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This month's newsletter is all about growth. With the New Year upon us, why not grow our leadership skills, be more productive and organized as a team, heighten our awareness in our interactions, and modernize our panel discussions. Don't just coast through the holidays, keep reading, learning, and growing.

Happy Holidays,
Kristin

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HOW TO TRANSITION FROM A HIERARCHY TO TEAM BASED APPROACH

I thought the recently published [Deloitte Trends Report on Organizational Performance](#) was spot on.

"Hierarchies are being displaced by teams at organizations across industries and geographies" with 96% indicating that some (65%), most (25%), or almost all (8%) of the work is done in teams.

Unfortunately, "65 percent of this year's survey respondents viewed the shift from "functional hierarchy to team-centric and network-based organizational models" as important or very important—but only seven percent of respondents felt very ready to execute this shift, and only six percent rated themselves very effective at managing cross-functional teams."

Why is that? For a hundred years, we have operated under the simple rules of a **hierarchical organization**.

1. Leader has information and makes the decisions.
2. Tells the direct reports what to do.
3. They do it and tell the boss.

It's an elegant model *when the task is defined and contained and when the information is not accessible to all*. But we don't work in that kind of world anymore. We live in a [YUCA](#) world where there are many moving parts and where information, if available, is available and accessible to all.

The problem is that it is *easier* to work in a hierarchical mode and much more complex to operate in teams. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't try.

- The report cites several recommendations to embed a team based approach to work:
- **"The ecosystem.** Define purpose-driven teams in the context of the missions they serve within the organization and externally relative to customers, partners, and society at large.
 - **The organization.** Design 'front-led' networks of teams that promote multidisciplinary collaboration and empowered decision-making.
 - **The team.** Build teams that demonstrate new agile and collaborative ways of working.
 - **The leader.** Select and develop team leaders who have a growth mindset that creates the conditions for teams to be iterative, open, inclusive, and effective.
 - **The individual.** Challenge conventional talent management interventions, from succession and performance management, to rewards and learning, to enable individuals to change their focus from 'climbing the ladder' to growing from experience to experience."

The report cites a case study where the leadership team did an evaluation of their formal and informal hierarchical and teaming behaviors. "By identifying the gaps, the organizations were able to make adjustments in team design based on performance and effectiveness data."

You, too, can do an "armchair assessment" (a much less rigorous approach!) of your team's work. Bring together your team and identify the gaps between where your team is now and how y'all would like to operate. Then, as a team, design a plan to close that gap, using the Deloitte recommendations to generate discussion and ideas. I find that people are much more committed to that which they have created.

I know it is easier said than done. But you've got to start somewhere because teams and teamwork are not going away.

PANEL FORMATS OF THE PAST AND IMPROVEMENTS OF TODAY

Harry A. Overstreet, an American educator, first coined the term "panel discussion" in a short article "[On the Panel](#)" in the October, 1934, issue of *The Trained Nurse and Hospital Review*. In essence, Overstreet envisioned the panel as a "glorified conversation [with] all the delight of generous give-and-take. And if it is a genuinely good conversation, it sends people away with a warm feeling not only that their own ideas have been clarified but that their understanding of other points of view has been broadened."

The actual mechanics of a panel discussion at that time were to:

Set the Stage. "The members of the panel (usually not more than eight) sit on the platform, behind a long table facing the audience, so that they may comfortably lean forward as they engage in the discussion."

Have a Chairman. "One member of the panel serves as chairman. His function is to state the problem and to keep the discussion well within the areas of relevancy." (See Overstreet on the Role of the Moderator).

Have No Speeches. "If he is a wise chairman, he announces at the beginning the one simple rule of the procedure; that no one, under any circumstances, is to rise and make a speech. To do so, he indicates, will be the one unforgivable offense."

Kick It Off. "Informally introducing the individual members of the panel, he then states briefly the problem of the evening and throws the discussion open to the panel, inviting any member to speak as the spirit moves him."

Not Rehearse. "A nervous chairman will feel that something in the nature of a program must be agreed upon beforehand. He will therefore gather his panel about him and conduct a kind of preliminary discussion. No worse procedure can be imagined. The

stimulation and the intellectual value of the panel method lie in its sheer spontaneity, for it is in the atmosphere of spontaneity that the best flashes of insight frequently come, the most fascinating turns of thought, the quips of humor.”

Engage the Audience in Q&A. “Usually, at the end of an hour or so- or better, when something in the way of one or more clear-cut opinions has shaped itself in the panel-the discussion is thrown open to the audience. It is most interesting to watch the swift response. The audience has thus far had no chance to express themselves. But they have been literally sitting on the edges of their chairs. When their chance comes, therefore, they are instantly on their feet. Usually from all over the room, questions and opinions come like rifle cracks, and for another hour the discussion waxes warm.”

While the mechanics are still basically the same, a few modern updates are necessary to keep Overstreet’s model current:

Get Rid of the Long, Draped Table. It creates a barrier between the panelists and the audience. Consider seating the panelists in a shallow semi-circle in comfortable chairs with a small cocktail table in front or to the side.

Limit the Number of Panelists to 3 or 4. Eight panelists is too many to have a meaningful conversation. We have found the sweet spot to be 3 or 4, tops.

Carefully Select a Skilled Moderator. This is crucial to the success of your program. Never assume that a celebrity or well-known person can do this task. Do your due diligence when selecting a moderator from within the organization, an industry expert or professional speaker.

No Speeches. This is equally as relevant, if not more so. If you must, do speeches BEFORE the panel starts!

No Rehearsals. There is some value to giving the panelists a preview of the process you will use - and save the discussion about the content for the actual session.

Engage the Audience Early. Today’s audiences are demanding to be more engaged in the actual development of the program. You can use technology enablers (social media, email etc.) to engage the audience before the session starts and continue the conversation afterwards. Furthermore, there are myriad ways to engage the audience during the session beyond just the typical Q&A format at the end.

“He” Can Be a “She.” Overstreet uses the pronoun “he” throughout his discourse, presumably because most moderators and panelists were men. Unfortunately, many moderators and panelists today continue to be men although it is even more important than ever for the panelists to represent the diverse populations within the audience. And that probably includes women as well as other under-represented groups. :-)

What other updates do you like to see in the panel format these days?

FROM THE BOOKSHELF: TALKING TO STRANGERS: WHAT WE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE PEOPLE WE DON’T KNOW

After five New York Times bestsellers and six years, Malcolm Gladwell published his latest book [“Talking to Strangers: What We Should Know About the People We Don’t Know.”](#) Since I am constantly talking with, meeting, and facilitating “strangers,” I was intrigued with this book that balances his theory with stories in typical Gladwell manner.

Using high-profile cases (most of the cases were vaguely familiar to me, but lacked the detail provided), Gladwell asserts that talking to strangers is not as easy nor straightforward as we think.

He presents us with two puzzles:

1. **Why can't we tell when a stranger is front of us is lying to our face?** Gladwell posits: "You believe someone not because you have no doubts about them. Belief is not the absence of doubt. You believe someone because you don't have enough doubts about them." As humans, we "default to truth" until we have enough "red flags" to push us over the threshold of belief. I call this "assume positive intent." He further claims that society could not function if we all were doubting everything all the time.
2. **How is it that meeting a stranger can sometimes make us worse at making sense of that person than not meeting them?** Because we tend to judge people's honesty based on their demeanor – the "transparency" of their behaviors. "Well-spoken, confident people with a firm handshake who are friendly and engaging are seen as believable. Nervous, shifty, stammering, uncomfortable people who give windy, convoluted explanations aren't." Turns out we are "bad lie detectors in those situations when the person we're judging is mismatched."

Which leads to the paradox of talking to strangers: "We need to talk to them. But we're terrible at it....and we're not always honest with one another about just how terrible at it we are."

No, this book is not about talking with strangers in the literal sense. I talk to them all the time! It is about checking in with your *assumptions about* that stranger in front of you and how you wish to proceed with the relationship.

I wish I could say that Gladwell then offers some actionable advice on how to get better at "talking with strangers." Alas, the book is more about heightening our awareness of the dynamics of when you talk to strangers. And that, in and of itself, is the actionable advice.

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