

The Power of Collaboration

by Jeffrey Leventry

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I have been fortunate to collaborate with many incredible people throughout my life, especially during my business career. One of my favorite collaboration partners was my brother Tim, who was an incredible artist. Working together with a singular focus, we typically started with an idea or concept to create something unique and special to address a business need or to benefit others. Over a period of many years, we created one-of-a-kind sports caricatures for my son and daughter during their high school athletic careers. We also designed all of the graphic art for my first book – “In Your Quest for Excellence.” In addition, Tim and I formulated a template for my business card, bookmark and the visual image for “Innovation through Collaboration” – the tag line for my consulting practice.

In each case, our partnership was a “labor of love” that yielded a wonderful result!

What does it mean to collaborate?

The term is typically defined as follows:

- **Collaboration** – to work with another person or group in order to achieve or do something

In addition, the concepts of innovation and collaboration are normally thought of in combination since history tells us that breakthrough ideas result when people collaborate with one another.

The process of collaboration takes many forms but once it begins, momentum builds and a sense of excitement grows as new ideas take shape. It has been my experience that amazing things happen when people with diverse talents and skills join forces with a singular purpose or focus to build something unique and special.

The outcome of this partnership is innovative ideas and solutions that could only have been created through the exchange of ideas and perspectives.

What are the ingredients of effective collaboration?

In my experience, effective collaboration does not happen by accident. Instead, in order to create an atmosphere where people feel safe to innovate new ideas or products, certain ingredients need to be present. The key ingredients include the following:

- A shared or common goal so everyone understands where they are headed
- Commitment to the purpose or goal and mutual accountability for producing tangible results
- Open and honest communication, as well as a willingness to share information freely while listening to each person's ideas and suggestions
- Complementary skills that can be coordinated to become more powerful in accomplishing the agreed-upon objective
- Mutual trust and respect for the participants so that everyone's contributions can be valued and appreciated

What is the true value of collaboration?

While I realize that creating a collaborative workplace takes time and effort, the benefits of collaboration are both numerous and tangible. Here are just a few examples of what genuine collaboration can produce in an organization:

- **Better Team Chemistry** – Collaboration brings people together to focus on common goals. Along the way, team members learn to work with one another and appreciate each others' unique knowledge and skills.
- **Improved Communication** – Partnering with colleagues helps open channels of communication and encourages information sharing to solve problems and business challenges faced by the organization.
- **Expanded Innovation** – Working with team members who possess complementary skills and abilities promotes new ways of thinking and understanding. Breakthrough ideas lead to new products and services that can be offered to clients.
- **Enhanced Employee Engagement** – Employees who are challenged to work with others to develop new ideas find more excitement in their work. They enjoy the opportunity to learn new approaches for producing solutions that are valued by the company. As a result, both employee morale and engagement are enhanced.
- **Higher Retention Rates** – A workplace that supports collaboration typically attracts job candidates who like to perform at a high level in their role. If the collaborative effort is rewarded and recognized by the organization, employees tend to stay at the firm longer and produce sustained results.
- **Increased Efficiency & Productivity** – Partnering with others is a way to share the workload and apportion responsibilities among employees who have specialized skills. This approach promotes synergy to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of the individual work product, plays to each team member's strengths, and leads to greater productivity.

What are some examples of successful collaboration?

In history, there are many examples of collaboration that resulted in discoveries, innovative products and sports championships.

Here are a few of my favorite examples of partnerships that produced great success:

- Wilbur and Orville Wright gave us the gift of fixed-wing aircraft.
- Marie and Pierre Curie announced the discovery of two new elements – radium and polonium.
- Ed Catmull, Steve Jobs and John Lassiter developed Pixar Animation Studios.
- Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield devised a unique blend of ice cream.
- Terry Bradshaw, Franco Harris, Joe Greene and Jack Lambert helped produce 4 superbowl championships.
- Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks and D.W. Griffith joined forces to create the United Artists Corporation.
- Sandra Lerner and then-husband Len Bosack founded what would become technology giant Cisco while working together at Stanford University.
- John Lennon and Paul McCartney formed The Beatles.

The Collaboration Challenge

In conclusion, the benefits of collaboration are undeniable – in life and in the world of business. Given the true value of collaborating with others, when will you partner with someone to create the next great innovative idea or product to help shape the world we live in?