

Leaders Who Collaborate Drive Innovative Results!

By Carolyn Rowe, Management Consultant specializing in Conversation and Collaboration

In our experience, we have found that collaborative leaders who are mature in their willingness to work with other leaders and teams, are willing to do the hard work of facilitating a conversation with a diverse thinking group of people and are often rewarded with an outcome that exceeds expectations. We also recognize that choosing a path of collaboration may not always be the easiest way to go!

Leaders who can drive collaborative conversations know that, by transcending the limited view of each person on the team and bringing divergent views into focus, amazing innovation can emerge! It is in this invigorating challenging place where new ideas and visions come into existence. The excitement created in the collaborative conversation buoys up the creative process, bringing new ways to compete in your market.

The reality of the 21st Century is that opportunities for collaboration may be across the silos of the company or with diverse team members from around the world...it's no longer just the intact organizational team.

What's different about "collaborative" leaders?

A compelling leader in this complicated, interconnected world is the person who asks really good questions and facilitates conversations so that collaborative views emerge. *In this new reality, leaders use their position to empower and convene others, to catalyze difficult conversations, and to humbly recognize that they don't have all of the answers.*

Collaborative leaders can create a space where everyone feels invited and inspired to generate new and different ideas, a space where people in the organization come together and have rich and meaningful conversations toward improving business results. In this shared space that is *built on trust*, people can be more open, are willing to take risks, share their true opinions and ideas, and are better prepared to respond to complex challenges.

With focus and by putting new behaviors into practice, your leaders can make the shift to a more collaborative relational way of leading by...

1. Confidently building and sustaining deep trusting relationships. TRUST is inherent to building satisfying, collaborative teams in order to nurture openness, involvement, personal satisfaction, and high levels of commitment to excellence.
2. Enhancing their network of peers. By building and maintaining a network of peer relationships, compelling leaders remain keenly aware of issues they are facing and have a network of collective knowledge and expertise to keep their thinking fresh.
3. Developing the skills to lead Collaborative Conversations. With the skill of leading a collaborative conversation, the leader can create enormous synergies using supportive

and inclusive methods to ensure all people involved are heard, engaged, and part of the solution.

The characteristics of collaborative leaders and the conversational skills they need to be effective are summarized in the following table:

<i>A Collaborative Leader...</i>	<i>And is Adept at these Conversational Skills...</i>
Demonstrates his or her values through their words and actions.	Openly learns from others and is able to embrace another's point of view. Actively listens and uses inquiry and paraphrasing to test their understanding.
Shows authenticity by being true to their values and by being comfortable with their weaknesses. They can admit to making a mistake or not having all the answers. In a word...they show humility!	Listens, listens, listens...fully and hears beyond just the words being spoken. They are in tune to body language and tone of voice. Balances advocacy of views with inquiry into own and other's thinking, listens to deeply understand others.
Recognizes that every conversation is an opportunity to learn more about another person and their point of view.	Through inquiry, brings divergent viewpoints into a conversation, knowing this is how to foster a culture of collaborative thinking where new and exciting ideas can emerge.
Empowers others by acknowledging their talents and gifts and provides an enabling environment where they are able to do their best work.	And in turn, able to have respectful and pointed conversations, even when the topic may be difficult.

So if collaboration is so good for an organization's outcomes...why don't we do more of it?

Our work with leaders and teams supports the thinking that collaboration across the silos of an organization is sometimes too great of a hill to climb with the inherent risks of losing power. If a leader has developed his or her identity within this power, it will take time and patience to help this leader be comfortable with collaboration.

Many performance management systems reward individual or small team achievement. Because performance contracts are specific regarding a leader's area of accountability and

agreed performance, an organization has to address the gap that may be created by asking for collaborative behaviors without a visible way of recognizing those efforts.

An organization can begin creating a culture of collaboration by

- Insisting and demonstrating a climate of trust and integrity,
- Rewarding outcomes of interdependent relationships across the organization where silos currently exist, and
- Creating space and time for conversation.

As an HR professional, you have the opportunity to facilitate a conversation with your leadership team about the advantages of collaboration. Is it possible that, by working for the good of the whole and by taking in the collective intelligence of the organization, they could generate ideas that far exceed those of any one individual or team?

It's important to note that, if the leadership team agrees they want to encourage collaboration across their organization, recognizing the commercial value as well as the relationship value in doing so, they will have to personally name and live into the behaviors that would create such a culture. Those behaviors have to be consistently demonstrated, and the performance management and reward system has to support collaborative efforts and results.

In this world of complexity, the leader's ultimate goal is to achieve bottom-line results. Our experience confirms leaders who are able to lead collaborative efforts and are adept at capturing the collective intelligence of a group or team will be seen as the leaders who are driving the organization's success.

ABOUT US: Carolyn Rowe is a management consultant specializing in conversation and dialog for organization effectiveness. She works in concert with W.I.S.E.-HR to bring meaning and light to the advantages of effectively capturing the potential of an organization through creating a culture of collaboration. Wind In Sails Experience-HR, Inc. (W.I.S.E.-HR) is a consortium of senior-level Human Resource professionals dedicated to supporting business leaders and HR professionals alike, creating people practices powerful enough to impact the bottom line. With more than 100 years of collective experience, we are the consultancy of choice with a long history of successes.



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