

The Chicago Bulls in Tech

Desislava Danovska



THE LAST DANCE



Main topics in the series

- The Chicago Bulls golden age in the 1990s
- Covers the needs and challenges of
 - individual players
 - the team
 - the business



Desislava Danovska
Product Lead



About me

- 7+ years in product management
- Experienced with both startups and unicorns (Auto1 and Klarna)
- Led awesome teams 🚀



Why am I here?

I will show you how to have a team like the
Chicago Bulls yourself!

The formula

1

**Have the
right people**

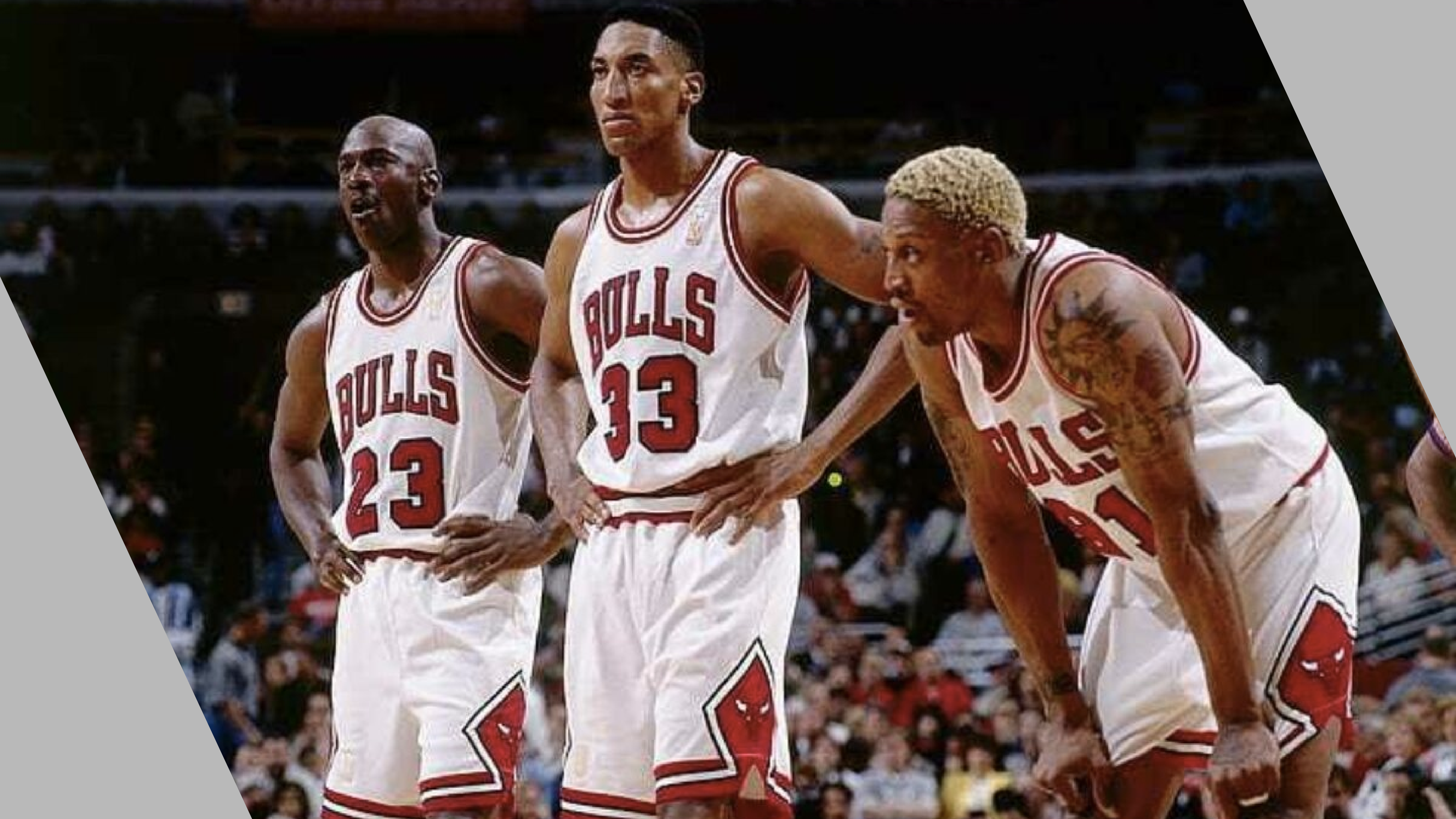
2

**Set the right
team culture**

3

**Bridge the
gap with the
business**

1 Have the right people



.. ok, but how do these guys relate to tech?

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This is how



Engineering Manager/
Lead Engineer

- Highest expertise
- Challenges others to be better
- _ Role model



Senior Engineers

- Extremely qualified
- Step up when Michael Jordan is away



Mid-level/
Junior Engineers

- Eager to learn from others
- Scared to step up to solve more serious problems
- Don't tend to speak up as much

Some lessons on getting the right people

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Know what you need

It all starts here!

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Get the best talent

Ruthless recruitment

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Get enough seniors

The seniors deliver the most value and get the others up to speed faster

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Balance in skill level and interests

People are good and interested in different things.
It is easier to deliver value where one is great at

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Drop dead weight early on

Underperformers poison the well over time. Beware of sunk cost fallacy

However, the harsh truth is ...

Getting the right people is just step 1.

The goal is to then actually keep them for as long as possible!

2 Set the right team culture

The Chicago Bulls team



1980

The Chicago Bulls in 1980



1984

First year with Michael Jordan



1998

The last year of the 1990s Golden era with Jordan and Pippen



2022

The Chicago Bulls today

My team



2020

We had 3 original team members and 3 new joiners (me included)



2021

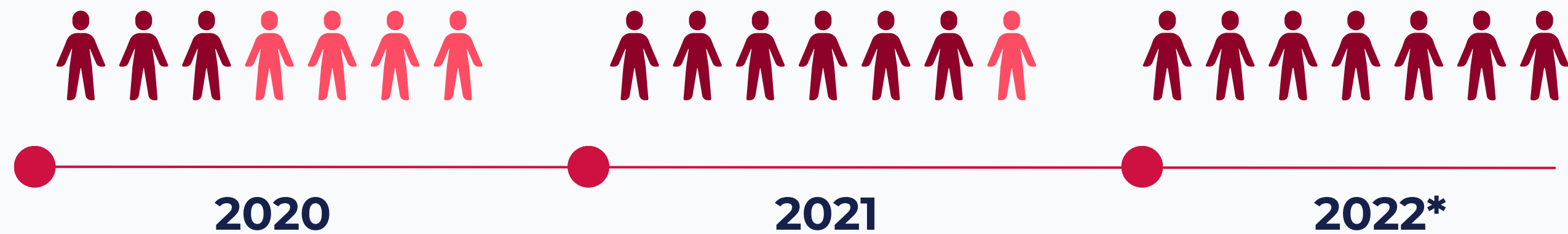
The team didn't change in 2021 and we had a temporary graduate



2022

The team last year, one team member left but our 2021 graduate joined us

Retention is critical



 Team members from the previous year

 New joiners

*In 2022, we still had **three** people from 2019

We had to be aware of each other's
professional needs



Engineering Manager/ Lead Engineer

Characteristics

- Highest performer
- Challenges others to be better

Needs

- Wants to do things right
- Committed to the outcome
- Strong focus on quality

Ways to support

- Provide work on meaningful things
- Alleviate as many admin tasks as possible



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- Recognition and rewards
- Opportunities to step up

- Market their accomplishments
- Fight for them to be rewarded otherwise they will leave



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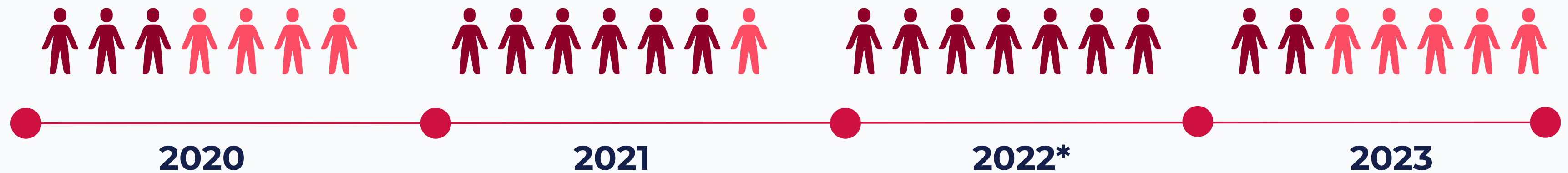
Mid-level/ Junior Engineers

- Eager to learn from others
- Scared to step up to solve more serious problems
- Don't tend to speak up as much

- Need direction and feedback to uplevel their skills

- Foster an inclusive and emotionally safe place to ask questions
- Ensure a good ratio of senior engineers

Where is my team today?

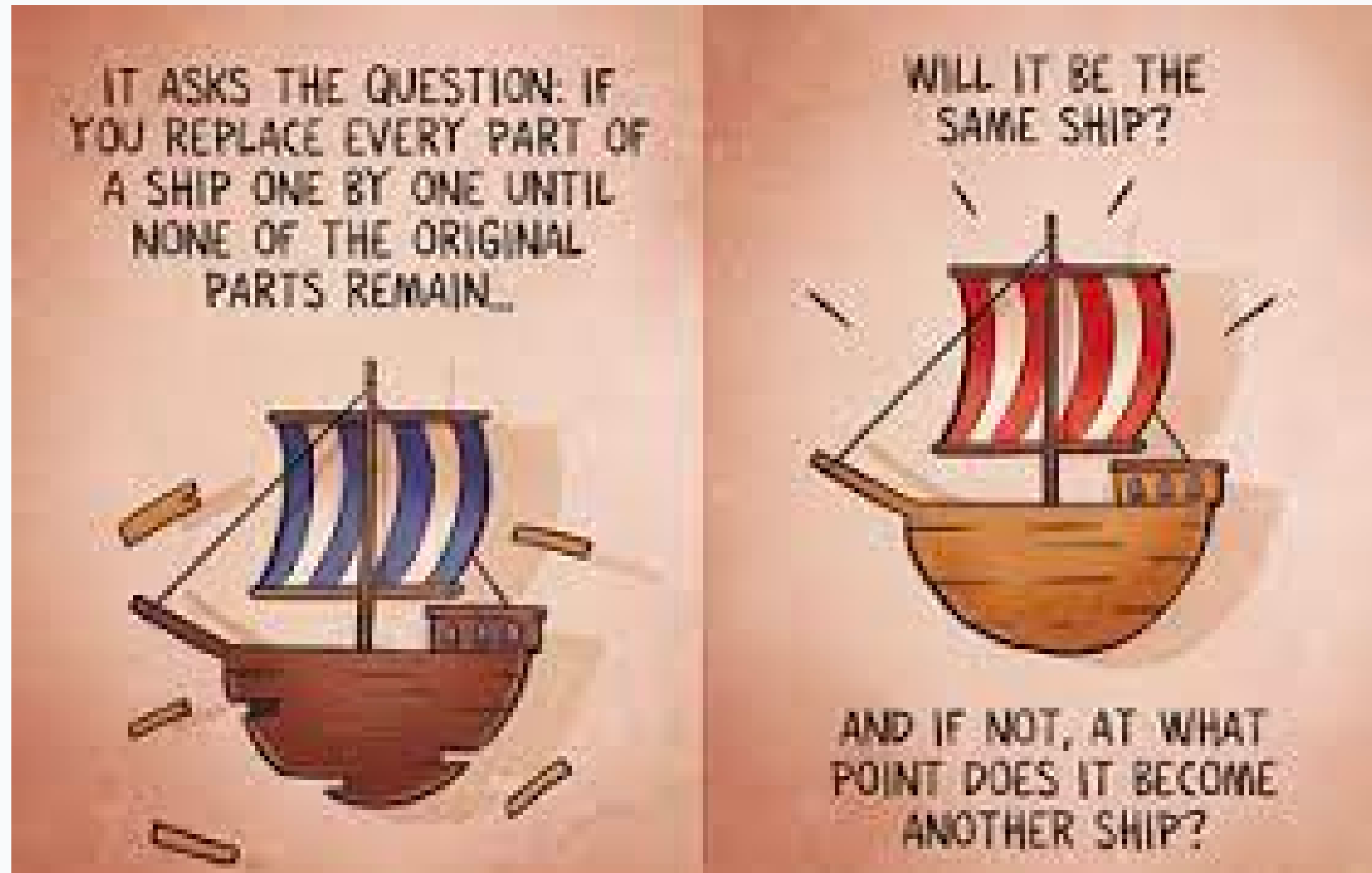


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 New joiners

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Ship of Theseus



What helps set the culture

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Surviving and thriving together

Solving critical incidents and challenges brought us closer

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Giving ownership

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Host bi-weekly retrospectives and revisit the ways of working quarterly. Iterate continuously

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Have fun!

Team events, Karaoke and birthday gifts

“

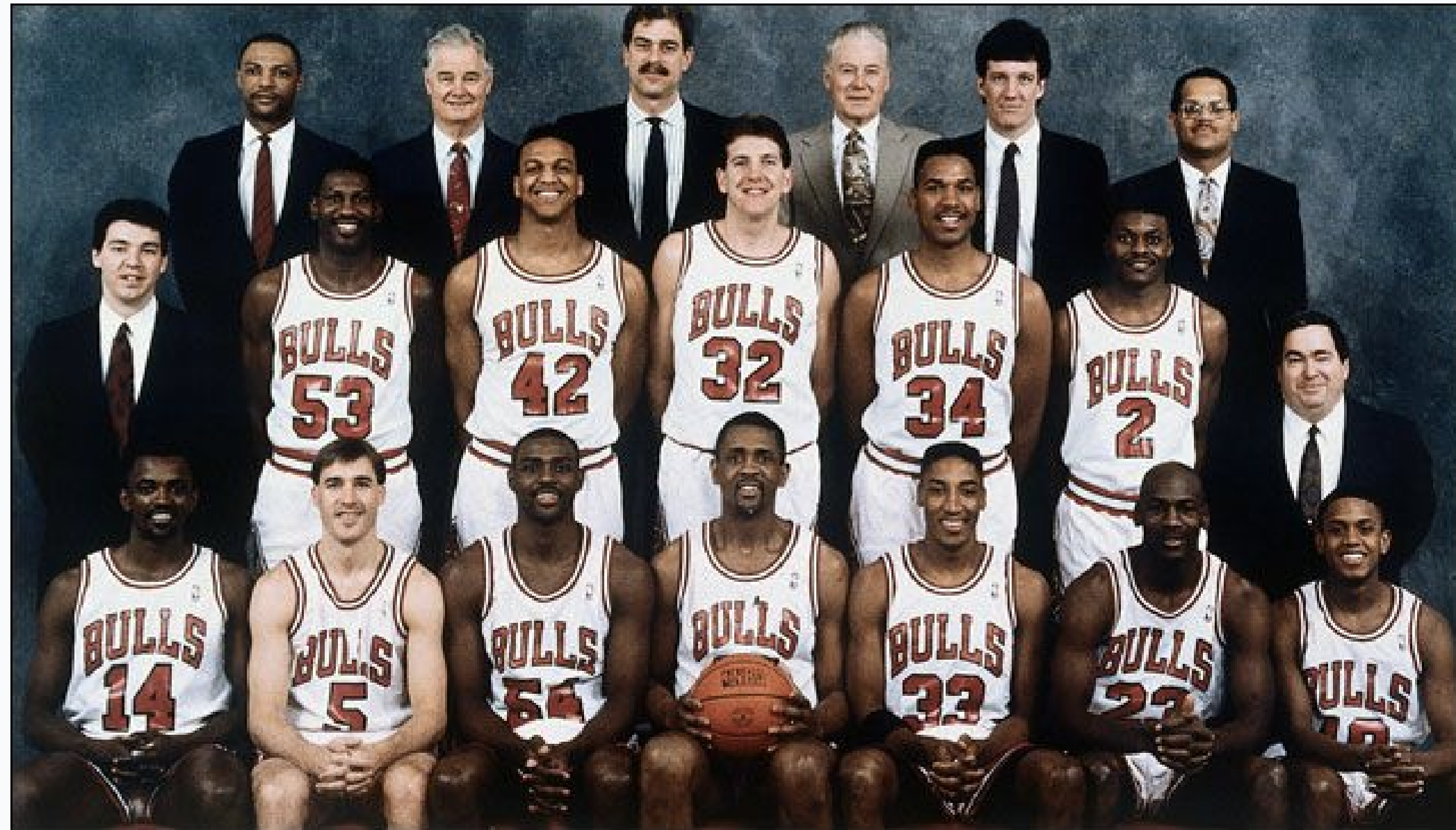
The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team.

Phil Jackson

3

Bridging the gap with the business

The team is still owned by the business



How to improve the relationship with the business

Sense of purpose

Motivate the team to feel like a part of something bigger

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Regular demos

Regular demos where team members present the latest and upcoming features

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Bring in the customers

Bring team members in user testing sessions with end users or talks with internal stakeholders

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Promote the team's accomplishments

Public Kudos on Slack and in senior stakeholder meetings/reviews

To sum up..

... to have the best team, you have to:

1

Have the right people

- Get the best talent
- Ensure you have enough senior people on the team
- Strive for balance in skill level and interests
- Drop dead weight early on

2

Set the right team culture

- Survive and thrive together
- Give ownership
- Build trust and emotional safety
- Regularly revisit the ways of working
- Have fun

3

Bridge the gap with the organization

- Foster a sense of purpose
- Host demos
- Expose the team to the customers and their feedback
- Promote the team's accomplishments

Thank you!