

Collaboration

Create a team culture.



by Patricia Heyman

LEADERS CAN'T ACHIEVE goals or desired results without *effective collaboration*. Leaders are expected to express innovations and ideas, but often they're involved in micromanaging business units. They aren't focusing on improving the leadership team or on encouraging people in team meetings to contribute creative ideas and share honest opinions in order to create an internal sense of team unity.

Hence, team members tend to compete with each other and engage in fear-based, behind-the-scenes complaining that stymies growth. Often, ears that should *hear ideas* and *expand them into doable innovation* never hear them. Many solutions are lost—and strategic plans are poorly implemented.

Collaboration is crucial for success. When motivation and productivity are down, people wander in distraction rather than contribute to the solutions. Lack of teamwork contributes to loss of money, loss of direction, slow or no growth, and smaller market share.

Often, leaders assume that having an innovative idea, benchmarking successful companies, and hiring or firing leaders will create the desired change. Strategy is often focused in one area, without considering that *the core issues* are in the interaction, focus, accountability and collaborative solutions for the leadership team, and other teams.

You may be frustrated with the lack of progress of units or teams, especially if you're familiar with *three scenarios*:

Scenario 1: The leadership team meets irregularly, and when they do the communication goes from the CEO to the team members with little push-back or discussion. Often some people do not agree or have an idea, but don't express it. Also, there may be a challenge in one business that peers might assist with—but it is not expressed for fear of looking bad. After the meeting, people gather to whisper real feelings. Collaboration is not happening, and the implementation of initiatives proceeds irregularly and runs into difficulty with everyone knowing a part of the problem, but no overview with solutions created to move forward.

Scenario 2: A new product or service is introduced. New employees enter the system, and current employees are fearful and confused about the new focus. Clear communication is neglected, as the focus is on the new product, service, or structure. It is clear that the focus is expanding, and new skills and relationship connections will be necessary—so there is a need for specific communication, new accountability processes, new solutions, and time for planning, communicating, inclusion, and surfacing *challenges that might sabotage efforts*.

Scenario 3: The technical design and implementation teams are neither getting work out in a timely manner nor communicating differences of opinion about practicality of designs and construction. There is behind-the-scenes complaining with no solution focus. Designs are altered during construction, which upsets the design team. Time and money are lost in changes, and all team members feel angry and undervalued. Responsibility in the form of blaming is *the major focus*.

With collaboration, positive results are achieved when you target: *accountability, solution-focus* and effective communication. One or all of these targets is missing in all three scenarios and is *the reason for lack of achievement*.

Without the *elements of collaboration*, change management fails. Lack of buy-in, sabotage, demotivation, and fear create a *culture of stagnation*.

By instilling a *culture of collaboration*, the elements of *communication, accountability, and solution* create **a template to manage change**. Lack of *personal accountability* can exist in many ways when leaders fail to value or implement a clear collaboration process. Clients mistakenly think that assigning projects is all that is needed to move forward.

Projects are often stymied by concerns—such as taking time away from the usual job, giving over power and authority, no channels for discussion, no sense of ownership or motivation. In a *culture of collaboration*, such issues are dealt with openly and honestly. Rather than blaming, the focus is *how we can work together to solve the problem*.

Without effective team collaboration, there's little collegial *communication*. Leaders know less about each other than they know about their direct reports. Candid communication rarely occurs in meetings. Often meetings occur irregularly, and are seen as *a waste of time*.

When people fear taking risks, the

culture is one of *competition* and watching your back. No one is willing to open up or offer a creative idea for fear of being wrong. Lack of communication creates a lack of understanding of performance expectations. Performance reviews are viewed with trepidation, and people walk out relieved or upset without much information that can move them forward. Low performance results often come from misunderstanding. *Accountability* can only be sustained with clear expectations in a collaborative culture. The poor functioning of teams is the repercussion of not valuing collaboration by giving the process time and resources. When team members give up—and when leaders burn out—it's not necessarily due to hard times, stress, or challenges, but instead to the lack of col-



laboration and a sense of team. What is missing is *communication, accountability, and a focus on solutions*.

Lack of creative thinking is one big barrier to growth. Without a format for creative thinking followed by analysis and innovation, your business won't move into new progressive realms. With sus-

tainable team collaboration, creative thinking is supported and encouraged and takes place ahead of analysis so that out-of-the-box ideas are expressed. Innovation follows, and new ideas are moved into production and implemented successfully.

In a *culture of collaboration*, **certain elements create success**: communication-connection, accountability, and solution focus. These lead to effective teams and strategic results. These elements create *top-performing teams* committed to a common goal and focused on implementation. The team alignment process is used to develop these elements of successful collaboration.

Creating this culture will require all members to make changes in mindset and behavior, starting at the top and with the teams who execute the work. Conduct interviews to discover how each leader sees the organization in the present and future. Ask questions to create a mind-set of *openness to change*. Hold monthly follow-up meetings to address current actions and time lines; and check-in meetings for follow-up and appraisal. Creating a *culture of collaboration* leads to better results. LE

Patricia Heyman is a speaker, leadership specialist, and executive coach with Bridging Associates. www.bridgingassociates.com

ACTION: Create a culture of collaboration.