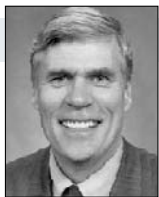


Collaborative Influence

Develop five skills.



by Jim Tamm

ORGANIZATIONS LIVE or die on relationships. Your ability to create successful collaborative relationships can make or break your career.

Effective executives have one skill in common—collaborative influence—the ability to get things done by getting people to collaborate and building strong collaborative networks.

Five Essential Skills

Five skills are essential to increasing your collaborative influence:

1. Collaborative intention: Maintaining a non-defensive presence and making a personal commitment to seek mutual gains in your relationships. We call this being in the *Green Zone*, as opposed to being in the adversarial *Red Zone*. Executives in the *Green Zone* seek solutions rather than blame. They think both short-term and long-term. They are interested in other points of view and welcome feedback to build mutual success. Executives in the *Red Zone* respond defensively, which triggers defensiveness in others. They use shame, blame, and accusations, and have a low awareness of their blind spots.

The long-term consequences of a *Red Zone* culture can be devastating. Pain and fear take a toll on individuals, and creativity and effectiveness decrease. It is tough for *Red Zone* cultures to sustain long-term, high-performing collaborative relationships.

2. Truthfulness: Committing to speak and listen to the truth, and create a culture where it feels safe to raise difficult issues. The level of trust in any relationship is largely determined by the amount of truth being told. Telling the truth requires awareness, honesty, and openness. If leaders are self-aware but choose to deceive others, either by misstatements or withholding, their dishonesty will weaken the relationship. If leaders are self-aware and honest, but

choose never to share their thoughts and feelings, their lack of openness will create a barrier to creativity and effective problem solving and limit trust.

3. Self-accountability: Taking responsibility for the choices leaders make, either through action or inaction, and for the intended and unintended or unforeseen consequences of those choices. We have more choices than we think. We often forfeit choices, not realizing that not to choose is also a choice. The way we make little decisions is a reflection of how we make bigger decisions. Our beliefs about the amount of choice in our lives can either paralyze us or empower and mobilize us. A sense of influence over our lives makes undesirable events



less demoralizing. Self-accountability is being aware of our choices and taking responsibility for results.

4. Self-awareness and awareness of others: Committing to know yourself deeply and showing a willingness to deal with difficult interpersonal issues. In 25 years as a judge, dealing with employment disputes, I rarely dealt with pure legal issues. Most parties were before me because somebody got defensive, became rigid in their thinking and became a poor problem solver. Whether you want to improve a relationship or change the culture, Step 1 is to increase your self-awareness.

The ability to make effective choices and live an authentic life depends largely on your capacity to be self-reflective. If you don't understand your own feel-

ings, fears, values, intentions and patterns of behavior, you will have no sense of control over your own destiny.

You may think your past is behind you, and yet carry your past out in front like a shield, wondering why you can't get close to others. The past is impossible to change, but it doesn't have to determine your future.

5. Solving problems: Skillfully negotiating your way through the conflict in any long-term relationship. If your relationship doesn't bump up against some conflict once in a while, you're either in a boring relationship, in denial, or overly medicated. Even the most collaborative, self-aware, accountable, non-defensive, truth-telling people will have difficulty maintaining relationships if they aren't skilled at negotiating their way through conflict. Resolving conflict requires both courage and skill.

The Interest Approach

The *Interest-Based Approach* is an effective method of negotiating relationship conflict. It focuses on the underlying interests of the parties before looking for solutions and involves six steps:

1. Set a collaborative tone by being open and direct about your intentions. Reach agreement about the process you will use to deal with the dispute.

2. Discuss the problem. Develop a list of issues that need to be resolved.

3. Understand the underlying interests—the wants or needs that underlie the issues that need to be resolved.

4. Develop a contingency plan. Know what you can do on your own if you agree on a solution.

5. Work together to invent creative solutions. Meet as many interests of all the parties as possible.

6. Evaluate possible solutions against the interests and contingency plans of the parties. Narrow the possible solutions and reach clear commitments where it is possible to verify compliance.

By concentrating on these five skills, you will not only become more effective, you will create a more collaborative team by becoming a catalyst for innovation and problem solving. **LE**

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ACTION: Cultivate collaborative influence.