

THE WISDOM OF “WE”

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TAKE YOUR COMPANY TO GREATNESS BY UNLEASHING THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

BY EVAN MARCUS



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One day, my wife and I were going to meet each other after I finished meeting with a client. She couldn't find her cell phone, so she took mine. We agreed to meet at a certain street corner at 1:30 p.m. As I waited, I noticed an Asian man struggling to push a cart of produce.

If this were my son, or someone I knew, I would have gone over and helped him. But I'd never met him, and I didn't help him. In that moment, I wondered, "Why I am not walking across the street to help this guy?"

I came up with plenty of reasons. Essentially, I had created a circle, and the man with the produce cart was outside of it. There was an "us" and a "them." What creates "we" and what creates "us and them"?

It's important to understand that you are always on a continuum. Everything you do moves you closer to "we" or closer to "us and them." Think of the people who work for you, your vendors and your customers. Think of the language you use—"those guys over there"—and the extent to which you are willing to help someone.

These are some of the benefits of the "we" experience:

Grow the Pie. Some people don't want to be part of "we" because there is only so much there, and they want their full share. With the "we" experience, it is not more people sharing the pie; we are growing the pie, and expanding opportunities.

“Your net worth is in your network of relationships. So much of what we accomplish comes from our ability to develop robust, dynamic networks.”

Get Smarter. We get smarter when we seek out other people's opinions. It's the wisdom of crowds. Even an average group of people will make a better decision by sharing their wisdom than one smart person working alone.

Increase Your Net Worth. Your net worth is in your network of relationships. So much of what we accomplish comes from our ability to develop robust, dynamic networks.

Improve Customer, Employee And Vendor Loyalty. Who isn't looking for this? That happens because you took steps to create a “we” network.

Enhance Your Peace Of Mind. When I feel like you and I are on the same page, I don't have to spend time figuring out if we're allies or enemies. That frees up energy to move forward, set new goals and accomplish great things.

What Is Mine?

If I'm walking down the street and I see a piece of trash, I pick it up. What allows any of us to walk past it and not pick it up? You might feel it's not your property or your problem. You didn't put it there. It's not your job. You might wonder where you draw the line: If you pick up this trash, do you have to pick up every piece?

If I decided that I was—in a global sense—one of the owners of wherever I was walking, then it would become my property. I would have to pick up the trash or I would feel crappy about it. I ask myself: What am I part of? What belongs to me?

Think about this story in terms of your own business. In your world, what does this piece of trash represent? It could be everything from putting your coffee cup in the sink to keeping your desk clean. What happens to that “piece of trash” if you don't pick it up? What happens if you do? When a job isn't going well, are you jumping in and helping out? It's an opportunity to convey to others that you care.

Among the people who work for you, doesn't it drive you nuts when someone says, “It's not my job”? At Walt Disney World, regardless of rank, everyone's job description has the same first item: clean up the park. They established a value that keeping the park clean was non-negotiable; this is the way we do things around here. This is a critical question for your organization. How do we do things?

Let's go back to the question about whether you have to pick up every piece of trash. Where does it end?

A guy told me once, “If it comes to my attention, it's mine to do.” I liked that he decided to take ownership of situations instead of waiting to be told to do it. Another thing hit me: As it relates to the size of your “we” circle, you have a decision to

make. If you run a company, you have a decision to make for your business. You choose what is part of “we” and what's not.

Here are a few ways to get into the “we” mindset:

Choose “We” Choose where you stand on the continuum. Who will be included? It's always a decision.

Speak “We” Our language creates our reality. At Disney World, they talk about cast members, not employees.

Live “We” You can say what you stand for, but people watch your actions.

Risk “We” When you step out and connect with people in a genuine way, there's a risk. You can only reap the benefits of “we” if you're willing to take a chance.

Give “We” What you give is what you get. The book *The Go-Giver: A Little Story About a Powerful Business Idea* talks about enlightened self-interest. When you give “we,” the person who benefits most is you.

Also, here are two questions to ask yourself:

Is This Mine? Remember the piece of trash. This question is one of the most important ingredients in the “we” formula. You decide what's yours to care for.

What Are We Really Building? This is critical. It's all about vision. For those of you who run organizations, one of your most important jobs is to hold your company's vision. Having shared values is an incredibly powerful tool for galvanizing companies. It's the leader that articulates the values.

I'll leave you with this scene from the opening day of Disney World. Walt Disney was no longer alive. On the dais were all the dignitaries, including Walt Disney's wife. A gentleman leaned over to her and said, “It's a shame Walt is no longer here to see this.” She said, “He did see it. That's why it's here.”

With the right vision, you'll see the wisdom of “we”—and use it to lead your company. ■

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Note: This article is based on a keynote address at the 66th Annual RIA Leadership Summit and Industry Expo.

16 PRINCIPLES OF PARTNERSHIP

Every discipline has principles that are deemed **essential** to its practice. By understanding the principles of partnership, people and organizations will be able to maximize the strength in **“WE”** versus **“US AND THEM.”**

RESULTS ORIENTED. Partnership should add real productivity and value. It is about combining abilities to create a whole new product, service or efficiency that could not be realized alone.

SHARED VISION. When a company’s vision is shared, entities in the partnership will work toward the success of the partnership, or common goal, often sacrificing what’s best for themselves.

TRANSPARENCY. Partnering in business requires sharing of information that goes beyond what is necessary for a transaction. Information-sharing partnered with trust has the ability to catapult the partnership to levels that were once unfathomable.

TOGETHER OVER TIME. It takes time to develop all the elements of true partnership. If you don’t have time to work on the partnership, ask yourself, “Should we become partners?”

RISK TAKING. The big risk in a business partnership is the business ultimately failing because of not realizing the partnership’s full potential. Successful partnering leads to bigger profits, increased efficiency and decreased risk.

MUTUALITY. Mutuality contributes to the sustainability of the partnership. Each partner is sharing the rewards, the burdens and the losses, while at the same time being focused on each other.

PROXIMITY. You need contact to be able to partner. Proximity is both environmental and cultural.

SERENDIPITY. Many of the strongest partnering possibilities are identified spontaneously. By being truly open to new ideas, seeing connections and avoiding compartmentalization of information, you create the opportunity for partnering at any moment.

CHOICE. Real partnership occurs when people choose to work together. It is not dictated or mandated.

PERSPECTIVE/PERCEPTION. A partnership perspective is being tuned in to what is needed not only for yourself and your organization, but also for the “other” and the partnership itself.

SUSPENDING JUDGMENT. People often view others with prejudice. A good partner is one who has an open mind and considers what the other party has to offer, not what he perceives the other party’s limitations to be.

PERSONAL. People invest in partnerships for all kinds of personal needs. The point of partnership is to keep those personal reasons relevant and to integrate them with the goals of the partnership.

INITIATIVE. Initiative is doing something and investing in opportunities without having to be told. When partnerships see those opportunities and take the initiative to invest in them, they are able to reap the unnoticed benefits.

RIPPLE EFFECTS. This is not so much a principle as a result of partnering. A partnership affects others around it. Knowing there will be these ripple effects allows those working on the partnership to prepare or help others live with the effects.

NON-POSITIONAL POWER. In a good partnership, the individuals share power. It is derived by what each person brings to the partnership, not by his position or title.

LANGUAGE. What we say informs others about our beliefs. The use of language—a “we” perspective as opposed to an “us and them”—has a direct effect on the success of partnering.