



Collaboration – Working Together

By Mark D. Sauter, author, *Bringing Meaning into Monday™*

People and organizations are facing the realities of adapting to a more socially challenging and interdependent workplace. Problems are more complex and the marketplace is becoming more globally interconnected. In order to improve performance, people and organizations need to improve how they work together, internally and externally. Organizations must equip their people to deal in a high-speed, high-tension environment and people must become skilled at embracing diverse perspectives, reconciling differences, managing interdependencies and finding common ground.

Reframing an individual's approach and/or attitude toward challenging relationships and social circumstances can have a profound and lasting impact on their ability to manage stress, increase personal effectiveness and improve overall quality of life. Unfortunately, many people find it easier to surround themselves with people who share their beliefs, avoiding the inherent friction or risk that comes from associating with people who see the world differently. This is a problem. Real answers, in today's networked era, will be created through crossbreeding not inbreeding.

Easier said than done

Collaboration in theory is not difficult, however, achieving it is. It is difficult to reconcile conflicting self-interests or gain agreement with people whose perspectives or beliefs run counter to your own. Individualism, while beneficial in certain respects, impedes collaboration. It creates divisive silos where people or groups are more concerned with their self-interests than the collective or shared-interests of the broader organization.

This is a big issue, one that directly impacts an organizations bottom line and long-term viability. Yet many leaders are not comfortable or skilled at harmonizing differences. In many cases training tends to focus on interpersonal traits, the softer side of leadership. While necessary, it is not enough.

In addition to developing their interpersonal traits, leaders must also address structural deficiencies present in many organizations and/or work units. Deficiencies, when not addressed, that will derail collaboration by undermining the ability to find common ground. For example, the needs and priorities of customers and/or fellow coworkers help shape an organization's purpose, which in turn ensures alignment on the highest valued

and most profitable areas. Yet, with that said, many organizations are not well schooled on how to effectively gather, assess and respond to the dynamic needs and priorities of those they serve, internally or externally.

This is unfortunate. Productivity and creativity will improve by optimizing or eliminating time, cost and resources directed toward lower valued priorities. Employee's sense of purpose and meaning will correspondingly increase as they gain clearer appreciation of how their contributions matter. And collaboration, as a result, will increase as people gain greater appreciation of the collective contribution of others.

Given today's complex and interconnected business climate it is unlikely that any one perspective has the complete picture. Therefore it is important that the various pieces and parts understand how they fit into the bigger picture. A picture which more appropriately reflects today's interdependent and networked realities.

Collaboration will yield conflict and opposition, it must. It's the healthy tension created between viewpoints that makes for more robust solutions. When viewed constructively, diverse viewpoints make individuals wiser and organizations stronger.

To remain healthy and sustainable, organizations are dependent on the creative, even disruptive ideas of their people. Therefore, while encouraging and nurturing an environment which welcomes divergent thinking, they must simultaneously develop the social agility and political tact in those people willing to do it. *Bringing Meaning into Monday™* offers a process that can help organizations achieve it.

Mark D. Sauter is the founder and president of GTP Associates, Inc. With over 25 years of business leadership experience, Mark's work, while with Dow Corning Corporation, was profiled in, *Value Based Marketing for Bottom-Line Success* – McGraw-Hill, 2003. In 2009, Mark released his book entitled *Bringing Meaning Into Monday™: A Sustainable Approach to Bottom Line Success*. Additional information is available at www.gtpassociates.com.