

Tom Little's

BIG IDEAS

for Non-Profits

In This Edition

February 8-12, 2021

There may not be an “i” in team, but there is definitely a “v” and a “p”.

Last week, astrophysics revealed the importance of teamwork. This week, Tom addresses how to foster teamwork in your organization.

Before Sunrise

We may be stardust, as the movie Before Sunrise explains, but the movie has another lesson for us too.

Teamwork is Important for Boards and CEOs/Executive Directors Too

Tom explores the relationship between the two sources of leadership in non-profits

The Canadian Way

This week's Blast from the Past describes the values that make Canada a leader on how to treating employees.

Headline News

There may not be an “i” in team, but there is definitely a “v” and a “p” in “team”.

The Story

Teamwork is the key to organizational success. That was the lesson from last week’s BIG Ideas article on astrophysics and the study of the Universe. All the major cosmic discoveries of our time have been the result of a number of teams working together towards a common goal. The same principle applies to non-profits.

The Skinny

If teamwork is important, the question then becomes how you embed teamwork within the organization? Here are some of my ideas, augmented by writings from Fiona Adler, an Aussie by birth and apparently now living in France. I don’t usually draw ideas from beyond Canada’s borders, because we have so many strong thinkers here, but her ideas are so straightforward and jargon-free, it’s like she is one of us.

The first step is to articulate that teamwork is a cornerstone value in your organization, department or group – whatever you have responsibility for. Having said it, however, everything remains to be done.

The second step is creating a vision of the future. If you are the CEO or Executive Director, this starts with you. Here, we are not talking about a vision for your clientele if you are a human service organization. Instead, we are talking about a vision of the key characteristics of those aspects of the organization that you can control. That vision could include developing leading edge-products or services, building new facilities, growth, enhancing the work environment or harnessing technology to make work more effective.

When I was an Executive Director, I wanted my organization to be the best at what it did, to be innovative, to grow and to be a great place to work. I also wanted an organization that did everything through planning and then delivering on the plan. (I like to think that is what happened, but you would have to ask others for verification. Who? Let me get back to you on that.)

Since there is only one CEO or Executive Director and there may be a number of departments and sub-departments, the same discipline needs to apply at each level. Each group, large or small, should have a vision. The vision for administrative departments like Office Services, Finance, HR and IT should include the concept of supporting the “core” departments – i.e. the ones that provide the products or services.

To test each vision that is created, you can use these qualities outlined by Adler:

- Sets a standard of excellence
- Clarifies the direction and purpose of the group, department or organization
- Inspires enthusiasm and commitment

- Bridges the present and future
- Is clear and easy to understand
- Is ambitious

To those, I would add:

- Is realistic (while still being ambitious)
- Fits with the visions of the other parts of the organization.

Once the visions have been created, this is where planning comes into play. Your plan should address the following:

- What your department will achieve
- Staffing
- Infrastructure (e.g. facilities, furnishings and equipment, supplies)
- Support from other departments as appropriate (e.g. Office, HR, Finance, IT, Property, Fund Development, Management)
- Budget

Both the vision and the plan should be developed with input from the staff who are part of the group/department and should be vetted in other groups/departments to ensure compatibility. Assuming your vision is aspirational, each year plan you develop should move you incrementally closer to making your vision a reality.

In implementing the plan, I suggest you engage in ongoing discussion of progress towards the goals included in it with the employees involved. To do so, I suggest the supervisor/manager/director/CEO/ED meet once a month with their direct reports, both as a group and individually, to update on progress and plan out the next month's actions. Adler agrees but takes this part of the process in a bit further, advocating for what she calls transparency.

"The best way to achieve transparency across the team is to use a platform where each team member communicates what they intend to do in the day, and what they actually did in the day. Instilling this one thing as a habit for all team members has an enormous impact on team performance.

When everyone shares their daily actions:

- *Each team member is forced to think through their priorities (and not just work on auto-pilot)*
- *Team members get the benefits of positive peer pressure – they're much more likely to do the things they said they would do*
- *There's better understanding and appreciation of everyone's workloads and roles*
- *Opportunities to collaborate or provide assistance are easily identified*
- *Team members feel the shared satisfaction of seeing their progress as they update the team on the actions they've completed*

As well as managing the team as a whole, individuals still need to be managed. Having one-on-one weekly or bi-weekly meetings with each team member helps you connect with each individual and address any specific issues. During these meetings you can go over the tasks they're currently working on, discuss priorities, and work through any problems.

You can also use this time to strengthen your relationship with the team member by getting to know them better. Bit by bit you'll develop rapport when you show interest in their personal life (without intruding!), ask about their work goals, what types of work they most enjoy, etc. And importantly, these meetings are a great time to give feedback (hopefully mainly positive), and reiterate the role they play in achieving the team vision.

If you're not having 1:1 meetings with your team members, you're missing out on a big opportunity. These don't need to be long, but they should be regular."

I am not so sure about sharing daily actions or weekly or bi-weekly individual meetings, but I definitely support holding individual and group meetings at least monthly and building rapport.

Another area of focus for Adler is team culture:

"High performance teams almost always have a strong, and very positive team culture. Admittedly, I used to think that a team culture was something optional and fairly unrelated to performance, but now I know better. When people understand, respect, and preferably like each other, team performance increases dramatically. People naturally want to help each other and don't want to let their team members down.

Sometimes, to build a strong and positive team culture, you'll need to invest in activities that don't feel productive. Activities that help people know each other better, learn to trust each other, and bond over common interests and experiences all help build a stronger team culture. If you want a high performance team, don't ignore the impact that team culture has on your outcomes."

I agree that team culture is important. At the same time, I am not so sure about "activities that don't feel productive" but am willing to be convinced. Definitely, the team culture has to include teamwork. It's mostly a question of how you develop and foster it. I think if you say teamwork is important, create a vision that your group has contributed to, then work towards making that vision a reality, you are well on the road to producing teamwork by osmosis.

The BIG Idea

There may not be an "i" in the word "team", but there is a "v" and a "p". My BIG Idea is to create a vision for your organization, department or group, then plan how you will make that vision a reality. The key, whether you hear it from Fiona Adler or me, is meeting on a regular basis with every team member to monitor progress. Follow Adler's suggestions to share your daily actions and invest in team-building activities as you wish.

There are two other elements to add to the discussion of making teamwork a reality, which I will speak to in next week's BIG Ideas newsletter.

Emails... We Get Emails



Before Sunrise

In last week's BIG Ideas newsletter, I mentioned a 1990s movie called *Before Sunrise*, noting that in one segment, the young couple at the centre of the story (played by the USA's Ethan Hawke and France's Julie Delpy, are sitting in an outdoor café, when they are approached by a Roma palm reader. After reading their palms and accepting their money, she offers a parting remark: *"You are both stars. Billions of years ago, when the stars exploded, they created everything we know today. So, remember... stardust ... you are stardust."* She then laughs and walks away.

A number of you emailed to comment on the reference. BIG Ideas reader Laurie Thomson, noted that she too was interested in astrophysics: *"I can relate to your interest in the physics of the universe, the creation and ever changing aspects of it and love that you also watch many You Tube videos about it. I love all things about the universe as well! Such amazing stuff. In particular, I love the quote from the movie about us all being from stardust. Beautiful! Anyway – just thought I'd let you know how much this made me smile today – and we can all use more of that!"*

I highly recommend this movie, *Before Sunrise*. It is a brilliant unpeeling of the layers that are relationships. There is one other part that I found exceptional. The storyline unfolds over a day and a night in Vienna and involves a number of scenes in various parts of the city – an amusement park, a streetcar, a café, a nightclub, a square in the middle of the city, a cemetery. And in each scene there is activity and other people. But when the film is finished and the credits are running, the same locales are shown without either. The contrast is startling and disconcerting. It makes you want the people back. In

this time of COVID, it is a reminder that we are social creatures and that being in proximity to others is important to our existence.

Just a warning: don't confuse Before Sunrise with Before Sunset, the next film in the "Before" trilogy that also includes Before Midnight. From my perspective at least, the second is a pale imitation of the first.

This Week's TomBit



Teamwork is Important for Boards and CEOs/Executive Directors Too

Speaking of teamwork, as I do in the article above, it is a concept needs to inform the relationship between the Board and the CEO/Executive Director of non-profits too.

As anyone who has been on a non-profit Board will attest, it is critical that the two parties work together towards their common goal. Boards are given ultimate authority through corporations legislation, but being volunteers, their members have a very limited amount of time to spend exercising that authority. This is why they delegate day-to-day operations to the CEO/Executive Director. In so doing, they change the nature of the relationship between the two.

The reality is that the relationship constitutes a partnership and partnerships are most effective when they are based on teamwork.

Blast From the Past

Blast from the Past is a selection of previous BIG Ideas articles that you may not have read, or if you did, may have forgotten how helpful and insightful (i.e., brilliantly written) they were. This article is from 2018.



The Canadian Way

The Story

There is a “Canadian Way of Doing Business” and that way is world class. This is confirmed by Macleans magazine in reporting on Canada’s Best Managed Companies. The observation comes from the firm Deloitte, which is responsible for the Best Managed Companies program. According to Deloitte, doing business the Canadian Way elevates the Canadian approach to the status of global best practice.

And the Canadian Way is all about:

- Treating people with respect
- Ensuring they have input and that their opinions matter
- Tying the work they do to the company’s mission

Focusing on people is an idea I try to put in front of you on a regular basis in BIG Ideas. The reason is that so many non-profit organizations are “people heavy”. They don’t make products. They don’t have machinery. It’s just them.

Bear in mind that the Canadian Way is achieved by spending a disproportionate amount of time and money on your employees. Time is not the problem for you. You have time. Money is the problem for most non-profits, but only on a relative scale. You can still spend money on people, you just can’t spend as much as the private sector, so it has to be allocated prudently.

Whether you have a little or a lot, you can do things “the Canadian Way” and therefore be world class. Here are steps to take to climb that mountain:

- Commit to your employees as the cornerstone of your organization. If you look after your employees, they will look after everything else.

- Allocate as many resources as possible to the HR administrative function, and ensure they are effectively utilized.
- Develop and implement comprehensive HR strategies related to recruiting, orientation, utilization, supervision, professional development and retention of quality staff.
- Hire and orientate well, including by emphasizing the mission of the organization from the outset.
- Make HR a critical part of long- and short-term planning.
- Create a productive, healthy work environment that is built on:
 - Respect
 - Teamwork
 - Independent action and decision-making
 - Encouragement and acknowledgement of staff accomplishments
- Continuously monitor that work environment, bearing in mind that “how” work gets done is as important as “what” gets done.
- Introduce ways to enhance the work experience of front line staff, to develop their skills and to prepare them for advancing through the organization.
- Evaluate individual performance regularly, identify strengths and need areas and encourage skill development.
- Ask for input from front line staff when planning and evaluating the work of the organization and when evaluating the performance of the Management Team, and act on that input.

The Skinny

So now you have the framework for doing things “the Canadian Way”. This means I can offer a few ideas I have been exposed to by your non-profit colleagues across Ontario that might help as you go about being strategic about HR:

- In a recent focus group, we facilitated for strategic planning, one of the staff members in attendance mentioned that she joined the organization because of its mission. So mission matters, starting with recruitment. Refer to yours, ensure it is always prominently displayed and most important, make sure it is used. Hire people who are committed to your mission.
- One organization I know, made transparency a key value of the organization, and transformed how it communicated with its employees to make transparency a reality. Another mobilized its staff to acknowledge each other’s contribution by encouraging them to send out an email “eblast” when they saw one of their colleagues doing something noteworthy (noteworthy in a good way I mean).
- Norfolk Association for Community Living created a program called LEAD (Leadership Exploration and Development) for first line staff. Staff who expressed an interest were given the training and the opportunity to undertake a leadership role and move into supervisory positions as the opportunity arose.
- Community Living York South has its WIG program (Wildly Important Goals) which engage front line and management staff together in various initiatives for moving the organization forward. A WIG might be: “Increase cross-training across the organization to improve staff skills and capacity” and actions might include: “Host a minimum of two information sessions to share best practices, department goals, job responsibilities and current activities and make them available to all staff”.
- The Meta Centre and E3 Community Services hold townhalls (and fikas in the case of E3) to share information and invite input to what is happening within their respective organizations.

The BIG Idea

My BIG Idea for this week is that it's all about the people who work for you. Be strategic. Allocate as many resources as possible to your people. Acknowledge their importance, choose them well and make it possible for them to thrive.

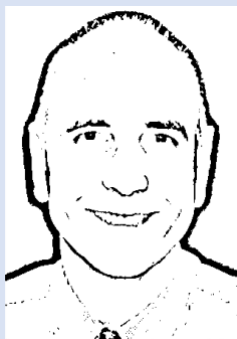
Current CMCS Clients

We are pleased to be working with York Region Centre for Community Safety, Community Living Thunder Bay, Canopy Support Services (formerly Tri-County Community Support Services), Community Living Port Colborne-Wainfleet, Community Visions and Networking (Quinte), Chatham-Kent Family Health Team, Community Living St. Catharines, Durham Youth Services, Community Living Association for South Simcoe, Camphill Community Services and Camphill Foundation Canada.

Recent clientele includes Literacy Network Northeast, Community Living Trent Highlands and Mill Creek Care Centre.

About Tom Little and Nancy Collins

Tom Little and Nancy Collins are the principals of CMCS.



In addition to consulting for many years, Tom has been Executive Director of a large human service organization, experience he brings to the table when working with his non-profit clients. In his younger days he was lucky enough to be part of three Canadian champion hockey teams while attending the University of Toronto.

Nancy's background includes a degree from Wilfrid Laurier and working at a downtown Toronto law firm. In her spare time, at least when there is no pandemic, she plays goal in women's hockey and catcher in summer slo-pitch. A life-long Leafs fan, she no longer apologizes for her unwavering commitment, given their resurrection in recent years. Now if they could just win a playoff round!



Testimonials

On behalf the Board of Directors, we would like to thank you very much for facilitating the work of creating a new strategic plan for our network. It was a pleasure to work with you and everything flowed smoothly. It is great to have this project complete! I hope we will get the opportunity to work together again in the future. Rita Delaurier, Executive Director, Literacy Network Northeast

Thank you so much (for your Board training)! Looking forward to the notes and your presentation was very well received! Lots of growth happening with the board and you helped steer more of that in the right direction. Really enjoy working with you and will keep you in mind for my other boards. Natasha Cosulich Vemb, Board of Directors, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Clarington

Thank you again to you and Nancy for all the work, dedication and effort put into this Operations Review. We made the right choice in hiring you to do this project and on behalf of the board of directors, I express our deep gratitude. Roz Werner-Arce, Board Chair, Durham Youth Services

Our Strategic Plan is moving along better than I could have imagined. I chair the group of around 20 Board and staff who have been meeting monthly for the past 6 months and plan to continue through the fall. Great enthusiasm from all involved and much is being accomplished already, particularly on renewed focus on our Mission and Vision. Thanks again for getting us off on the right foot! Frank Moore, Board Chair, Community Living Central Huron

Free Resources From CMCS

We offer a range of free resources to help non-profits be better. For your copy, contact us at info@cmcsconsulting.ca

- Board Duties
- Policy Board Model
- Board Meeting Minutes
- Board Decision-Making Checklist
- Board Evaluation Form
- Dealing with Risk
- List of Possible Board Policies
- Board Recruitment (Stop the BIG LIE)
- Management Principles
- Member and Director Qualifications
- The Importance of Planning
- Canada's Great Non-Profit Websites
- Transitioning to the New Not-for-Profit Corporations Act

Tom's Book For Boards of Directors



One hundred and ninety-pages. Thirty-six *BIG Ideas*. Thirteen of them are *The BIGGEST of the BIG*, ideas Tom's experience says are critical to any non-profit. Then come twenty-three *BIG Ideas*, more ways to enhance the governance of your organization.

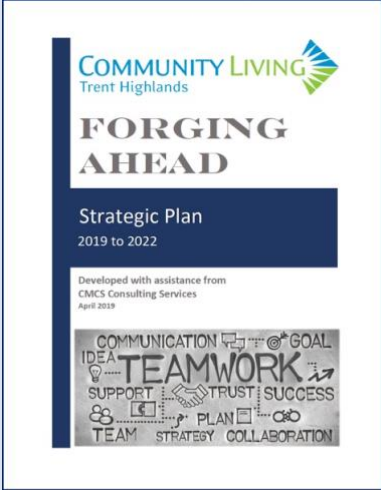
You don't just get ideas either. The book contains all kinds of resources for implementing them. For example, *BIG Ideas* includes samples of strategic and Board yearly action plans, and of evaluation formats Boards can use to rate their own work.

Tom Little's BIG Ideas is formatted as a work book, so it can be used on a continuous basis by the Directors. It is easy to read and has a fun quality your Board members will appreciate.

Just \$40 plus HST and shipping. For your copy, contact us at info@cmcsconsulting.ca.

More About CMCS

At CMCS, our specialty is strategic planning.



Since the start of 2018, the following 15 organizations have completed their strategic plans with help from CMCS:

- Kenora Association for Community Living
- Community Living Dryden-Sioux Lookout
- Community Living Trent Highlands
- Elmira District Community Living
- Literacy Northwest
- E3 Community Services
- Durham Region Child Care Forum
- Tollendale Village
- Centennial College School of Transportation
- York Region Violence Against Women Coordinating Committee
- Autism Home Base Durham
- Canoe FM Community Radio
- Toronto Island Residential Community Trust

York Region Centre for Community Safety
Literacy Network Northeast

We provide Board training that comes with a bonus: A Board action plan developed by participants based on the discussion.

Tom wrote his book for non-profit Boards, which you can buy and use as an ongoing resource. We are great facilitators and can help develop agendas for Board and management retreats.

Much of our past work has been in the human service sector, especially disability. But we have assisted in other sectors such as community colleges, local workforce authorities, family health teams, Big Brothers Big Sisters, United Ways and violence against women. We have even assisted a community radio station.

We have built our reputation on producing quality products that have great content and are appealing to look at.

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