

Collaboration is the Ultimate Superpower

By Susan Schilke; April 2, 2018

No, I don't think I am exaggerating. I see it every month in TeamStrength. Really smart, talented business leaders present an outlined version of a tough business dilemma with some potential answers, and elevate their thinking, decisions and organizations by collaborating on solutions. Every time.

We are closing in on our 1,000th meeting, so this no longer surprises me. But it's still a revelation. The person presenting the issue has a huge advantage on the rest of us in the room. They've been wrestling with the issue – sometimes for years – know all the facts, history and details, and have an intimate understanding of the elements and players involved. And every time the group takes them further.

We have a good process and very intelligent people in the room who really invest for each other. Everyone in the room is focused on the same thing – finding the best answers to the challenge. Everyone has an open frame – especially the presenting member. But all members are receptive to learning and putting ideas together in a new a different way on every issue. It's a highly creative process.

Do you see this in your organization? Does it happen enough? I think most people value collaboration, but there are inherent challenges within a company when team members collaborate like silos, power structures, personal dynamics, politics. And not every decision warrants the investment of collaborative, so leaders make a lot of decisions without input from others. These elements all create limitations to the collaborative process when it's really needed.

Three things are required to fully tap into the superpower that is collaboration – trust, openness, and the ability to give ideas without owning them. Collaboration breaks down completely without trust, it is the foundation of every relationship and without it, people will protect themselves versus sharing necessary information. An open frame is also a requirement; it's ultimately a belief that the best ideas and answers will only emerge through seeking input from others to create new solutions. And finally, you have to manage your ego to have enough confidence to share some worthy ideas, yet enough humility to know that better ones are out there.

Too often, collaboration is viewed as a competition – and everyone wants to bring the 'winning' idea. Or the fear is ideas will be judged, so people don't share ideas they're not sure about – even though those outside-the-box thoughts sometimes lead to the most progress. Or talking about new and better approaches leads to people defending and explaining their past actions which doesn't add to the process at all.

At the end of some of our highest-impact sessions in TeamStrength, we're not really sure of the origin of the new thinking – it emerged through questions, discussion, exploration and early ideas that grew and evolved in the process. Everyone had some role in creating the solutions.

By definition, collaboration is working together to craft a solution. When everyone invests in the process, you uncover great strategies and approaches together. Everyone contributes, everyone has ownership, and everyone wins.