

Collaboration

How to Get it Right



In order to truly make positive environmental change we all know at some level we can't get it done ourselves. Not only do we need one another every time we sit down at the table to change the world, we need more tables of great people devoting themselves to sustainability. Genuine collaboration with an expanding movement of committed leaders is our only hope.

The problem occurs when we bring the worst out of one another as we attempt to work together. This only occurs when we forget to work from our hearts, which wastes precious time and isn't the best invitation to others who are thinking about joining the table.

There are two methodologies that work really well for effective collaboration, much better in fact than the familiar "forming, storming, norming, performing" model that we've all heard of.

The first methodology, Appreciative Inquiry, comes from the founder of the Fowler Center for Sustainable Value, David L. Cooperrider and his colleague Frank Barrett.¹ It is a simple and elegant approach to problem solving that builds on the idea of focusing on what's going right.²

If you want to bring the best out of people, Appreciative Inquiry is a very wise approach because we all want to be noticed for our best character traits and contributions. Innate to the human heart is the longing to be connected with one another; we all have the longing to feel loved. Researchers at the Institute of HeartMath have been demonstrating the truth of what spiritual mystics have been

1. weatherhead.case.edu/centers/fowler

2. For those who want to put this idea to work, visit our toolbox that includes a specific set of steps at lionhrt.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/LionHeart-web-2011-Appreciative-Problem-Solving-white-paper.pdf



telling us forever: we are hardwired for collaboration. You can explore this research at www.heartmath.org. It's just the way we are built and meant to be with one another. So why not look at and listen to our colleagues that way all of the time instead of most of the time? Great question! We forget to see the beauty in one another because we forget to see the beauty in ourselves.

A wise man once said, "When we open our mouths to describe something, our words say more about who we are in that moment than what we are describing." In other words, when it comes right down to it, I am what I judge. In the moment I look at your performance and say you are "uncommitted," I am being uncommitted to bringing the best out of myself and the best out of you. My judgment may be partially or completely accurate at a superficial level, but it's not the whole story and the judgment puts up a wall between us, instead of a bridge.

We all know that on some level, we are our own harshest critics. In practical terms this means that when we are not at peace within ourselves, we cannot be at peace with the perceived shortcomings of others. This leaves us unable to bring the best out of ourselves and others. Why does this happen? Well, that's a long story. Fortunately, a brief understanding will suffice. We all got cut from the baseball team, or left out of a party, or fired from a job, or "whatever" many times in our lives. Our hearts have been "broken" by moments of life we did not welcome or know how to handle. Without the ability to deal with these moments, we just carried on with those hurts to the best of our ability.

I have noticed that even the most successful among us haven't completely resolved all of our past painful moments completely. So when I say you are uncommitted, there's a part of me that's not at peace inside with some-

thing to do with my own commitment – otherwise I could speak with you effectively about what happened, as opposed to getting judgmental.

The good news is that we do not need therapy to deal with our “broken” hearts because we’re not really broken at all. We are simply feeling hurt and being forgetful of who we really are.

But we do need another group dynamics model to collaborate most effectively when our hurts and forgetfulness impede our ability to appreciate one another. This second methodology was pioneered by Scott Peck when he offered a community building model in [The Different Drum](#) in 1983. I built upon his work with [Building Unity](#) in 2007.³

Again, there is simple elegance to this work. Group dynamics occur in four phases. We begin in Pseudocommunity, where we withhold our upsets and pretend we have no differences. It’s being superficially friendly when inside we are not really in harmony with one another. The second stage is Chaos where our differences are out in the open and we are blaming and judging one another as adversaries. When this type of fighting occurs it is so unpalatable that we often scurry back to Pseudocommunity. The fourth phase is Unity where we can “fight gracefully” and honor our differences as we become a group of all leaders working together for the common good. It is the experience of “flow” when the team is just rocking and having fun doing what no one thought could be done.

What about phase three? That’s the tough part, but it’s the transformational active ingredient. We call it Emptying because it requires a high degree of self-responsibility as we acknowledge and let go of our own contributions to this particular conflict or upset. To break out of Chaos we must own up to our own judgments and attitudes that inhibit harmonious and unified group dynamics and let them go – until we get back to a state where we can appreciate one another beyond our differences.

3. lionhrt.com/product-offerings/building-unity-the-book

My addition to Scott Peck’s work was focused on what we empty and how we empty it. In short, many of the personal hurts that interfere with group dynamics are lifelong phenomena that seem to be bigger than us and beyond our ability to release. The good news is that we do not need to go back and dredge up all of the times we got our hearts broken. Yuk!

Therapy is not required. All we have to do is identify how our upsets with others appear to us as problems that leave us with a (belief in a) compromised future. You know, something like, “He’s not committed, so it’s all up to me.” Then we can cross examine the truth of that statement and discover that statement is not true at all. It’s a self-imposed prison sentence that we have the key to free ourselves from when we declare, “I’m not buying into ‘it’s all up to me’ so my heart must have a better answer than that.” Sometimes that does the trick and we find a better way to address the perception of low commitment and we work through the problem without compromising anything.

Other times we need to dig deeper into our hearts with the practice of remembrance. This is a specific approach to mindfulness or meditation that calls in spiritual energy to wash away what’s troubling us. My experience is that the practice of remembrance is the most powerful tool that allows us to genuinely bring the best out of ourselves and others. But please do not believe me; you will have to do your own experiment to see if my “field research” is relevant to you. So if you are interested, here’s our step by step set of instructions to explore a new and empowering approach to both leadership and collaboration: lionhrt.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/LionHeart-web-2011-The-Remembrance-white-paper.pdf. Let me know what you discover!



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