

# The Chicago Bulls in Tech

Desislava Danovska



# THE LAST DANCE

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# 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

△ AMBOSS

# About me

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

Klarna.

AUTO1.com

finleap

# 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

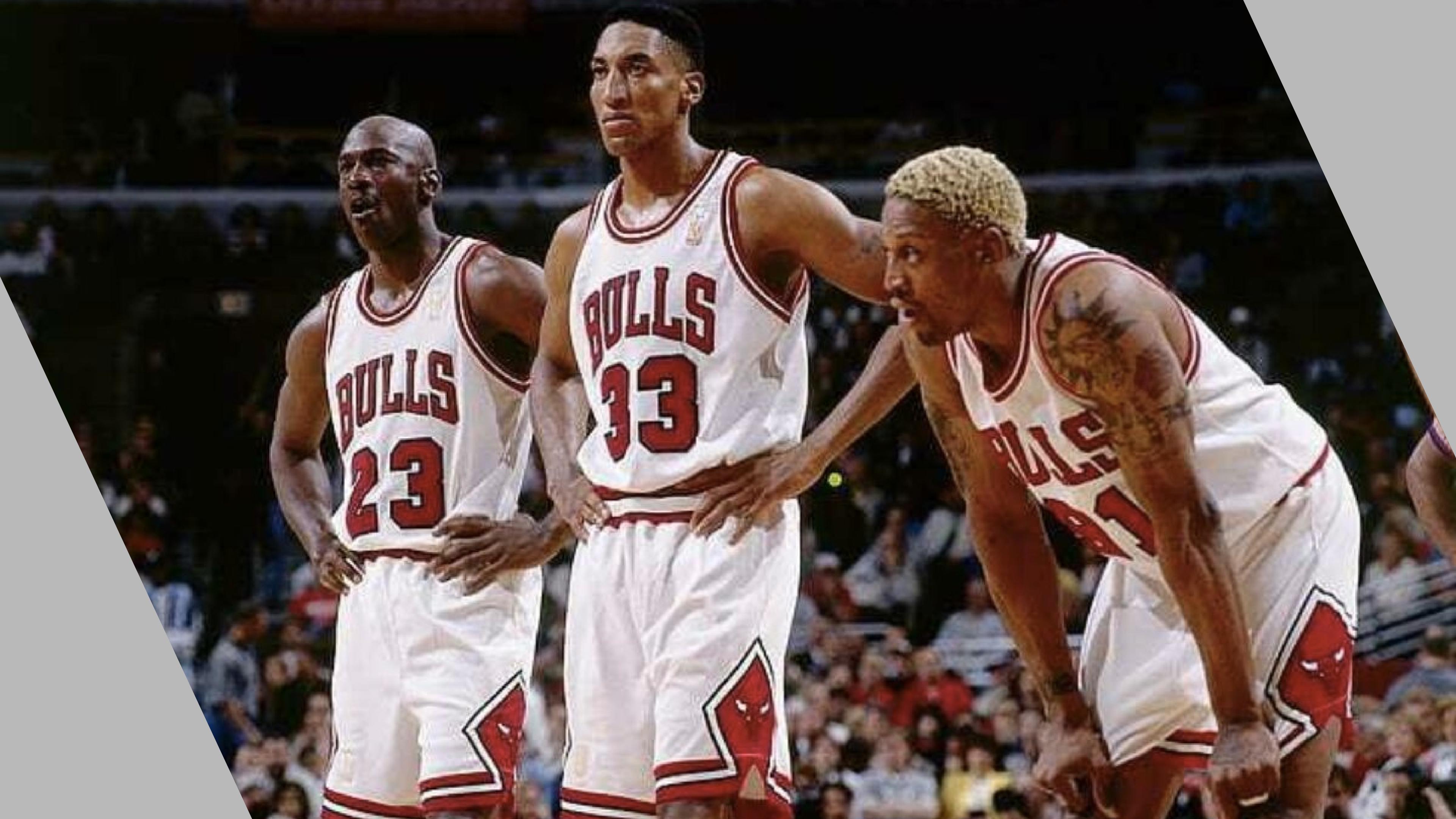
**Set the right  
team culture**

3

**Bridge the  
gap with the  
business**

1

# Have the right people

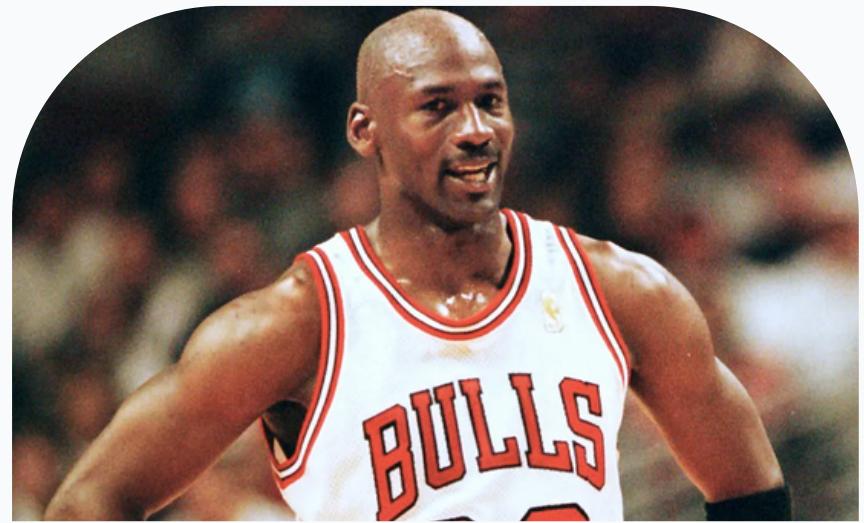


# .. ok, but how do these guys relate to tech?

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    header0_initialPadding = header0_initialPadding + $window.scrollTop();  
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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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It all starts here!

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Ruthless recruitment

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

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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 ...

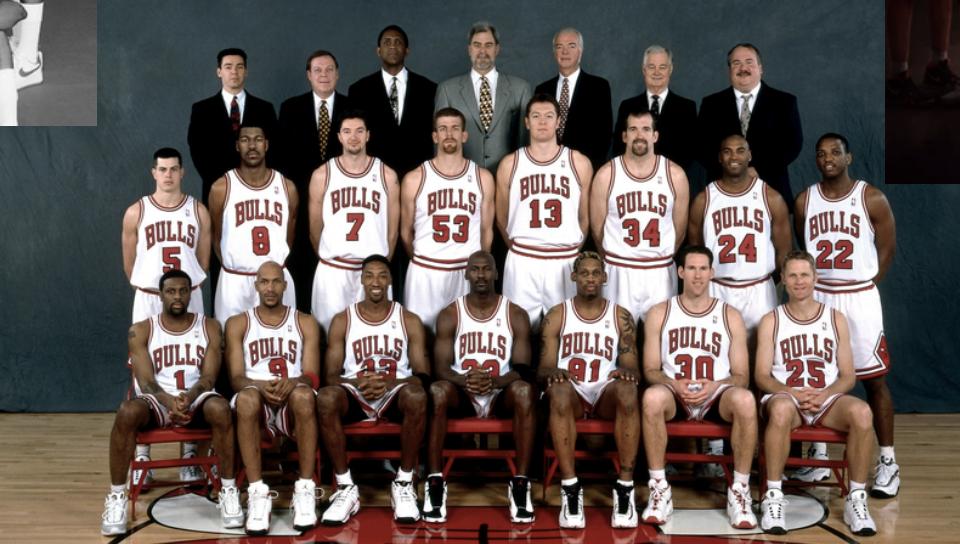
Getting the right people is just step 1.

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 Chicaho Bulls today

# My team



**2020**

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



**2021**

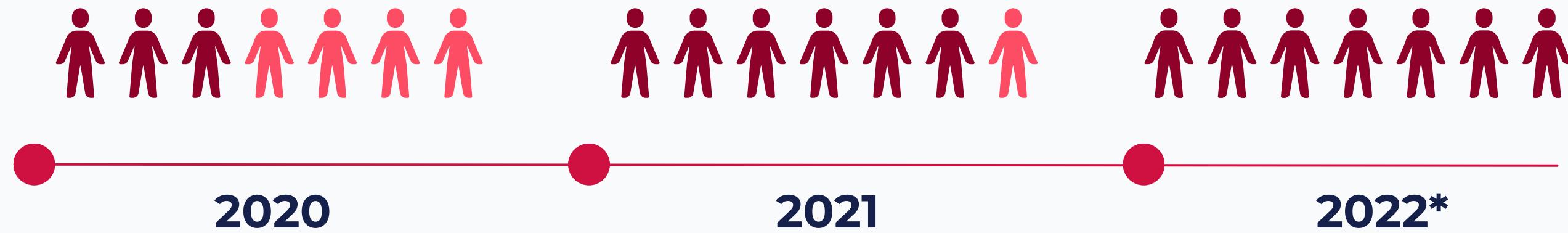
The team didn't change in 2021 and we had a temporary graduate



**2022**

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

# Retention is critical

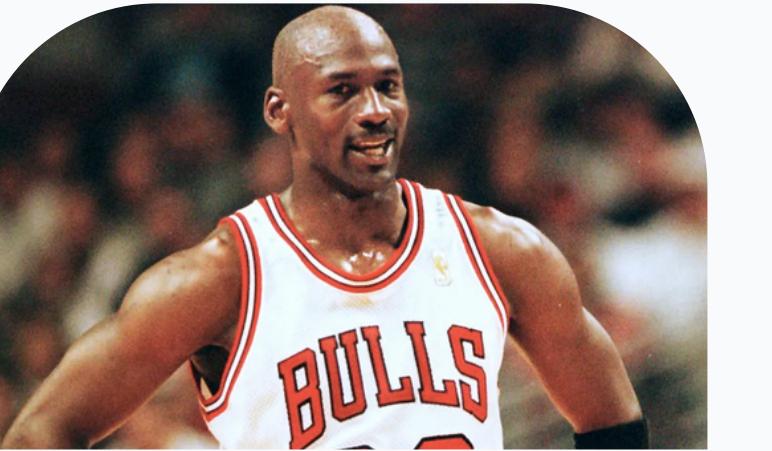


Team members from the previous year

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

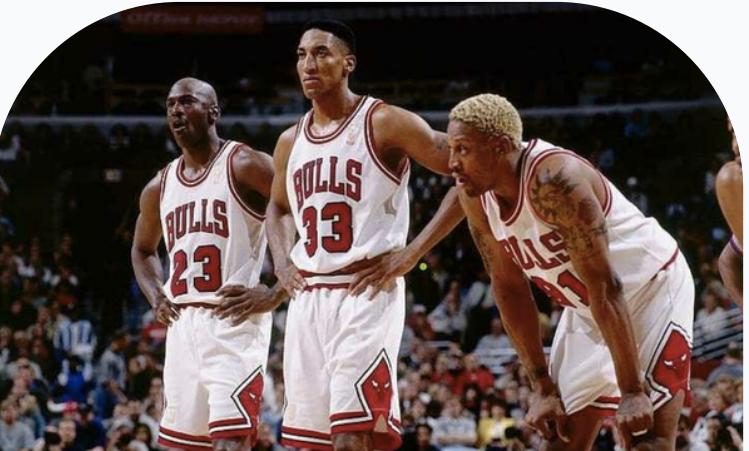
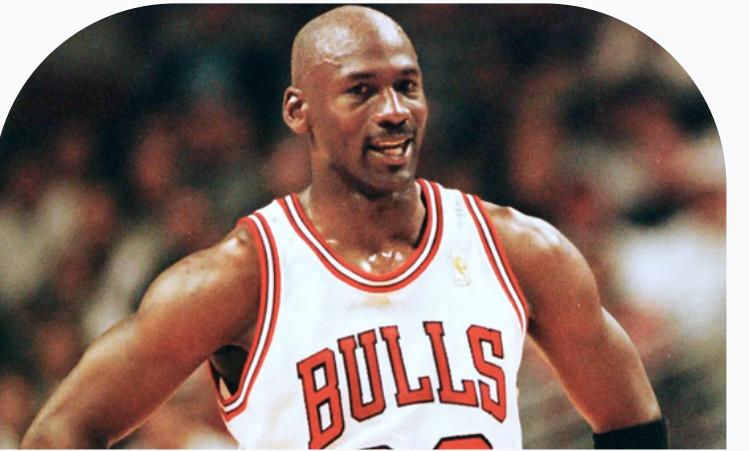
- Highest performer
- Challenges others to be better

### 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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## Senior Engineers

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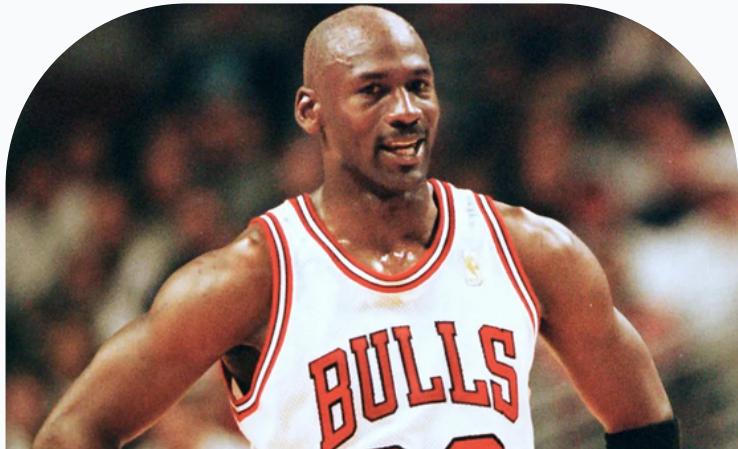
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- Opportunities to step up

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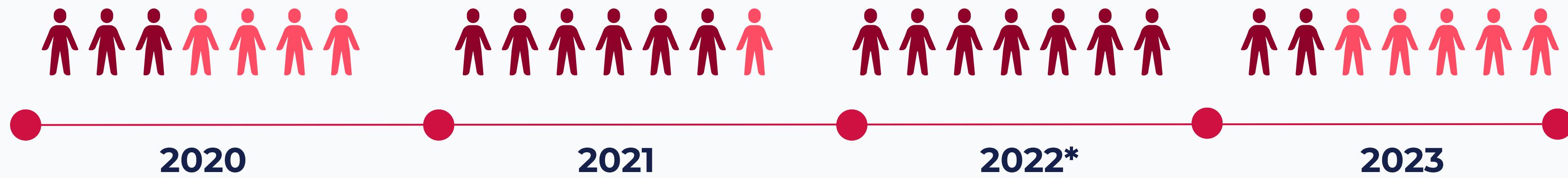
## Mid-level/ Junior Engineers

- 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?



 Team members from the previous year

 New joiners

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

# Ship of Theseus

IT ASKS THE QUESTION: IF YOU REPLACE EVERY PART OF A SHIP ONE BY ONE UNTIL NONE OF THE ORIGINAL PARTS REMAIN...



WILL IT BE THE SAME SHIP?



AND IF NOT, AT WHAT POINT DOES IT BECOME ANOTHER SHIP?

# **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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Host bi-weekly retrospectives and revisit the  
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Have fun!

Team events, Karaoke and birthday gifts

“

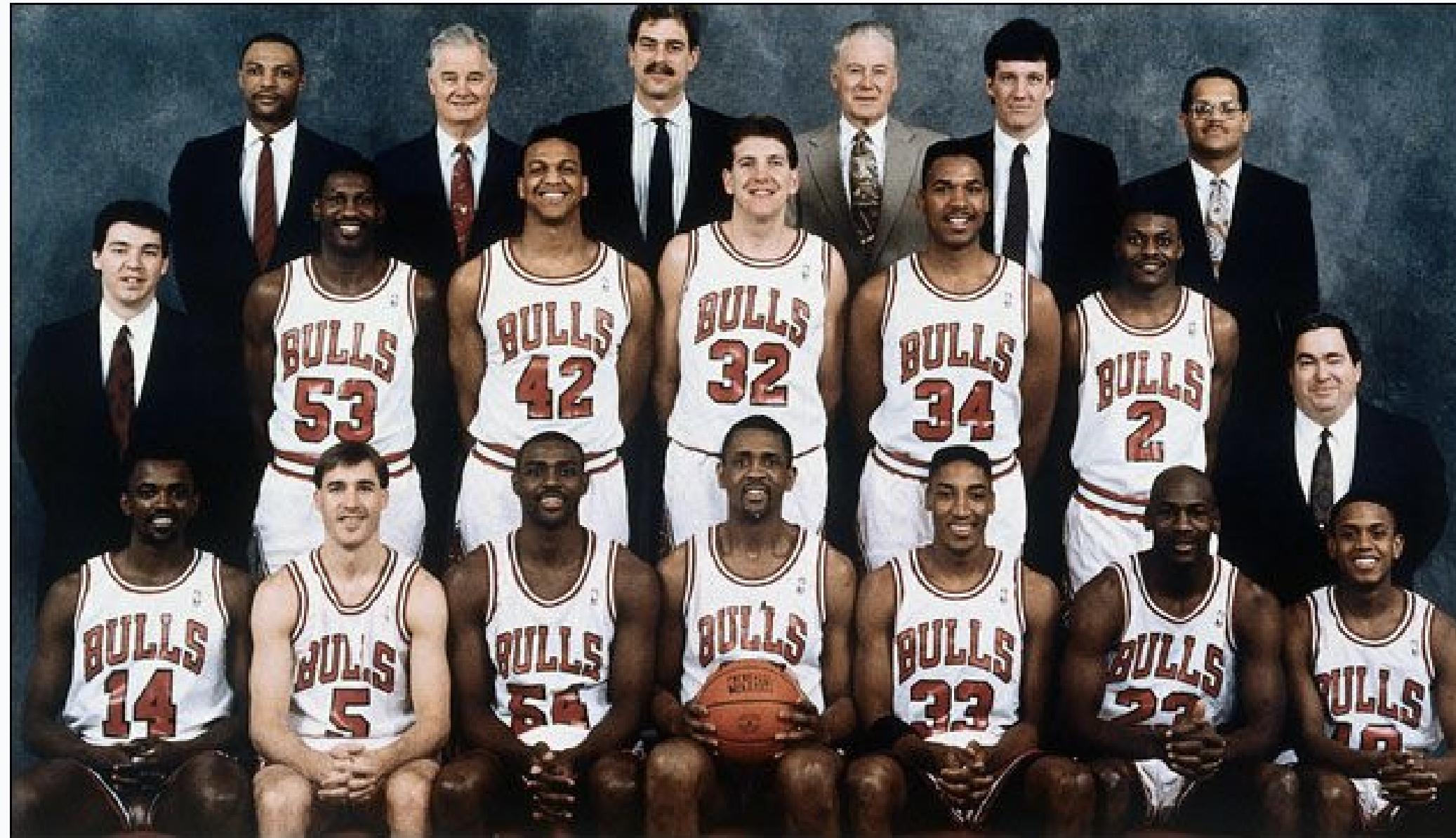
**The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team.**

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

# How to improve the relationship with the business

Sense of purpose

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Regular demos where team members present the latest and upcoming features

Bring in the customers

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

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!**