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## Ten Laws of Collaboration

By Mickey Connolly and Julie Naster

Today's business environment demands innovative solutions executed rapidly and precisely by people working well together.

An effective leader must be able to rally a team and lead it to its goal, successfully navigating obstacles along the way. In our work with companies large (Fortune 50) to small (tech start-ups), our clients report that leading effective teams is one of their greatest challenges.

We developed the following "Ten Laws of Collaboration" as a distillation of the work we have done with over 200,000 people around the world.

### 1. Teamwork: the source of teamwork is a common future.

By focusing on the intersection of your view, their view and the facts, you will reveal common purposes that enable problem solving. For teams to become strong, they need to consider intersections in three domains:

- Shared purpose—why is it important that we operate together as a team?
- Shared principles—what values will we adhere to in good times and bad?
- Specific, measurable goals

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## **2. Influence: a need as natural as breathing.**

People do influence each other and the course of events in their organizations. The important question: is the influence valuable or is it wasteful? Valuable influence requires:

- A shared view of reality
- A common purpose
- An understanding of how decisions are made
- Clear ways to give input to decision makers
- Clear ways to get information from decision makers

If you are in the midst of significant change (or about to launch change) make sure you address these influence fundamentals.

## **3. Purpose: great achievement demands being true to purpose in the face of fear and threat.**

The Law of Purpose recognizes that all humans have important purposes. They exhibit a biological response to threat—fight, flight, freeze or appease—which has evolved as a powerful mechanism for insuring survival. Often, these fearful reactions have made us forget our most important purposes.

To spend more time true to purpose requires three elements:

- Awareness—learn to catch bioreactions
- A worthy purpose to turn your attention toward.
- Discipline—choose actions that move toward purpose rather than succumb to bioreactions.

## **4. Listening: the test for listening is learning.**

Ordinary listeners only listen until they have an opinion about what they are hearing or until they validate what they already know. Great listeners listen until they learn something they did not know before.

Here are some questions that help you focus on learning while you listen:

- What purpose do they have that I can respect?
- What can I learn from this person?
- What accurate information do they have that I do not?
- What does this person have to contribute to me?

**5. Conversation: the quality of conversation governs the rate of value creation.**

Conversation can be gauged according to four domains. Pay attention to which domain the conversation is in; speed it up by moving to the next domain.

*slowest Pretense*: listening focus is avoiding difficulty; results in lying and withholding information

*slow Sincerity*: listening focus is expressing and defending my view; results in an "honest" report of my opinion and dismissal of competing opinions

*fast Accuracy*: listening focus is learning facts and explanations that are the basis of someone's opinion; requires separating facts from explanations so you can sort through various explanations to arrive at a set of facts. Some explanations are more valuable than others!

*fastest Authenticity*: listening focus is purpose; results in a genuine appreciation of different views and facts, finding an intersection that yields new insight and opportunity. To launch authentic conversations, separate purpose from methods and results. Often you will be able to intersect with another's purpose even when you disagree with methods and results.

- Purpose: the important reason behind action
- Methods: tools and processes for advancing purpose
- Results: measurable, specific results that advance purpose

If you disagree with results or methods, ask, "What is important to you that has you prefer these results (or methods)?" The other person will frequently reveal his essential purpose. Can you support that purpose? A return to shared purpose allows you a chance to co-create new methods and results.

**6. Appraisal: judgments are based on perception, not on reality, so hold them lightly.**

If we hold our judgments lightly, we are available to new, more valuable explanations.

Consider an explanation as an investment. Just as you carefully consider where to invest your savings, it is smart to consider which explanation to invest in. The next time you are in a wasteful conversation, list three to five explanations for the behavior of the people involved. Then, compare explanations for value by asking:

- Which explanations make the conflict worse?
- Which explanations help me launch a valuable conversation?
- Which explanation gives me the best ideas for a valuable action to take?

#### **7. Resistance: when you get resistance, do research.**

When we bring our opinions forward, others may resist us. Resistance often triggers bioreaction and we try to overwhelm the resistance or run away from it, which only causes the resistance of the other to increase.

The valuable response to resistance is to research the other person's purposes, concerns and circumstances. Then you have a chance to discover an intersection.

#### **8. Failure: the integrity of failure is return on investment.**

Humans inevitably make mistakes. Mistakes can yield valuable learning if we focus on adjustment rather than on blame and disappointment.

Answering these questions can help you return the investment of any mistake:

1. What happened?
2. What essential purpose (yours and others) is threatened?
3. What lessons return the investment of what has happened?
4. What valuable action can we take now to solve the issue?

#### **9. Consensus: having influence does not equal having a veto.**

Mistakenly, consensus has come to mean that everyone has to agree. The more precise meaning of the word is, "to feel or think together."

For fast resolution, use consensus to mean that all relevant people can influence, rather than that everyone has a veto. If everyone has a veto, they are less likely to explore other views and craft the best result.

To benefit from broad input:

- Identify, upfront:
  - Who will make the decisions if the group does not agree? The decision maker must learn from others involved.

- Who gives input and how?
- In working toward a decision, *propose* instead of *oppose*. You do not need to prove another's idea wrong before proposing your own.
- Don't exclude the views of those involved to try to go faster. This will slow execution when people resist what they haven't had a chance to influence.

**10. Appreciation: appreciation is the soul of collaboration, bringing meaning, resilience and learning to the workplace.**

For the individual, appreciation makes work meaningful and worthwhile. For the organization, appreciation honors highly valued contribution and makes it an example for all. Appreciation strengthens organizations.

The following practices will help you develop appreciation as an organizational and personal asset:

- Give appreciation to others, making it specific to the individual and what was contributed
- Receive appreciation fully and graciously
- Appreciate yourself: note your own contributions—where things are better as a result of your efforts

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- [Effective Project Leadership: Building High Commitment Through Superior Communication](#)

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