Andrew Carnegie once said: “You cannot push anyone up the ladder unless he be willing to climb a little himself.”

Here’s a little-known fact about the man behind some of the world’s tallest buildings: He stood just 5 feet 3 inches tall. Yep, Andrew Carnegie was a little man. But here’s the rub: When you scan the historical landscape of American business, he stands as tall as the skyscrapers he helped build.

Andrew Carnegie reshaped the steel industry in the 19th Century and oversaw the most extensive steel operations ever owned in the U.S. It’s a staggering feat when you consider another detail about this man: He knew practically nothing about manufacturing steel. But he did know a secret that he credits for much of his success — the power of teams.

He surrounded himself with the right folks.

During research that would eventually get formulated into his famous book “Think and Grow Rich,” Napoleon Hill interviewed Carnegie about how he achieved his success. Carnegie replied:

“We have here in this business a mastermind. It’s not my mind, and it’s not the mind
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of any other man on my staff, but the sum total of all these minds that I have gathered around me. ... I have been many years gathering these men around me and building this mind. Each man contributes an important part to the building of this mind. ... I know that I need these men, and they know that they need me.”

If you remember anything about this article, make it this: The power of teams is even more relevant today than it was when Carnegie was making history. In fact, earlier this year the consulting giant Deloitte released a study of the biggest challenges facing today’s businesses. Among the 7,000 leaders who responded, the top issue was human resources — in a word, teams.

A whopping 92 percent of the leaders said redesigning the organization — the way we work — was the key challenge and top trend in 2016 and for the immediate future. The study says there’s been a game-changing shift from the old hierarchical grouping to what Deloitte calls a “network of teams.” This new model of work is forcing organizations to change how leaders form, manage, develop and reward teams.

So what can mortgage originators take from this research to help build teams that add to the bottom line? Here are three things you can start doing immediately:

1. **Employees:** Get employees intimately involved in your company goals, values and culture.
2. **Communication:** Make sure your team’s communication is wide open — like a fire hose.
3. **Rewards:** Acknowledge and reward team members by focusing on specific skills and actions that get your team closer to your company’s goals.

Let’s look at each of these areas in depth.

**Employee involvement**

If you catch a football game this fall, notice the offensive team’s huddle before the snap. Note that all the players are in the huddle. In fact, it would look strange if they weren’t in the huddle.

Imagine how the excluded players would feel. Every person counts and can contribute. When you involve all of your players, you show them what’s at stake every day when you open your doors for business. They see the bigger picture.

A recent study by Catalyst, a research and strategy consulting company, found that inclusion breeds innovation in employees. Give your employees guidelines and value systems to help them do their day-to-day jobs, learn how to make decisions and determine what’s acceptable — all of which can help them feel like they belong. One term for this is “fostering inclusion.”

**Wide-open communication**

Going back to the football analogy, remember to huddle with your team. Can you imagine the chaos, not to mention all the games that would be lost, if a team didn’t have any plays drawn up — in other words, no communication about who’s doing what on the field?

Create regular times when your team can gather to talk about their daily tasks and their interactions with customers, so they can share what’s working and what’s not. Why? If there is one truth about progress in human history, it’s that solutions to problems come from open, honest communication.

Every chance you get, encourage communication between you and your team — and among team members. That will foster a culture of openness.

**Recognition and rewards**

There have been volumes — literally volumes — written about employee recognition. Search “employee recognition” online and you will get about 18 million results. The concept can be boiled down to just one word: empathy.

After you have made a sale, ask yourself what would make you feel wanted, needed, included or valued. Remember, employees want to feel part of the group, but they also want to be recognized for their individual qualities that help the company. So when you acknowledge them, focus on those specific qualities.

You don’t have to always say, “Great job,” because you are paying them for their work. Instead, use the phrase, “Great effort,” and this will praise them for everything they did to get the “job” done. Sometimes it isn’t about the results as much as it is about the effort.

Get the right team in place and then nurture them to help your company reach its goals. It’s true. A small man with a big brain named Andrew Carnegie has already proven it. ■