

COLLABORATION

The Three Pillars of a Teaming Culture

by Amy C. Edmondson

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Building the right culture in an era of fast-paced teaming, when people work on a shifting mix of projects with a shifting mix of partners, might sound challenging - if not impossible. But, in my experience, in the most innovative companies, teaming *is* the culture.

Teaming is about identifying essential collaborators and quickly getting up to speed on what they know so you can work together to get things done. This more flexible teamwork (in contrast to stable teams) is on the rise in many industries because the work - be it patient care, product development, customized software, or strategic decision-making - increasingly presents complicated interdependencies that have to be managed on the fly. The time between an issue arising and when it must be resolved is shrinking fast. Stepping back to select, build, and prepare the ideal team to handle fast-moving issues is not always practical. So teaming is here to stay.

Today's leaders must therefore build a culture where teaming is expected and begins to feel natural, and this starts with helping everyone to become **curious**, **passionate**, and **empathic**.

Curiosity drives people to find out what others know, what they bring to the table, what they can add. Passion fuels enthusiasm and effort. It makes people care enough to stretch, to go all out. Empathy is the ability to see another's perspective, which is absolutely critical to effective collaboration under pressure.

The leader's task is to model these behaviors. When leaders ask genuine questions and listen intently to the responses, display deep enthusiasm for achieving team goals, and show they're attuned to everyone's diverse perspectives no matter their position in the hierarchy, curiosity, passion and empathy start to take root in a culture. When you join an unfamiliar team or start a

challenging new project, self-protection is a natural instinct. It's not possible to look good or be right all the time when collaborating on an endeavor with uncertain outcomes. But when you're concerned about yourself, you tend to be less interested in others, less passionate about your shared cause, and unable to understand different points of view. So it takes conscious work to shift the culture.

Consider the case of Julie Morath, a pioneer in launching an ambitious patient safety initiative at Children's Hospital and Clinics in Minnesota, long before such efforts became widespread in the industry. To get employee attention, she gave speeches about patient safety and met one-on-one with opinion leaders throughout the organization. But still, staff resisted the change effort, confident that the hospital didn't really have a problem. Instead of using her position to argue her position more forcefully, Morath responded to the pushback with questions. "What was your own experience this week, in the units, with your patients?" she asked thoughtfully. "Was everything as safe as you would like it to have been?"

This simple inquiry transformed engagement, and started to shift the organization's culture to one in which people started teaming up to improve safety. Morath's simple questions made the staff realize that most of them had been at the center of a health care situation where something did not go well and the hospital could indeed be doing better. She went on to lead as many as 18 focus groups to allow people to air concerns and ideas. As everyone began to discuss the incidents they'd experienced, it became clear that their experiences weren't unique or idiosyncratic; many of them had similar stories.

In short, Morath's display of curiosity helped others deepen their own understanding of the organization's processes and results. She was passionate about patient safety, and her passion was infectious. Finally, her empathy was unmistakable, extending not just to the patients whose lives would be saved by higher quality care but also to the employees who needed to team up under pressure day in and day out.

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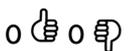
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"Curiosity, passion, and empathy"

These are rare commodities in the workforce today. There needs to be an effort from all members of an organization to engage themselves in their work that emanates these qualities.

I like using Ving to measure employee engagement in real-time. Incredibly powerful tool and highly recommend it to anyone looking to find, polish, and develop young leaders under your wing. <http://vingapp.com/hr/>

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