

Effective Partnering

Collaborate for advantage.



by Stephen M. Dent

IF YOU WANT YOUR STOCK to increase 300 percent over the next two-years, study Google. Although Google, the search engine company, has great technology, its culture and partnering attributes generate the wealth.

To compete effectively, your culture must be focused. Spending time dealing with internal strife and competing agendas reduces your ability to outmaneuver the competition, support your customers, generate new ideas, or explore opportunities.

We identify six effective partnering behaviors.

1. Self-disclosure and feedback. Communication skills are the hallmark of partnering excellence. The ability to state needs, offer feedback, and candidly express opinions is critical, not just for building on employees' technical competencies, but also for enhancing trust. Freedom of communication, combined with diversity of opinion, is a hotbed of insight and innovation.

2. Win-win orientation. This orientation enables team members to resolve differences effectively (without creating losers), to step beyond an emotional reaction to conflict, and to move toward understanding issues, information, and others' needs. They can then negotiate outcomes that are supported by everyone involved. A collaboration-based, problem-solving approach to resolving differences builds trust and results in better resolutions. Communication is key to attaining a win-win outcome, and knowing your own conflict-resolution style positions people to move beyond fight-or-flight responses.

3. Ability to trust. Trust is essential to using the win-win style effectively. How, for instance, could I believe that you'll look out after my best interests if I don't trust you? Trust is paramount to building great partnerships. Building trust involves talking, reaching agreement, and holding others accountable.

The win-win orientation provides the negotiating skills to achieve agreement.

4. Future orientation. We must break through old assumptions and paradigms of how things previously worked to a mind-set that challenges us to see things differently, to approach solutions using new perspectives. Future orientation requires us to put aside the past and concentrate on our potential and new opportunities. Getting caught up in the past creates complacency. Leaders with a past-orientation mind-set tend to build a cadre of workers who end up using a past orientation. Based on the leader's example, workers would see past orientation, rather than future orientation as a key to their success. This creates a self-fulfilling prophecy of repeated errors, reinforced by a past-oriented culture. When we are entrenched in a past-orientation perspective, we create resistance to any change that we perceive as a threat to our personal safety.

5. Comfortable with change. As situations evolve, change becomes inevitable. These dynamics challenge us to examine

our strategies for managing change events. How we react to change events impacts our own well-being and the trust that others place in us. People or organizations that resist change may create situations where they become irrelevant to others over time.

6. Comfort with interdependence. Teams having leaders and members who communicate openly and freely resolve differences in rewarding ways, trust each other's opinions and judgments, look for opportunities, accept change, and create an environment that supports teamwork and interdependence.

When you use these six attributes consistently, you create a culture based on a trust that values the free flow of ideas and reduces conflict to allow creativity and innovation to surface in profitable ways. All six partnering attributes reinforce each other.

Cultures that value the ideas and contributions of their people and understand that people are more clever and creative than any machine—especially when placed in a supportive, partnering environment—can dramatically impact the health of the business, and thus, the bottom line. **LE**

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ACTION: Create a culture of trust.

