

▶ Stand Out of Their Light

By Joseph Sherren, CSP

Senior executives, when asked in a survey what skills they look for most when developing a management team stated: “It is the ability to deal with and motivate people more than any other.” Surveys of top executives have also confirmed that “people skills” are more important to a manager’s progress than intelligence, knowledge, or job skills. If a business wants to take seriously the effort which has been put into the strategic plan, they must also ensure accountability at all levels of management.

Three fundamental skills are necessary for leaders to implement viable team management strategies:

Diagnosing. Being able to see the environment and understand the needs of the people, team or situation they are attempting to lead.

Adapting. Being flexible by adapting their thinking and decision-making styles to suit the contingencies of the challenge.

Communicating. Being able to convey messages that can be easily understood, interpreted, accepted and responded to in a positive way.

Leaders must understand how their



coaching style influences team performance and understand the basic levels of team members’ competence.

They must develop an ability to apply a theoretical model in practical work environments and understand how it can facilitate positive behavior to achieve performance improvements.

When leaders are able to assess the competency of their team members and understand what truly motivates them, they will be able to effectively engage in the appropriate coaching style which will ensure constructive performance.

Once this is all done, it is important to truly empower the people to

Great vision. When Alexander the Great visited Diogenes and asked whether he could do anything for the famed teacher, Diogenes replied, “Only stand out of my light.” For leaders with talented, creative and enthusiastic team members, many times the best thing they can do is “stand out of their light.”

Only by trusting and empowering your team members will you get their best performance and productivity.

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▶ The Challenge of Executive Teams (Part 3) By Kristin Arnold

Editors Note: You can read parts one and two on our website at www.executiveteamadvantage.com

Sally took a deep breath before she opened the door to the conference room. Most of her meetings with her direct reports were task-oriented status reports, briefings, and problem-solving sessions. This meeting was going to be a bit different. She had asked her direct reports to come prepared to discuss business fundamentals – just to make sure her executive team was all talking from the same sheet of music. From some of the exercises she did during the *Executive Team Advantage Program*, she knew the team was not as clear nor as focused as they could be.

Furthermore, she wanted to pay attention to the interactions between her executives. The Program’s team assessment results confirmed her suspicions: her team was not particularly candid nor open with each other. Sally wanted to see if she could inspire some “robust dialogue” among her team.

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Nine Links

Have you been to our website lately? Here are nine of our most popular links at www.qpcteam.com:

1. Download Kristin’s chapter, “How to Build Your Expertise in Facilitation” in the recently released *IAF Handbook of Group Facilitation*.
2. Take the Team Litmus Test to rate your team’s work.
3. Discover Kristin’s Top Ten Team Tips including the most notorious, “Get Naked”.
4. Nominate your Extraordinary Work Team, celebrated annually on December 4th.
5. Find the perfect icebreaker to get your team off to a great start.
6. Discover a famous (or infamous) quote about teams and teamwork.
7. Search for an article Kristin has written about teams.
8. Read (or post) a movie review that involves team growth.
9. Subscribe to the electronic version of this newsletter!

Starts June 22, 2005 in Vienna, Virginia

**See www.executiveteamadvantage.com
for more information**

Executive Teams (continued from page 1)

Sally opened the door and greeted her team. "Thank you for investing the next hour in a bit of 'wallowing' as Jack Welch calls it. In an effort to make sure we are all focused and in alignment, let's kick around some of the "business basics" that drive (or should drive) our business. My intent is to make sure we have a common language and understanding of what's important and to gain a deeper understanding of our individual perspectives. How does that sound to you?"

A few heads nodded in tacit agreement. "Let's start with our purpose. Why we exist." Sally recognized that her role would be to facilitate the conversation as well as participate, but she didn't want to dominate the discussion either. She simply asked the group, "Any thoughts on that?"

After a few moments of stunned silence, the CFO, Tom cleared his throat and said, "Isn't it obvious? We're here to make a profit. It's that simple."

"Yes, but we also provide a valuable service to our customers. It's more than just profitability," Bill countered.

After a few more comments, Sally summarized the discussion so far. "So profitability is important, as well as being value-added. Why else to do exist?"

Layne grumbled, "So I can send my kids to college." The others chuckled knowing that Layne has two kids in college and two more in high school.

"Okay, so we are also about providing a respectable quality of life for our employees? Is that what you mean, Layne?" Sally asked.

Layne perked up. "Well, yes, I guess it is. But it's more than that. I spend more time here than I do at home...and I want to be in a place that values its employees."

Sally cringed at his comment. Did that mean he thinks MidCo doesn't value its employees? Rather than confront, Sally opted to reflect Layne's observation to the rest of the group. "What do the rest of you think about what Layne just said?"

Bill said, "I agree with Layne. We provide more than just a paycheck. We provide meaningful, challenging work. Most of us come in each day looking to do great work. I think our purpose is also to provide an avenue where people can use their strengths and talents...and make a profit as well!"

The discussion continued until Sally confirmed agreement on the main reasons why MidCo exists: Profitability, Customer Value, Leveraged Talent and Growth. Sally then asked her team, "So, was this a helpful discussion?"

Bill responded, "I think so Sally. It was great to hear from each of us – including you – on what we thought was important. Articulated as a group, they make perfect sense and that's really where we should be focusing our efforts as the leadership team. We tend to get distracted with the day-to-day details of this business."

Layne chimed in. "I also appreciate the frank discussion. Because we allocated an hour and didn't have to rush off to the next meeting, we were really able to express our opinions...without being sidetracked or rushed."

Sally was proud of the team's work and told them so. "Thanks so much for contributing. We had a great discussion and I look forward to other opportunities to 'wallow' with you. I see tremendous value in these strategic discussions and there are many more basic questions I'd like to ask, have the team kick around."

"As far as next steps, I'll email a summary of what was said. Give this a bit more thought over the next few days. We might have forgotten something important to add. Then, let's keep these three focus areas in mind as we continue to work on a daily basis. This was a great discussion and let's keep it up!"

For more information about building high performance executive teams, see our website at www.executive teamadvantage.com

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“The best thing a manager can do for great employees is to stand out of their light.”

Joseph Sherren, CSP

What's New at QPC Inc.

I just love this time of year. The weather is mild and sunny, the cherry blossoms are swaying in the breeze and all is right with the world. (And Washington has a national baseball team again!).

I just got back from Singapore where I was asked to present at the Global Summit for Professional Speakers. Three hundred speakers from all over the world congregated for the first time ever to learn from each other and share ideas. It is the first time I have ever been west of Hawaii (trust me, 22 hours in a plane is no fun), and it was incredible to be surrounded by so many other accomplished speakers from Europe, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Southeast Asia. The Summit was truly international versus a U.S.-centric conference—quite a change of pace! I was honored to present a session on how speakers can add facilitation to the services they provide their clients.

Jossey-Bass, in cooperation with the International Association of Facilitators just published the *IAF Handbook of Group Facilitation*. Chock full of great information from facilitation thought leaders such as Roger Schwarz, Sam Kaner, David Sibbett, David Straus, Dale Hunter and yours truly! Check out my chapter on “Building your Facilitation Expertise” about what it takes to learn and grow your facilitation skills. (Note: You can download my chapter from my website at <http://www.qpcteam.com/docs/dfc.pdf>).—among other Otherwise, enjoy the beautiful spring weather, wherever you are, and keep in touch! We always enjoy hearing about your Extraordinary Team!

Kristin



Practical Team Activities: Aardvark or Antelope?

Aardvark or Antelope?

To creatively demonstrate the idea that we can't rely on the team leader/expert to make all the decisions.

Time: 15 to 20 minutes

Nr. of Participants: 8 to 20 people

Materials:

- ◆ Two different colored marking pens
- ◆ One aardvark and one antelope stuffed animal (optional)

Introduce the person at the end of the “U” or one person in the circle as the “fount of all knowledge about aardvarks.” Hand that person a marker or the aardvark stuffed animal. “Whenever anyone needs to know anything about aardvarks, they have to come to Jane, oh fount of all knowledge about aardvarks.”

Introduce the person at the other end of the “U” or the person sitting next to the “fount of all knowledge about aardvarks” as the “fount of all knowledge about antelopes.” Hand that person a dif-

ferent colored marker. Restate, “Whenever anyone needs to know anything about antelopes, they have to come to Bob, oh fount of all knowledge about antelopes.”

Explain to the team the rules of the activity: “This is how it works: Jane, you tell the person next to you (not Bob, the other person, Sally), ‘This marker is an aardvark.’ Sally, because she is NOT the fount of all knowledge asks Jane, ‘A what?’ Jane replies, ‘An aardvark.’ Sally then understands, and takes the marker from Jane.”

Now Sally needs to explain the aardvark to the next person in the line, Kelly. But Sally is NOT the fount of all knowledge. She has to go back to the fount of all knowledge (Jane) and ask “A what?” To which Jane will reply “an aardvark.” Sally will then tell Kelly, “It’s an aardvark.” And so the process begins. The only person who can verify that it is, in fact, an aardvark is Jane.

Same thing holds true for Bob and the antelopes. Make

sure both “sides” understand the rules before you continue.

Now here is where the fun starts. The goal is to ensure that Bob (at the other end of the “U”) understands about aardvarks and that Jane understands about antelopes. Pass the marker down the line, recognizing that you need to have the founts of all knowledge verify each time it passes from one team member to the next.

Then stand back and watch the confusion, especially when the two pens intersect in the midway point. They will be VERY confused!

After the aardvark and antelope have made it all the way around, debrief this activity with the following questions:

- ◆ What do you think about the founts of all knowledge?
- ◆ Was it necessary to keep going back to them?
- ◆ Do you see this dynamic on our team?
- ◆ How can we prevent this dynamic from occurring?

“Groups do not need to be dominated by exceptionally intelligent people in order to be smart. Even if most of the people within a group are not especially well-informed or rational, it can still reach a collectively wise decision.”

James Surowiecki
The Wisdom of Crowds

From the Bookshelf: The Wisdom of Crowds



Being a huge proponent of teams, I felt compelled to pick up James Surowiecki's book, *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many are Smarter Than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economies, Societies and Nations* (ISBN 0-385-50386-5) at my local bookstore. I'm also a big fan of Surowiecki's contributions to the *Wall Street Journal* and *The New Yorker*. And then a few of my buddies suggested the book. I call this "triangulation," when three completely different events collide. For me, it's like a huge, neon, pulsating arrow saying "read me!"

In a nutshell, this book reinforced my faith in large groups. Surowiecki's premise is this: "Large groups of people are smarter than the elite few, no matter how brilliant—better at solving problems, fostering innovation, coming to wise decisions, even predicting the future."

In entertaining vignettes (similar to Malcolm Gladwell's style in *The Tipping Point* and *Blink*, two other wonderful

books on collective and individual decision-making), Surowiecki describes the conditions for group wisdom (diversity, independence and decentralization) and examples that support his premise.

His stories range from popular culture, psychology, biology, economics, artificial intelligence, military history, political theory—a veritable potpourri of instances where the wisdom of crowds flourish as well as flounder. Makes you think a bit differently about all kinds of things including why I have "bad line karma" where the line I am standing in is always the longest.

For over a decade, I have taught others to "trust the team." Now I know why...as well as the three conditions for group wisdom—another version of triangulation.

I also have myriad everyday examples of how the many are smarter than the few. Now that can restore anyone's faith in group process!

Be a Mule and Shake It Off

A parable is told of a farmer who owned an old mule. The mule fell into a farmer's well and the farmer heard the mule's calls.

After carefully assessing the situation, the farmer sympathized with the mule, but decided that neither the mule nor the well was worth the trouble of saving.

Instead, he called his neighbors together and told them what had happened. He enlisted them to help haul dirt to bury the old mule in the well and put him out of his misery.

Initially, the old mule was frightened as he feared this would be the end for him. But, as the farmer and his neighbors continued shoveling dirt on his back, a thought struck him as well. It suddenly dawned on him that every time a shovel load of dirt landed on his back, he could shake it off, and take a step up on top of it. This he did, blow after blow.

"Shake it off and step up...shake it off and step up!" he repeated to encourage himself. No matter how painful the blows or distressing the situation seemed, the old mule fought panic and just kept right on shaking it off and stepping up.

The mule's situation became very muddy and it seemed

as though there was no way that he could persevere. His struggle was intense. Many times, he considered giving up, even knowing the consequences would bury him alive.

However, in the midst of his adversity, the stubborn survivor could see the light from above getting brighter. Albeit feint, he took it as a sign of encouragement and he continued to fight. Eventually, the light got brighter and his efforts became even more intense.

Finally, he had worked his way up to the edge of the barrier that constrained him. The mule looked at those who thought they might bury him and (if he could talk) he might have said, "Thank you." Then he stepped out and re-joined them.

Clearly, what seemed like it would bury him actually provided him with a tremendous experience in life—all because of the manner in which he handled his adversity. He refused to give in to panic, bitterness or self-pity.

Again, if he could talk, he might say with a "Hee Haawww," the adversities in life that come along to bury us can actually make us stronger. Sometimes, it is our choices that make all the differences.

Author unknown

