

The Challenge of Executive Teams *By Kristin Arnold*

Frustrated, Sally walked away from the meeting with her direct reports. It was only supposed to be a short meeting to solve a particularly vexing problem, but it took far longer. The team was guarding their functional areas of responsibility rather than searching for an optimal *company* solution. Sally knew the team could solve the issue without her involvement, but she couldn't take the impasse any longer.

As Director of Operations of MidCo, Sally played the trump card to reach a decision, but she resented having to get involved. "I have good people on my leadership team. We pay them a generous salary to produce results and be professional. Why can't they work better together?" she muttered as she walked back to her office.

She wasn't surprised to find Bill waiting for her. Bill was her most vocal team member and she knew he wanted to rehash what happened at the meeting.

Sally had to cut him off. "Bill, I'm already a few hours behind schedule and I still have some important tasks I need to do for the CEO today. Let's

talk later, okay?"

"Sure," Bill said. "See you later today."

Sally sat down at her desk and took a deep breath. She printed out MidCo's operations report and reviewed the numbers. They were good, but not great. She knew her team could produce much more, but just wasn't quite hitting on all cylinders. She deferred, "I have to get this report out and answer several critical emails, and then I'll think about it."

After she reviewed the report, she emailed it to the CEO. Answered more emails. Went to another meeting. Called some key clients. Checked voicemail. Returned calls. Answered questions. Stopped in the hall for side conversations. And so the day progressed without another thought given to the team's work.

Remembering her promise to Bill, Sally went to his office and knocked on his door.

"Hi Bill. What's on your mind? I've got a few minutes before I head home."

Bill got up from his desk and offered Sally a comfortable chair in his more informal meeting area.

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Miracle

One of my favorite past times is to watch a full-length, feature film and extract lessons in team dynamics, visioning, change management, diversity, decision-making, and other factors that make teams work.

The latest movie is "Miracle," the against-all-odds story of the 1980 U.S. Olympic hockey team winning the gold medal. The coach is determined to create a team that can rival the "fluid, creative" style of hockey of the Soviets, who dominated the sport for almost two decades. The coach uses a rather unorthodox, but effective approach (which borders on the sadistic) to turn a ragtag bunch of non-pro, college athletes into a world-class team.

Now available on DVD, the film can inspire a rather robust dialogue on the good, the bad and the ugly sides of teamwork!

You can find more films that depict the team dynamic on our website at www.qpcteam.com.

Follow Up to Follow Through *By Kristin Arnold*

Are you having trouble getting your team to follow-through on their tasks? You're not alone. Most teams identify possible tasks throughout the course of their meetings, so the action items become a hodgepodge of possibilities.

It's always a good idea to have a flipchart ready to record the idea as it emerges as well as the name of the person who suggested the task. At the end of the meeting, review the "task list." Make sure the team thoroughly understands the task assigned and the scope of the work. You may discover a task doesn't need to be done at all!

Make sure you confirm the name of at least one person responsible for completing each task. That person is accountable to the team for ensuring the task is complete. Notice, it doesn't mean they have to do all the work, but they do have to marshal the right people and resources to get the job done.

Ask the person responsible if they are going to need some help, then quickly identify who will help them. It's a good practice for those people to touch base right after the meeting to set up a time to get together.

Set a specific due date. Rather than "next week," write **1** *(cont'd on p. 3)*

"Kristin Arnold compiled the "best of" her series and created an annual program with an intensive day each quarter for the senior executive. Now that's thinking like one."

Clint Maun

Senior Partner, Maun-Lemke Inc.

Executive Team Advantage *(continued from page 1)*

She usually enjoyed talking with Bill. He was bright, energetic and wasn't afraid to speak his mind. Bill came from another mid-sized company and brought a wealth of knowledge and expertise.

"Sally, thanks for stopping in...and this won't take long," Bill promised. "I really enjoy working with you and our team. I just think with all the talent we have, we can be so much better."

"I've been thinking the same thing, Bill. I just haven't had the time to think through the issues and what to do about them."

"I know," Bill sympathized. You've got a lot on your mind. But our success is directly linked to the success of our team. We need you to take the time to set the strategy and environment for our team to thrive, not just survive."

Bill continued, "Joe, my old boss at InkCo, went to a program called the *Executive Team Advantage* which really helped him create a solid foundation for our team's work."

Sally groaned. "Don't ask me to go to another communications skills workshop!"

"This is different," Bill assured her. "*Executive Team Advantage* is a program specifically designed for the busy executive – like you. Joe used to come back with lots of practical ideas and, more importantly, clarity on how to improve our team's work."

"Wait a minute. Doesn't the team go to the program with me?"

"No," answered Bill. "But we participated before each session with some kind of prework and then Joe would come back and debrief us. I would really look forward to those discussions. They were more strategic than our usual staff meetings."

"Sounds interesting," Sally conceded. "Tell me more about it."

"Once a quarter, Joe met with a dozen or so fellow executives and talked about their best practices and plans to build a high performance executive team. Over a year's time, the four workshops literally carved out the time necessary to invest in our team's success. Each workshop had a pre-assessment, a bit of skill-building and best practices. From my point of view, the best part was the action plan. There were monthly, ongoing coaching calls that supported his efforts throughout the quarter. At the end of the year, we re-assessed our teamwork profile. We were all amazed at how much we improved our team scores in the specific areas Joe selected for improvement."

"Bill, this could be the perfect solution. You're right. I need to carve out the time, and working with other executives is really appealing. But what's this plan of action?"

Bill explained, "The plan of action is a culmination of the entire day's work. It consists of three things you agree to start doing, stop doing or change the way you do them. You would be amazed at the impact that just one day has on the team's overall work. Especially since you know you'll be seeing your peers each quarter!"

On the way home, Sally starting thinking of the possibilities for improving her team's work. Sally had never heard of anything quite like this program and was intrigued with the possibilities. After dinner, she logged on the Internet and checked out the website Bill gave her: www.executiveteamadvantage.com. The format was really unusual. The program includes coaching calls between workshops and other options for improved teamwork. The registration fee was quite reasonable as well.

As Sally read the information, she realized her team would be successful if she deliberately created a fertile foundation and solid expectations for effective teamwork to thrive. Sally registered for the program starting September 14th at the Tower Club in Vienna, VA. You're welcome to come join the program!

Call 800.589.4733 or go to www.executiveteamadvantage.com for more information.

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"Today's successful corporate executive has many battles to fight, and finding an ally like Kristin can help turn the tide. Having known Kristin professionally for more than a decade, I can say that ten years of research and feedback have produced an excellent program designed to take your leadership team twice as far in half the time."

Tom Christal
President/CEO, The Christal Company

What's New at QPC Inc.

After extensive interviews with clients, we have started a new program aimed at executives (director levels and above) to help them build high performance teams with their direct reports (often called the "top team" or "leadership team." It fills a niche in the marketplace that has not been well-served (executive teams operate differently than cross-functional teams) and that I believe I can add tremendous value from the dozen years I have been working with teams. We are piloting the first program on September 14th at the Tower Club in Vienna, VA. We are looking for a few executives (like Sally in our lead story) who want to take their teams to the next level. I encourage you to check out our new website at www.executiveteamadvantage.com for more information.

Speaking of websites, we have completely revamped our primary website, www.qpcteam.com to be more user-friendly. The homepage is segmented based on user groups so that all team members have some options of interest, executives have other interests, as well as project/team leaders and facilitators. We're really excited about the format changes as well as the new material posted on the web. Look for movie reviews, team quotes, book reviews, team energizers and more.

I am thankful for my new clients: Chief/Senior Executive Network, Farm Credit Association; and my recurring clients: Caterpillar Inc., Farm Credit System Insurance Corporation, US Army Corps of Engineers, Strategic Partners, Horizon Lines, Maun-Lemke Inc., The Christal Co. and US Air Force.

Have a great summer and see you soon! Kristin

Follow Up (continued from page 1)

down February 11th. By assigning a specific date, the task becomes much more tangible and can be written on their calendars. If appropriate, put the task on a timeline and show how it affects other team events or tasks.

Make sure the action items are captured in the meeting minutes. Typically, minutes are sent out within two days of the meeting as a quick reminder to each team member.

Then, devise a system to follow-up on those tasks:

Post a "team task list" in a common area. This list has the assigned, and not yet completed tasks, Responsible person and due date. Check or cross the task off the list when done.

During your team meetings, report out progress, completion, or any delays. Celebrate and congratulate completion. Note progress and see if any help is needed. And if there is a delay, don't shoot the messenger! Instead, allow the team member to explain what happened and what they are doing to get the task done. Ask what the team can do to ensure the task is done within a reasonable timeframe.

If it seems like many deadlines are slipping, prioritize your team task list so each team member knows what is vital (it must be done - give it an "A"), important (it should be done - a "B") and nice to have (it could be done - a "C") to your team's work.

As you build a system to support the team's follow through on assigned tasks, the team will start to feel responsible to each other for completing the projects each team member takes on.

Practical Team Activities: Tinker Toys

Tinker Toys

To observe how easily communication can break down

Time: 30 minutes

Nr. of Participants: At least two groups of 4 to 8 people

Materials: Two sets of Tinker Toys®

solely on verbal description.

When finished, let the two groups observe the other's structure. From your specific observations as well as the discussion, debrief the activity:

- ◆ How did the group representative communicate with the other group?
- ◆ What helped the communication?
- ◆ What got in the way of the communication?
- ◆ What frustrations did the groups encounter?
- ◆ What did you learn from this activity?
- ◆ How might we apply these lessons to our team's work?

For a variation of the activity, conduct three rounds:

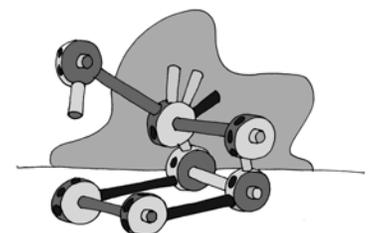
Round One – the representative gives verbal description, but the group may not ask any questions.

Round Two – the representative gives verbal description and the group may ask questions.

Round Three – the representative gives verbal description and may make suggestions.

Divide into two groups. Instruct each group to quickly build a Tinker Toy® structure, without letting the other group see the structure.

Send one representative from each group to the other group. The representative will instruct the other group on how to replicate the structure, based



"We've used a slow-motion replay to analyze Bush's style and uncover what he does that makes him so successful. We've examined different phases of his life, looking at major decisions, strategies, techniques, failures, and successes, all with the intent of seeing what practices endure."

*Carolyn Thompson and James Ware
The Leadership Genius of George W. Bush*

From the Bookshelf



"Politics aside, this is a really good book," said Bill Arbogast, one of my clients from Caterpillar, Inc. He handed me a copy of *The Leadership Genius of George W. Bush* by Carolyn B. Thompson and James W. Ware (ISBN 0-471-42006-9). "You may not agree with him, but after reading this book, you certainly know how he has built a high performance team."

I agree. The book is based on solid research about "Dubya" coupled with the authors' extensive background in leadership and teamwork. Fascinating anecdotes abound, from the way Bush hires people and builds trust within his team. It explores his "give it to 'em straight" talk, his vision and values, and his disciplined focus. The authors are clearly enamored with Bush's leadership style and the book easily engenders a sincere appreciation for the man and his ability to seek out talent and build an extraordinary team.

My only caveat in recommending this book is the authors' Pollyanna approach. The book was published in 2003, written shortly after 9/11. The afterglow of Bush's remarkable performance after the terrorist attacks smothers the book, especially since there is considerable controversy about Bush's team since the invasion of Iraq and 9/11 investigations. It appears the authors only recount the anecdotes that confirm their "genius" thesis and don't show any of his weaknesses. In other words, a little more balance would be appropriate. After all, we're all human!

You've Got the Power of Moot!

By Jim Ball

Early in my career, I was assigned to a thirty-day consulting project for Bob Moot, the CFO of Amtrak. Four days into the work, I was at my desk at Amtrak when a man appeared in the doorway and tapped on the door jam.

"Hi, I'm Bill Cook," he said. "I'm a systems manager with Amtrak. I work in the office across the way. How's it going?"

I stood and shook Bill's hand. "Hi," I said. "It's going great. I'm just getting started, but things are going well."

Bill said nothing for a few moments. Then he smiled. "You don't know me from the man the moon, but I am going to do you a favor and tell you like I see it. I've been watching you for three days and I know it's not going great. You are trying to set up meetings and everyone is playing hard to get. The problem is, you've got the power, and you don't even know it. You work for Bob Moot. He is the number two man at Amtrak. He gave you an assignment and you have the full authority to meet with anyone you need to meet with when you want to meet with them. You've got the Power of Moot, and if you want my advice, use it."

I don't remember Bill leaving my office that day. I was numb. Every word Bill had said was true. Things were not going great. No one was available when I called. Everyone was putting me off. I had "Moot Power," but wasn't using it!

The next day when I arrived at work, nothing and no one at Amtrak had changed, but I had changed. I knew I had Moot Power, the power to do whatever I needed to do to complete my project. As a result, I was more confident. I had more energy, more spark in my step. I held my head

higher and smiled more. I walked taller. Heck, I probably *was* taller!

It was magical. Although nothing was physically different, everything worked differently. People met with me. They volunteered their assistance. They helped me set up appointments and gather information. They stopped by to make sure I was getting everything I needed.

I finished my work and provided Bob Moot a summary of my findings. Bob liked my summary and suggestions. He even hired my firm to expand the project to implement my ideas, evolving into an eighteen-month project.

I have thought about this situation many times over the years. I had the Power of Moot all along and never realized it or used it. Even though I did absolutely nothing to invoke Moot's name or authority the next day, just realizing I had his power gave me the confidence I needed to deal with others effectively.

But here's the rub: It was not Bob Moot's power that I was using; it was my own. I always had the power I needed. I just had to find the switch and turn it on. Bill Cook gave me the wake-up call that helped me click my own switch on to release my own power. Once I did, the doors opened and whole world changed.

When you encounter obstacles, roadblocks, setbacks, frustrations, or seemingly insurmountable circumstances, remember this story. For you too, have all the power you need. It's just a click of the switch away.

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