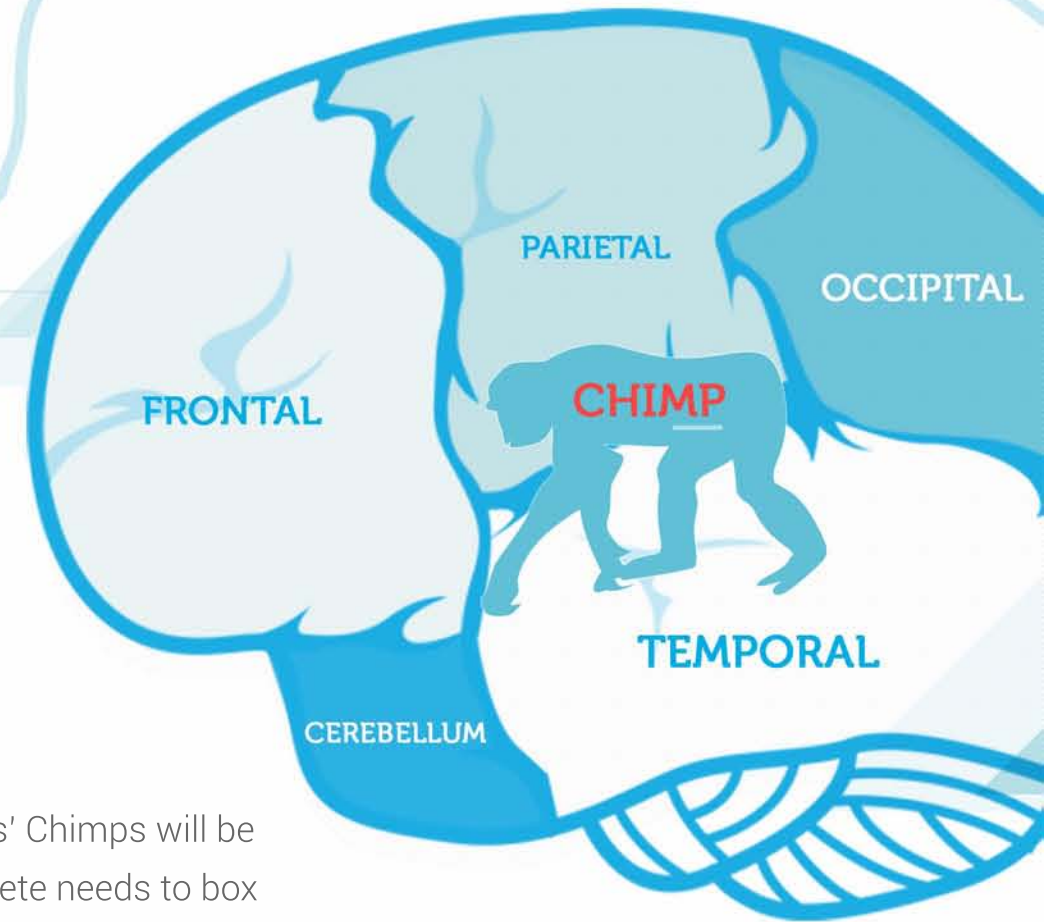
Another crucial aspect to Team Sky's success is their riders' ability to perform in high pressure environments. A significant part of this has been credited to the work of Dr Steve Peters, the world-renowned psychiatrist who specialises in looking after the human mind. During his work to make happy, confident and successful people, Peters developed the Chimp paradox – a model concerned with the functioning of the mind, how people cope and react to emotional stresses.

The human brain is in conflict. The model suggests that the Human mind is in constant battle with an inner Chimp. The Human part of the brain, or Frontal Cortex, works in truths and thinks logically while the Chimp, or Limbic System, reacts instantly in emotional, irrational terms.

While essential for survival, the Chimp is not meant for society or elite performance. It is concerned mainly with survival and is inherently counterproductive to executing anything at a high level as it contains anxiety, concerns and other emotions. The Chimp gets first go, nothing can be done about that as logic comes in after being given time to process.

*People need to educate their inner chimp because it isn't going to go away.*

Going against nature and remaining calm and calculated in situations of stress takes significant skill. Athletes' Chimps will be thinking about the pressure of having to win, worrying about failure and looking fearfully at the crowd. An athlete needs to box this off, think of their processes and their training, which should become as automated as breathing. They need to acknowledge that they can only do their best, which will likely be enough if their training has been good enough.



The Psychological Mind



## 5. CULTURE AND CORE

A central belief of Team Sky's is that if you have the right culture and environment you can get anything up to a 30% increase in performance. For them, it is essential for each member of the team to know, accept and thrive in their role. This includes Brailsford, who has been active in putting the riders first and saying that he works for them. It must be absolutely clear what everyone is aiming for so that success can be measured.

*Does everyone in your organisation know their role? Do they know how they contribute to success?*

To integrate this culture into their organisation, Team Sky developed the CORE principle. CORE is the underlying philosophy that applies to all staff and riders, underpinning everything they do.

- Commitment
- Ownership
- Responsibility
- Excellence

Setting a base culture enables an organisation to get buy-in from all its members and sets an expectation from the offset - an important part of team building. Working within a set culture establishes boundaries for personnel, it allows them to know their standing and develop themselves in a defined environment.



## 6. WINNING BEHAVIOURS

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*"It's all of it, the science, the training, the coaches, but most of all we point the mirror at ourselves and ask 'how can we get better?'" – Sir Chris Hoy*

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Setting the atmosphere, the mindset and the responsibilities creates the possibility for a winning culture, but it is necessary to get people to buy into owning the winning performance. Ask them to come up with winning behaviours and identify the losing behaviours so we can build the model of success.

**Team Sky's winning behaviours are identified as:**

- Celebrating together
- Identifying as part of a team
- Knowing what it takes, what is expected
- Owning each other's reputation

These are all actions that reinforce an individual's part in the culture, beliefs and efforts of the team. If a team member knows their role and does it well, but doesn't identify as part of the team, they will not worry about other reputations or celebrate the team's success. Essentially, they won't be part of the team. To build and harness a winning culture, it is important to get commitment from all the people involved.



# INSIGHTS FROM MARKET LEADERS

During the Forum, we asked several senior members of leading organisations about their inspirations, challenges and ambitions for

## Q. HOW DO YOU INSTIL AND MANAGE A HIGH PERFORMANCE CULTURE ACROSS AN ENTIRE ORGANISATION?

A. It's not easy. For us, it's about three things. It's about the client or customer, it's about teaming for the benefit of the customer which ultimately will lead in us winning. So, Client, Team, Win are the three buzz words that we have decided will capture our strategy and our culture across the 28 countries we operate in.

*"You can have the very best strategy, but if you don't have the right culture you are not going to succeed."*

David Denney

Vice President International Human Resources

Pitney Bowes



Pitney  
Bowes

# INSIGHTS FROM MARKET LEADERS

It's clear that businesses already do consider the same points as Team Sky, they just don't necessarily follow them through to the same level. It's apparent that highly targeted recruitment and marginal gains, both in existing processes and new areas, are crucial to reaching and capitalising further upon success.

**Q.** HOW ARE YOU GIVING YOUR TEAM RESPONSIBILITY AND WHY DO YOU DO THIS?

**A.** I've started to run listening groups with the people in my team to talk about 'what makes it good to work here' or 'what makes it good to work anywhere'. We could just carry on doing what we've always done, but I don't think that would be tapping into what people want as opposed to what I think they should want. I've got a team that design online training. At least a third of them don't sit at a desk in the office every day and two of them only come in for meetings - they do all their work at home.

*"It's about adapting in a way that, frankly, I wouldn't have done five years ago"*

**Jane Watkinson**

Head of Talent & Development  
Home Retail Group PLC





# INSIGHTS FROM MARKET LEADERS

As companies modernise and grow, they need to bring in new skills and people with the ambition to go the distance – but this distance, as well as any existing culture, needs to be defined.

## Q. WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE GOING INTO 2015?

A. Leading the organisation through growth, which brings with it change, but not changing the culture we've already got. When hiring people into your culture it's more about their mindsets. People talk about culture, but actually culture is what people create, what they bring. Hiring the right people with the right mindsets and skills will then create the culture.

*"Our ultimate aim is to be different, to take the best bits and make them better."*

**Heidi Coppin**  
People Director  
Not on the High street



# RESOURCEBANK

ResourceBank were established 19 years ago by Richard Pearson and under his guidance we have become a market leading HR and Recruitment company renowned for innovation and professionalism. We were delighted to have Fran Millar as our speaker at our 2014 Forum, as Team Sky's mentality influenced our own long before the event.

## WHY TEAM SKY?

*"I was very privileged to see Team Sky first-hand at the Giro d'Italia in 2013 and was really impressed by the attitude, organisation and focus of the whole team. I also saw that Team Sky used the best equipment and only employed the best people – not just riders but the back-up team too. I realised their approach to quality and success is just as relevant to business and have applied it to my own company, ResourceBank, to ensure our services are better, faster and more efficient. Our people are all focused on making a difference and are immediately rewarded for doing so. We have also invested in new technology which I know will give our RPO and Executive services even more of an edge.*

*From culture and psychology to processes, I firmly believe that businesses can learn from the practises of Team Sky. Studying and replicating the behaviours of an organisation with this level of success can only serve to improve any company's approach to building a winning culture."*

**Richard Pearson**  
Managing Director  
ResourceBank Recruitment

***If you are interested in attending next year's invite-only HR & Business Forum on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2015, contact a member of our team to secure your place.***