

you gotta have heart

Since last July I've taken four segments of an advanced course in "Relationship Systems Coaching" that focuses in part on the healthy functioning of executive teams. Faith Fuller, one of the founders of this approach, has graciously consented to my use of course material for this column.

Metaskills are in some measure necessary for the healthy functioning of any executive team. This column will discuss each one and stress the necessity of the last one discussed, Heart.

COMMITMENT

This means "showing up for your end of the bargain," whether it's to the team, to each other, to the leader or to the work. It's a strong, enduring allegiance that withstands the test of time, regardless of whatever good or ill fortune arises.

Some say commitment is all you need from your team. I say it depends on whether other Metaskills are present, since commitment itself can become rigid or brittle, and is subject to burnout.

PLAYFULNESS

This Metaskill brings to the endeavor "humor, laughing at oneself, and a childlike innocence in discovery." Some leaders naturally bring it to their work. By itself, however, it can degenerate into play for play's sake, and no significant work results.

RESPECT

Respect is that "positive regard with which I hold my whole self, and my willingness to do the same with and for you. It exemplifies "dignity." Rodney Dangerfield types would say it's all you need, all you'll ever need. I deeply believe respect is a cornerstone of any constructive executive team relationship, but in and of itself may not provide the lively energy that an effective team's work requires.

INQUIRY/AWARENESS

This is the "dance between curiosity and understanding...the stance of open-mindedness...not attached to outcome, creating from nothing and everything." I would add that

inquiry and awareness are prerequisites for effective dialogue and, as such, manipulation and turf protection have no place in a team where this Metaskill is present.

Yet, inquiry can become formulaic, and heightened awareness may be necessary so that team members are treated as living, breathing human beings rather than as mere information sources.

COLLABORATION

Collaboration is the "cooperative forwarding of the [team], honoring the strengths and weaknesses" of team members. "It is synergetic, cooperative and has the feel of being on the same team." Collaboration focuses on getting business done and it's often more action-oriented than the other Metaskills.

Collaboration without a well-defined goal becomes a social or support group with the task at hand never completed. On the other hand, the CEO must resist the temptation to prematurely end the collaborative effort by an autocratic decision. True collaboration requires that CEOs authentically share leadership with the team.

Collaboration by itself can result in the confusion of endless matrix teams that contain no place where the buck stops. In other words, for a CEO absolutely committed to this Metaskill, abdication of power is always a possibility, and effective team leadership requires sensitivity to this vulnerability.

BLANK SPACE

This is left for you to fill in. This list of Metaskills is not exhaustive, and you may consider your team has a Metaskill not on this list. What is it? Ask yourself and your team members what it might be.

DIVERSITY/DEEP DEMOCRACY

"All voices must be heard, even the unpopular ones," since diversity of team



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2400 Boston Street, Suite 330, Baltimore MD 21224
Phone: 410-342-9510 Fax: 410-342-9514
www.smartceo.com

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Wayne Caskey

opinion expands the area the team gets to play in. The sum is greater than its parts. Here's where modeling by CEOs is particularly important, since we can, by a slight gesture or brief comment instantaneously stifle our team's exercise of this Metaskill. Diversity/Deep Democracy is likewise a cornerstone of an effective team. Yet by itself it can degenerate into a cacophony of voices, so it must be skillfully led by us as CEOs.

HEART

Heart is "about consciously opening to others and removing the obstacles to connecting with others and yourself. It's the willingness to be moved and touched by others and to be willing to be open and present to all experience." I submit that this Metaskill generates the atmosphere that allows the thunder to roll and the lightning to strike across a team's landscape. When we as CEOs show how deeply touched we are by our associates' attitudes and actions, a bond like no other is established, from which flows commitment, playfulness, respect, the curiosity of effective inquiry, collaboration and the hearing and honoring of all voices.

Heart is the most desirable of the

Metaskills to acquire, and for many CEOs, the hardest. To be deeply touched we must be willing to open ourselves up to vulnerability – to become what many of us see as weak in order to claim the ultimate strength for our team. Most of us consider the risk to the continuing exercise of our power too great, so we limit letting our hair down to occasional exchanges with our executive assistant. Yet look at how much we miss, and how much could be instantaneously realized if we “played our edge” to see how far we could go in exercising the Heart Metaskill with our team.

Certainly, as with the other Metaskills, it is possible to go too far. Intimacy with an executive team is not intimacy with a significant other. However, playing with how far we can go can yield big rewards, not only for us as CEOs, but for our entire team.

So how do we work on developing this Heart Metaskill? Partly by relaxing – realizing that the feelings we share with the rest of humanity are a strength to be uncovered rather than a weakness to be hidden. Also, when heartfelt expressions occur in our team, by authentically expressing that we are touched by those expressions. Lip service will not work here. In fact, it’s almost guaranteed to be counterproductive.

If we find ourselves reluctant to engage, we must ask ourselves what’s standing in the way. Is it status, appearance of power, control, general reluctance or lack of experience in expressing our feelings? If the blockage continues, talking to a counselor or a coach may be in order. Perseverance is the key here. The personal and team rewards are great.

In *A Separate Reality*, Don Juan suggests that Carlos Castenada find and follow the path of heart. We as CEOs are likewise called. For us Heart is the Metaskill that is the necessary condition for fully realizing the potential of all the other Metaskills – for ourselves, and for our teams.

Wayne Caskey is a three-time CEO who is now an executive coach. His Web site is www.waynecaskey.com and e-mail wc@waynecaskey.com.