

What's Required for Collaborative Relationships?

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2011, published in the *Houston Home Journal* on Saturday, July 16, 2011

If you read my articles frequently, you know that I'm a strong advocate of collaboration. I've written about the topic a lot, and I've helped many leaders work to create a more collaborative culture.

I've recently discovered an excellent book that describes the critical elements required for healthy collaborative relationships. The information comes from extensive research conducted over twenty years by the Gallup organization. The book is entitled *The Power of 2: How to Make the Most of Your Partnerships at Work and in Life*. The authors are Gallup executives Rodd Wagner and Gale Muller.

Perhaps the most obvious element required for collaboration is a **common mission**. The relationship usually begins because of a shared objective. If both parties want the same thing bad enough, each individual will make great sacrifices to see the effort through. However, if either or both individuals start pursuing separate agendas, the collaboration is likely to fail.

Another obvious reason for teaming up is to offset your blind spots and weaknesses; we all have them. Seeking someone with **complementary strengths** allows both individuals to do what each does best. No one is well rounded alone, but a pair of collaborators certainly can be.

Early in our lives, without anyone teaching the concept to us, we start developing a sense of **fairness**. We never lose our awareness of the proper distribution of rewards, especially in relation to the amount of work contributed. When collaborative relationships are strong, the partners tend to not keep track of who does what. But when the balance feels inappropriate to either individual, the relationship suffers.

When you've got a powerful relationship going with another person, the level of **trust** is extremely high. You rely on your counterpart to look out for your best interests and to do what was promised. Your partner tells others how good you are, and you proclaim and compliment his or her strengths.

We all have our idiosyncrasies. We tend to see our own behaviors as "normal." But your partner may have characteristics that you view as a little strange. The health of any collaborative relationship will be strongly influenced by the degree of **acceptance** that the partners show for each other's behaviors.

We all also make mistakes. When your partner violates your trust in some way, the future of the relationship could depend heavily on the level of **forgiveness** you are able to muster. Otherwise, the strong mutual support that used to exist could quickly turn to revenge and retribution.

Progress toward a common objective will not occur unless **communication** between two partners is frequent, clear, and aimed at appropriate coordination. Otherwise, actions will be duplicated or "fall through the cracks." When communication lapses, assumptions flourish, and they don't work well!

In healthy collaborations, each person takes as much satisfaction in seeing the other person thrive as in their own success. This characteristic of **unselfishness** is perhaps the one thing that makes collaboration so fulfilling. Achievement is sweet, and even more so when shared with a colleague.

The Power of 2 provides more information than can be offered in this short article. If you are engaged with others in your work or in private life, consider exploring the book--and your relationship--together!

Dennis Hooper helps leaders build collaborative, supportive cultures. Contact him at 478-988-0237 or dhooper2@juno.com. Previous articles are available on his website: www.buildingfutureleaders.com.