



## The Power of Two We are Greater Than the Sum of Our Parts

by Colin Read

There is strength in numbers — even the number two. The support, in business and in life, that partners provide each other is borne of the synergies that result when we acknowledge our mutual interdependency. And that makes all the difference.

There was a time when innovations came from islands of genius. An image of

an isolated scientist toiling away to produce a new insight or equation is still the popular myth. This stereotype was perhaps more applicable when the extent of human knowledge was not so broad and the world was simpler. Now the world is most complex and much more competitive. Success is more elusive unless we recognize how your success paves my way, and mine

yours. Few can do it on their own any more.

And yet ours is increasingly an individualistic society. We are now as likely to collaborate on-line as in person. And some still measure success by the economic rewards and the accolades we garner. This emphasis on the individual keeping score is a culture of mine or yours, of dividing up the pie rather than creating the larger pie.

We sometimes seem to forget that a rising tide lifts all ships. A good relationship or a good collaboration implicitly recognizes the value of interdependence. They create a pie that grows because of synergies flowing from cooperation.

A successful team does not feel diminished when one of its members succeeds or receives recognition. They realize that ultimately, and in the long run, the success of a team member is the success of the team.

A good partnership of any kind manages to transcend professional jealousies and personal gain to instead pursue the greater good for the partnership.

For instance, I feel genuinely proud when my colleagues succeed. I am a member of a large and complex organization that is nonetheless viewed monolithically from outside the organization. And so the success of any unit on my campus raises the stature of the entire institution and paves the way for my unit to be more effective. Oddly enough, I am proud of the accomplishments of some I have never even met! Their efforts help me do my job, even if our efforts don't directly overlap.

Large interdependent organizations that recognize and foster synergies can be just as effective as a couple that agrees to support each other in life or in commerce. Such synergies are the very basis of community. And relationships of all kinds fail when individuals pursue their own isolated agendas, at the expense of others.

There is one thing I have come to know — the North Country is inherently cooperative. This rural region has historically been isolated from larger population centers. It has survived and thrived by partner helping partner, neighbor helping neighbor, and even sometimes by competitor helping competitor. Individual agendas and individual egos have taken the back seat to the importance of doing onto others

as we'd have them do unto us. This value of cooperation is not uncommon in regions where people try to forge a livelihood from the land.

I became aware of this North Country value almost as soon as I moved here. I was pleased and amazed by the warmth of this community. It was obvious to me early on that people want others to succeed, even those new to the community. I have observed few professional jealousies in this community, and I have observed hundreds of selfless acts when individuals and groups put the community first, knowing our strong and resilient community will allow us all to prosper.

I expect this value, borne of our recognition of mutual interdependencies, will endure. It may be the case that our country becomes increasingly factionalized and divided, our corporations become too large and unwieldy, and our domestic partnerships sometimes devolve to a pair of individuals rather than a true couple. Our community, though, remains rural, and our companies remain locally owned or managed. The national movement toward independence, isolation, and personal agendas does not take hold in the North Country. We are small enough to genuinely care about and take pride in our town or our region. And we demonstrate our best qualities when we make decisions not to advance ourselves, but rather to advance us all.

A new organizational strategy that puts the needs of the organization before those of the individual, will allow increasingly complex institutions to succeed. This strategy does not require us to give up our individualism or personal preferences. After all, from individualism often comes innovation and reward. But a competition enlightened by the value we all can provide each other will be the secret ingredient that will allow complex organizations to succeed in the future. These organizations must figure out a way to align personal interests with the greater good and foster a shared success. Enlightened companies that offer Employee Stock Ownership Plans, foster a sense of belonging, or hire those who derive personal worth from collective success will thrive in the increasingly global, competitive, and complex world.

So, in some sense, even global success will require a strong local identity. Regions that can offer a sense of belonging, community, and collective destiny will thrive as global commerce is redefined. Perhaps it really does take a village. If so, I can't imagine a community better positioned to attain membership in the global community and still retain the values that allow us to work toward each other's success. Our whole

really is greater than the sum of our parts. ■



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## EDUCATED EMPLOYEES ARE HAPPY EMPLOYEES



More and more, people are confused about how to make sound financial decisions for themselves and their families. The 2007 MetLife Study of Employee Benefit Trends that surveyed 1500 companies found:

- 72% of surveyed employees were not confident in their ability to make financial decisions
- 48% of the people had not taken steps to determine their financial needs for retirement
- 30% of the responding employees were interested in receiving financial planning help through their employers.

As an employer, how do you respond to this lack of financial literacy among your employees? How do you help them better understand and appreciate your benefit programs without increasing your costs? What can you do to attract and retain the best people?

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