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Working**Together** Learning Project*

Team Building for CEOs

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This contribution is dedicated to Guillermo Söhnlein, Founder and Director of the International Association of Space Entrepreneurs.

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Working Together on Team-building for CEOs

Welcome! This is Thomas Meylan of [EvolvingSuccess](#). There’s a great guy out there named Guillermo Söhnlein. He’s what’s called a serial entrepreneur. That’s serial with an “S,” not cereal as in “snap, crackle, pop.” A few years back I was pitching in with him to help start the International Association of Space Entrepreneurs. Google that some time soon.

Guillermo has the IASE set up on a really nice web community with blogs, discussions, groups, and all that. He recently posted an entry to his personal blog entitled, “CEO: A Lonely Job.” I know that is the experience of most people in those positions. Let’s take a look at this to see if we can’t get these lonely people some helpful interaction. After all, Warren Buffett looks like he’s usually got a friendly crowd around HIM.

In our book “Optimizing Luck,” the first characteristic we described about luck-optimizing leaders is that they build an outrageously extensive network. Furthermore, EVERYONE who might have ANYTHING to do with their business is considered a part of these leaders’ networks. This is the complete collection of actual and potential stakeholders in the success of the venture. Guillermo provided a great list of these. He included the CEO’s management and staff. He included the CEO’s board and the company’s shareholders. There are the business partners, and there are the customers. A CEO has advisors, and lastly, a CEO even has to deal with the public at large, whether they buy from the company or not.

So the trick is to keep people from thinking they can do a better job than you by giving them all something to do to help YOU succeed as a CEO. Let’s face it. All of those groups of stakeholders WANT you to succeed if they have any brains at all. They all get a better payoff if you succeed than if you fail. And you already know that. So, what makes the network of a CEO so hard to tune for the mutual success of all these stakeholders?

First, even though at one level all these stake holders have an interest in the CEO’s success, many of them remain personal and professional competitors. This, of course, often creates many conflicts of interest within this cloud of stakeholders. Second, human networks are hard to tune for mutual success because as animals our emotions aren’t tuned to the concept of trust. In the light of all those inherent conflicts of interest noted above, few among the stakeholders are likely to be trustworthy. The third issue I’ll focus on is that there is often little congruence between the CEO’s vision of the company and the visions that all the stakeholders have. This little fact creates lots of problems of trust if stakeholders think the CEO’s actions are inconsistent with their particular corporate vision. Well, this is just start. We’ll explore all these stakeholders and their motivations as we uncover useful team building methods for CEOs.

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Working Together on Turning Stakeholders into Collaborators

Welcome! This is Thomas Meylan of **EvolvingSuccess**. I certainly recognize that there are many factors that create difficulties between CEOs and all their stakeholders. I started this subunit by noting three to work through. As you listen to these, keep thinking about any strategic principles you note that could help you make strong team members for you personally and professionally in your role as CEO.

The first of these difficulties is that even though at one level all these stakeholders have an interest in the CEO's success, many of them remain personal and professional competitors. This, of course, often creates many conflicts of interest within this cloud of stakeholders. Sometimes there are even nasty interpersonal habits some of these stakeholder-competitors inflict on the CEO. This, for better or worse, is a natural consequence of our great ape roots. Even more to the point, the CEO's world of direct stakeholders usually contains a higher population density of alpha climbers than mere mortals have to put up with. And furthermore still, if they got far enough to be part of your circle they're usually REALLY good competitors, like to win, and like to eat the next competitor's lunch. In this case, that would be YOU.

Now, in all fairness, you are ALSO a competitor who might lose focus because someone ELSE'S lunch looks easy to snatch and eat. But, isn't focus really the key here? Supposedly every one of your stakeholders wants you to succeed. Supposedly if you do well they get a better payoff in some form of return on investment. So how do you get them out of your face, out of their competitive habits, and into your team as fully committed collaborators?

Well, let's be fair again. If you're a CEO it's actually unlikely that YOU have ever developed much of a habit for building collaborative teams, right? Your habits are strongly competitive. But in addition to your kick ass and take names business habits, your career is also the product of a long string of happy accidents. A key lieutenant here, a fortuitous death in the corporate command structure there, a major market trend that by dumb luck you just happened to be interested in at the right time.

What you want to do is to take advantage of the string of happy accidents that ALL of your stakeholders also bring to the table. How do you do that? You give them a **competitive** reason to apply their competitive habits and capabilities toward your success. This reduces the time they have to apply their competitive skills against you in any form. A competitor usually honors power and compensation as reasons for teaming with someone. What can you offer your stakeholders to buy their collaborative cooperation?

We'll sort through that question as we deal with Guillermo's groups of stakeholders separately in future MP3s. For the most part, you'll need to learn to lead by example on the specific issue of SHARING to make some of this happen.

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Working Together on Trust Building for CEOs

Welcome! This is Thomas Meylan of **EvolvingSuccess**. In the previous MP3 we noted that CEOs can have troubles turning their stakeholders into fully committed collaborative partners. Why? All of those successful people are usually successful BECAUSE they are massively competitive. And we can't forget that the CEO in question is highly competitive as well.

This is, of course, a highly conflicted situation. Collaboration among competitors is a recipe for disaster because of all the opportunities for conflicts of interest. At least if they remain in a deliberate state of confrontation and competition no one can be faulted for operating on a lack of good faith.

This brings us to our second main barrier against turning stakeholders into collaborators. In general, human networks are hard to tune for mutual success because as animals our emotions aren't tuned to the concept of trust. In the light of all those inherent conflicts of interested noted above, few among the stakeholders are likely to be trustworthy.

Let's look at this more closely. Our emotions are tuned NOT to distrust, but to be **WARY** of all other competitors. These emotions presume that self-interest and mutual interest with others are always at odds. Trust, on the other hand, is a complex process requiring at least two steps. First, you have to collect a lot of history on someone in order to determine how often they do what they say they will do. Why? Because the level of consistency a person exhibits is critical for establishing potential trust levels. Second, you have to evaluate that record to determine the likelihood of that person doing **FOR YOU** what they say they will. And to complicate that two step process, there is the pervasive and continuously nagging feeling in your stomach that no one is ever completely trustworthy. Those are your emotions telling you your evaluation process is worthless.

Well, learning how to judge trustworthiness is NOT a worthless exercise. Difficult? Yes. Imperfect? Of course. Emotionally draining? Sometimes. But remember why you need to learn this. You are going to attempt to transition your stakeholders out of **THEIR** competitive habits into new modes of collaboration with you. Competition doesn't require trust. Collaboration does. It's not the only difference, but it's a big one.

So why bother with this? Well, Guillermo pointed out that it's dangerous at the top. He says that you are in everyone's crosshairs. But there's a huge upside as well. From a business standpoint, collaboration is much more efficient, and leads to good results in much shorter time frames. Collaborative teams typically outperform poorly coordinated teams by factors of two to three. The really great collaborative teams often hit factors of ten better performances over their peers. Learning to trust can break inefficient group dynamics, and lead to increasingly higher payoffs for all of your stakeholders.

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Working Together on Vision Making for CEOs

Welcome! This is Thomas Meylan of EvolvingSuccess. These last few programs have been about CEOs and some of the issues that make getting all his or her stakeholders on board with plans and actions for moving the company forward. I pointed out that almost everyone involved at that level is a hard charging competitor and how this works against forming the stakeholders into collaborators. After that I showed how our wiring for competition includes an inherent wariness of our fellow competitors and how that prevents trust between people from forming.

Here’s our third and last barrier keeping CEOs from building all of the stakeholders into a comprehensive corporate support team. In many cases all of the stakeholders have very different visions for the company, and often those are different than those of the CEO. This little fact creates lots of problems of trust if stakeholders think the CEO’s actions are inconsistent with their particular corporate vision.

As it happens, vision is the primary component of team building. So, if you’re the CEO and YOU want to be the proactive team builder, you better learn about vision formation.

It’s not that people want huge universals for visions. They want visions of concrete results coming from their support of YOU. Yet, most business leaders think of vision formulation as an exercise in motivation in the abstract, mom and apple pie sense.

Your stakeholders are involved in your company because they want to get paid in some sense. How does YOUR vision translate into visions of big payments for all of these shareholders? Big payments could be big payments of pride in a great product and organization for some stakeholders. Big payments could be big payments of power for others. Big payments for some might be larger blocks of stock, while others will be happy with a \$5/hr raise. YOUR vision of big payments might not be the same as many of your stakeholders.

So, you as the CEO might think, “Geez, I’ve got a ton of different stakeholders all believing something different about the company and the way I should be running it. And now YOU think I should stitch them all into a team?” Yeah, that’s exactly what I think. You see, if you’ve got the kind of stakeholders where most of the time you ask, “What do we have to do to shut them up?” then I’d suggest you’ve got the wrong stakeholders. Or perhaps you’re the wrong person for the top spot. On the other hand you can ask, “How can I get this group of stakeholders more actively involved in promoting the company’s success?” or “How can I get my key suppliers better integrated during our heavy season?”

The vision you build for each group is the key. Maybe you translate your over all vision to their motivations. Maybe everyone gets their own vision. You have to figure that out.

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Working Together on Turning Management and Staff into Collaborators

Welcome! This is Thomas Meylan of [EvolvingSuccess](#). Guillermo Söhnlein’s blog entry on lonely CEOs included four pairs of stakeholders taking aim at the CEO’s back. I pointed out three issues that create trouble between CEOs and their stakeholders. Briefly these are, first, that all the players at this level are competitors. Second, there are usually no bonds of trust among these competitors. Third, the CEO and all the stakeholders involved are usually operating under different visions for the company.

Let’s look at the pair of stakeholders Guillermo called Management and Staff. Our objective is to turn these groups of stakeholders into people who collaborate with the CEO. Willing collaborators can be generated by offering desired rewards for faithful and successful service to the CEO’s goals and objectives. What do a CEO’s management team and the rest of the company’s working professionals want?

Since for the most part the staff doesn’t interact much with the CEO, I’ll gloss over things a bit to save time. All employees want financial security. This includes the paycheck and assurances that they’ll have a job as long as they want one. It also includes other fringe benefits that bear risk, like life and health insurance and a good retirement plan. Some employees also want a career path that leads to greater responsibility and pay, but not many. If the CEO leads the company to successful business performance and doesn’t appear to be too stupid in public, that will about cover the needs of the staff.

The management presents a different set of issues. First off, they are a class of competitors. As such, they bring their trust issues up with them. And, of course, they have their personal vision for the company, which may include a vision of them running things in your place.

The biggest truth for all concerned here, CEO and management alike, is that NO ONE gets much payoff if the company doesn’t do well. If the company doesn’t do well it means the CEO failed. This most likely means that the rest of the management team failed as well, and the board will be happy to take their heads and start from scratch.

The collaborative proposition comes straight out of mutual success whether the personal visions and motivations are the same or not. The CEO plays to this as he or she starts to engage the individual managers as allies in forming a common vision for the company. This vision should include vision of rewards to allies as well as the achievement of corporate goals. Corporate goals must come first for two reasons. First you don’t want to become another Enron. Second, if the corporate goals aren’t achieved then no one gets better payouts. NO ONE, PERIOD!

The way this gets handled also affects the attitudes of the rank and file. If the people killing the company are still getting mega-bonuses, then the smart members of the rank and file will be working their exit strategies.

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Working Together on Turning the Board and Shareholders into Collaborators

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Let’s look at the pair of stakeholders Guillermo called the Board and Shareholders. Our objective is to turn these groups of stakeholders into people who collaborate with the CEO. Willing collaborators can be generated by offering desired rewards for faithful and successful service to the CEO’s goals and objectives. What do a CEO’s Board and Shareholders want?

Since for the most part the shareholders don’t interact much with the CEO, I’ll gloss over things a bit to save time. This group holds a very diverse range of reasons for owning a piece of the company, but most of these reasons depend on stable or increasing profitability and an ever more favorable reputation with the public at large. If the CEO can solicit direct participation from this group in the good fortunes of the company, he or she should encourage shareholder behaviors that improve profitability and public reputation. Buying the company’s products if feasible, and spreading good word-of-mouth PR are good collaborative behaviors from the CEO’s point of view for this group.

So, then, what are the members of the board of directors up to? Why are they involved? Most importantly, how do they win if the CEO they oversee succeeds?

The presumption in this program is that a director becomes involved in good faith to assist in the success of the company. This good faith doesn’t remove the sense of competition if the director has issues with the CEO. Good faith doesn’t necessarily engender trust between the director and the CEO. And lastly, one can almost count on it that the vision of any given director will not overlap the CEO’s vision on all points.

As we noted on dealing with the Management, vision is probably the easiest point of emotional entry in dealing with the Directors. And in fact, the CEO is well served by using the Board as collaborators in defining the top level vision for the company. He or she learns from the Board, and the Board learns from the CEO. All of these players will have a different personal vision of the company and its potential fortunes. What the CEO does is move toward an acceptable consensus level vision that retains the strongest enabling features of as many Directors’ opinions as feasible. This ought to build some form of majority support for the CEO’s plans of action.

No one wants to be involved with a loser. A Director wants to be involved in a dynamic company that’s making lots of positive news. Help them help you create that company. Thanks for listening. We’re at [EvolvingSuccess.com](#), a registered trademark of Digital Clones, Inc. This production is copyright 2008 by Thomas Meylan, all rights reserved.



Working Together on Turning Partners and Advisors into Collaborators

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Let’s look at the pair of stakeholders called the Partners and Advisors. Our objective is to turn these groups of stakeholders into people who collaborate with the CEO. Willing collaborators can be generated by offering desired rewards for faithful and successful service to the CEO’s goals and objectives. What do a CEO’s Partners and Advisors want?

Well, at this point you might ask, “Tom, these people are partners and advisors. Doesn’t that mean they’re collaborators already?” At least in principle, yes, they’re supposed to be. But remember, these stakeholders are peers, which means they are all top-end competitors first. With only a few exceptions, these people will collaborate only as long as the payoffs come easy. That’s why in most cases these relationships are governed by contracts, especially the partnerships. The contracts are what replace trust.

When attempting to bring other stakeholders effectively into the CEO’s influence we’ve appealed to generating commonality of vision. Things are different here. The CEO, the partners and the advisors should already be working from a common plan. The rubber is already supposed to be meeting the road. The contracts are supposed to have spelled out each party’s responsibilities as well as the consequences for defaulting on them.

If things aren’t working according to plan and contract, work to get them back on track quickly, or cut losses quickly by exercising the contract’s remedies. If, however, things aren’t going TOO badly, or if the letters of the law are being followed but no more, what might you do to get better performance out of partners and advisors?

The key here is to examine closely why the partners and advisors got involved in the first place. What did they think would happen in partnership with you that they didn’t think would happen without you? If this partnership locks a specific critical success factor for your partners and advisors, what is it? Figure this out. Find a compelling way to articulate it. Then play it back to these stakeholders. Do they still want this to happen? How much more do they want this critical success factor to play in this partnership, and therefore in the success of their part of the venture? What part do they have to play to enable this critical success factor, and how much more effort do they have to put in on it?

If this critical success factor is no longer vital to your partners, re-assess YOUR need for the partnership, and redefine it or eliminate it accordingly.

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Working Together on Turning Customers and the Public into Collaborators

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Let’s look at the pair of stakeholders called Customers and the Public. Our objective is to turn these groups of stakeholders into people who collaborate with the CEO. Willing collaborators can be generated by offering desired rewards for faithful and successful service to the CEO’s goals and objectives. What do a CEO’s Customers and the Public want?

Since turning the Public into collaborators is a bit of an abstract idea, let’s just talk about some generalities. For instance, if you have no real “Public” then perhaps you have nothing here to work on. However, it may be that creating a public might be good for business. In this case you need to make your company a visible part of the community, like at winter holiday fundraisers or toy collections. You might become part of local disaster recovery efforts if you have personnel physically capable of helping. You might take on a special youth program that suits the nature of your business in some way. Your local public needs to view your company as a good neighborhood citizen so that when you need local help you have both the name recognition and the accounts of good will fully paid up. These are just starting suggestions. Work out other possibilities based on the nature of your business and the nature of your local community.

Dealing with customers here in the one minute left will be tough. Everyone’s customer base is different. The top level questions here are, “What kind of help might you want from your customers, and how might you obtain it?” The two most obvious kinds of help are good word-of-mouth advertising and useful feedback on products and services for improvements, or even new product or service ideas. Good word of mouth comes about through not only delivering a great product or service, but also by delivering great customer care if something goes wrong. Both great product and great post-sale care have to be in place if there is any hope in getting great word of mouth. To get useful feedback you usually have to design feedback instruments that help you collect the information, and you have to bring those instruments and customers together. These could be surveys mailed to homes or conducted in malls. These could be focus groups where certain classes of customers are brought in to collect their viewpoints. All kinds of things can be done. And you don’t always pick out good customers for this kind of feedback. You need to get this from dissatisfied customers and lost customers as well. Why people don’t buy from you or stopped buying from you is the most important information you can possibly collect. You have no other way to fix their problems if you don’t know what they are.

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