

▶ The Challenge of Executive Teams (Part 2) *By Kristin Arnold*

Sally was frustrated with the apparent lack of teamwork on her leadership team. When questioned, they didn't really feel they had enough in common to "be a team," although there were specific instances where she knew the lack of teamwork significantly affected company results.

Based on Bill's recommendation, Sally attended a program devoted to helping executives build high performance teams: *Executive Team Advantage*.

The day following the first workshop, Bill wanted to hear all about Sally's experience.

"Bill, it was a breath of fresh air. I finally had a chunk of time to think through the strengths and opportunities for improvement within our team."

Bill smiled, remembering that was exactly what Joe, his previous boss, had said about the program!

"You remember that web survey we took in support of this workshop? Well, the results were very interesting. I wasn't



too surprised, but it clearly showed me what is working and what isn't working so well. Using these results, I was able to identify our team's strengths as well as opportunities for improvement."

"It was great to bounce ideas off of other folks and Kristin, the workshop facilitator had lots of best practices to share. What a relief to know that I am not alone! Now I have a few practical, easy-to-implement ideas to improve the team's work."

Bill could tell Sally was re-energized by the workshop.

"The workshop then zeroed in on 'clarity of purpose.' Kristin asked us to identify our leadership team's mission or purpose. I'm interested in your opinion, Bill. What would you say our purpose is?"

Bill thought for a moment and answered, "Well, we provide strategic, operational and institutional leadership for the organization."

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Now that we're all familiar with blogs, along comes the "plog," a trademarked name for using blog software to create a password-protected project log—or plog for short.

Co-workers can use a plog to create an archive of observations and data for each project they work on. People can keep tabs at their own pace, visiting the plog as often as they wish. And because plogs are web-enabled, users can post hyperlinks to key documents on them, sparing their colleagues' email inboxes the burden of dense attachments.

So far, most companies that employ plogs have built the software themselves. Chicago-based interface design firm *37signals* added a calendar and task list to its plog, which it is now selling as a program called *Basecamp*. You can try out the program for free on one project; after that, it starts at \$19 per month for up to 10 projects.

*Adapted from Ian Ybarra
Inc. Magazine, September 2004.*

▶ Problem Ownership

By Christopher Avery

Problem ownership (i.e. commitment to personal responsibility) is one of the most sought-after qualities in employees. IT organizations that deal with reality the fastest are those that acknowledge and foster what it takes for their leaders, teams, and workers to own problems.

Managerially speaking, this is a huge untapped opportunity. Organizational performance for the knowledge-based enterprise is sensitive to the social context within which people work. Information flow follows social pathways. How knowledge-workers are managed makes a competitive difference—for better or worse.

Here are some tips to increase the opportunity for people to own problems:

Tell the Truth. Your employees are much too smart to be fooled. If you are playing them, they'll play you too by vastly reducing the set of everyday organizational problems they are willing to own.

Include vs. Exclude. Participatory management recognizes that people generate commitment toward that which they have a voice in creating. Every time you think about whom to include or exclude from a

“The way a team plays as a whole determines its success. You may have the greatest bunch of individual stars in the world, but if they don’t play together, the club won’t be worth a dime.”

Babe Ruth

Executive Team Advantage *(continued from page 1)*

Sally agreed. “Yeah, we all answered something like that too, but Kristin really challenged us for evidence and to be more specific. After all, what does that really mean?”

Bill laughed. “Does sound kinda Dilbert-ish.”

“We had a great conversation about teams at our level. There has to be a balance between a top leadership approach where functionals report to me and a team-based approach. I realized that I have been perpetuating the functional approach where there are times when teams would be a better fit.

“I agree. We need to be able to shift into whichever mode is best for the task at hand. And we take our cues from you, Sally.”

Sally nodded. “Kristin said, ‘If you want your team to be a team, you must *design* team interactions that allow team members to act functionally as well as collaboratively, depending on the situation at hand.’ It’s my job to create opportunities for the team to discuss and agree on the fundamental concepts that drive the team—as well as the organization.”

“So how do you do that?” asked Bill.

Sally hesitated. “I have lots of ideas from the workshop, and Kristin suggested that we focus on a ‘vital few.’ Before I share my ideas with you, I’d like to think through my priorities. I intend to share my findings and action plan with the team later today. I hope I can depend on you to help implement some of the ideas?”

Bill smiled again. “Sure, Sally. Whatever I can do to help our team be even more successful! I’m looking forward to hearing your great ideas.”

For more information about the Executive Team Advantage Program, call 800.589.4733 or go to www.executiveteamadvantage.com

Problem Ownership *By Christopher Avery*

meeting, a management process, or a communication, ask this question: “How is this likely to effect people’s willingness to own problems?”

Clarify Decisions as yours, mine and ours. Are the people in your enterprise at each level absolutely clear about which decisions are yours to take, which decisions are theirs to take, and which decisions deserve consensus? Create a list of the last ten decisions you took on behalf of your organization. Did your taking those decisions surprise anyone who felt they weren’t yours to take? How did that affect problem ownership?

All of these tips really point to a single principle you can adopt to practice problem ownership: Start two (not one) problem resolution cycles when things go wrong. When something is out of control, it’s up to you to get it back under control. At the same time you launch a containment effort to regain control, also initiate a second, simultaneous effort. The second effort must be a discovery process examining your assumptions, presumptions, and projections in order to learn the truth about how your situation got out of control to begin with. If you are willing to stay in that self-imposed heat, you will eventually discover something you did to choose, create, or attract the very problem you are attempting to control. And that gives you true learning you can act on. The first cycle regains control. The second cycle embraces the power of leadership.

Reprinted with permission. © 2004 Christopher M. Avery, Ph.D., author of Teamwork Is an Individual Skill: Getting Your Work Done When Sharing Responsibility (Berrett-Koehler, 2001). Visit his website at www.partnerwerks.com

A newsletter designed to facilitate discussion and share tips and techniques to help your teams to be extraordinary.

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helps your teams to be extraordinary.

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"For the first time ever, we can define what makes a team perform successfully. And this has a tremendous impact on the success of our business."

John Barr

Senior Managing Partner, Xerox Quality Services

What's New at QPC Inc.

Welcome to the Tenth Anniversary edition of this newsletter. Ten years ago, we published this newsletter to clients, advocates and friends of Quality Process Consultants, Inc. Over the years, it has evolved into an electronic version with over 1,200 subscribers! We are delighted to provide timely tips to help your teams to be extraordinary. A BIG thanks for reading, and please, don't keep us a secret; share this newsletter with a friend!

Our newest program, the Executive Team Advantage (ETA) took an interesting turn of events. Positioned as four, one-day workshops, ETA is designed for executives (directors and above) to help build better leadership teams. While several executives were interested in ETA, many more were interested in a similar process and program for their *project teams*.

As a direct result of this client feedback, we created a "Project Team Advantage" workshop series that spans six months (versus a year), targeted toward project team issues around clarity of purpose, alignment of roles, communication, decision-making, managing conflict and accountability.

New Sessions Start Soon in Vienna, VA

Project Team Advantage: November 17, 2004

Executive Team Advantage: December 9, 2004

Go to www.executiveteamadvantage.com for more info

Here's an interesting tidbit of trivia: The Leeds School of Business at the University of Colorado at Boulder is using my book, *Team Basics* as a textbook. James Marlatt, a faculty member with extensive corporate experience selected *Team Basics* as "a practical book on team skills to help his students complete their team projects". Thanks, Jim!

And don't forget to nominate your high performance team for the Extraordinary Work Team Day! See www.qpcteam.com for more information and have an awesome autumn!

Kristin

Kolbe™ and the Trifecta

When you assign a bunch of individuals to work together as a team, you want to do everything you can to make them successful. You'll want to make sure you have the right people with the right skills, motivation and natural inclination to succeed.

I call this the "Team Trifecta:" competency, character and conation. You can teach knowledge and skills, you can assess personalities (MBTI, DISC etc.) and get people to "stretch," but conative, natural instincts are hard-wired into every individual.

Have you ever had a team that *should* be performing, but isn't? The Kolbe Indexes may help you pinpoint the issue: you may have some conative dissonance in the form of strain, strain, polarization or even meltdown!

The Kolbe Indexes can help you:

- ◆ Forecast how well your team(s) will perform
- ◆ Create teams with the most synergistic mix of people
- ◆ Make sure your team(s) are composed of people with the right mix of complementary instincts
- ◆ Determine whether or not particular candidates are right for a specific job within the team.

As an MBTI qualified consultant, I was intrigued with the Kolbe Indexes...so much so that last May I went out to Phoenix, AZ to get certified. The Kolbe provides the missing element to the team synergy equation: your conative instincts. Vastly different than MBTI, the Kolbe is NOT an indicator—and only half of you would "guess" your correct combination of instincts!

For more information on how Kolbe and QPC Inc. can help your teams hit the trifecta, call 800.589.4733.

Practical Team Activities: Map It!

Map It!

To creatively demonstrate the geographic diversity and similarities of the team

Time: 5 to 20 minutes

Nr. of Participants: 5 to 20 people

Materials: Plastic coated 3'x5' geographic map (of the U.S. or World, depending on the makeup of the team)

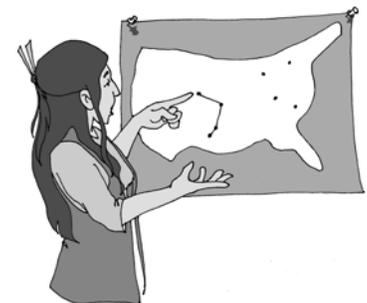
Removable colored dots

Before your team assembles, ask each team member to place a small, colored dot on the places they have lived.

Ask each team member to give a quick "tour" for the team, where they have lived and what they were doing at each location. Also ask each team member to share something they remember from their youth (the first dot on the map).

After all have had a chance to participate, debrief the activity:

- ◆ What do you think about the activity?



- ◆ What are some of the things we have in common?
- ◆ What are some of the differences between team members?
- ◆ How can these commonalities and differences affect our team work?

"Because a finite amount of time is available, if you want to get more done, the temptation is to go faster and work more hours. However, productivity is not about squeezing more into your days."

Laura Stack, MBA, CSP

The Productivity Pro® and Author, *Leave the Office Earlier*

From the Bookshelf



Many of you know that I am brutally efficient. So, it is no small feat for me to recommend a time-management book, *Leave the Office Earlier*, by Laura Stack, the Productivity Pro® (ISBN 0-7679-1626-3). Starting with a quiz to assess your productivity habits (which you can also take on her website, www.TheProductivityPro.com), Laura steers you to specific chapters full of tips and techniques to maximize your time at work *and* with your team mates.

The chapters are even organized in a "PRODUCTIVE" mnemonic: **P**reparation, **R**eduction, **O**rder, **D**iscipline, **U**nease, **C**oncentration, **T**ime Mastery, **I**nformation Management, **V**itality, **E**quilibrium. (Isn't Laura clever?) Start with the chapter with the lowest score and begin working on the item that gave you the most trouble.

Laura's writing style is easy to read, digest and apply. She has taken the world of time management and office productivity and boiled them into ideas you can use...today!

December 4, 2004 is the Fifth Annual Extraordinary Work Team Recognition Day

This day celebrates those teams that consistently work extraordinarily well together to produce significant results for their companies or organizations.

Team leaders, members and management "champions" are encouraged to recognize exceptional team performance. Submit your stories for a chance to win a \$200 gift certificate for the team to spend as they wish—on dinner, a limo ride, concert tickets or whatever they choose. The team will also receive a commemorative plaque and notification letter.

Past winners include the City of Norfolk Environmental Crimes Task Force, State of Missouri Criminal Investigation Bureau Project Team and Williams Employee Learning and Development Team.

Nominate your team at our website at www.qpcteam.com by December 4, 2004.

A Simple Piece of Chalk *By Jim Ball*

One of my favorite stories is about how Charles M. Schwab, the steel magnate, was frustrated trying to get the workers in one of his mills to produce more steel.

One day, Schwab asked one of the workers how many heats his shift had completed. The man said six.

Schwab took a piece of chalk, wrote a big "6" on the floor, and left the plant without another word.

When the night shift came in, they asked about the big "6" on the floor. They were told that Schwab had inquired about the number of heats the day shift had produced and he had placed the number on the floor.

The next morning, Schwab saw that the night shift had erased the "6" and replaced it with a big "7."

That evening, when the night shift returned, they saw that the day shift, not to be outdone by anyone, had erased their big "7" and replaced it with a big "10."

This mill, previously the poorest producer, soon became the best producing mill in the company.

In addition to being enjoyable and memorable, this story points out several key principles or concepts that all leaders and managers should keep in mind.

Feedback. If you want to improve performance, you must tell people how they are doing and you must make sure they are aware of what you are telling them. By placing the big "6" on the floor, Schwab made certain that the crews would know not only how they were doing, but they were also made clearly aware that Schwab knew as well.

Comparability. If you want people to increase output, you must give people comparable information so they can assess how well they are doing in comparison to how well others are doing. When the night shift replaced the big "6" with a big "7," they provided the comparative information in simple and vivid terms.

Recognition. If you want people to change their behavior and results, you must reward and recognize them. Interestingly, Schwab offered no tangible reward or incentive to produce more heats. However, the men responded to produce more simply because they knew that Schwab himself had drawn that first big "6." The workers knew that Schwab would know how well they did. This triggered their pride and enthusiasm to do even more.

Teamwork. If you want to increase results for a team, you have to obtain the commitment and enthusiasm of the entire team. Schwab did this by providing a challenge to them—with a simple piece of chalk and one specific piece of information.

Mr. Schwab dramatically improved results with a five-cent piece of chalk. You can do the same for both your business and personal performance results. All you need to do is provide simple and specific feedback to yourself and others in a vivid and memorable way. A big number on the floor is a very good idea. Need some chalk?

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