

Tom Little's

BIG IDEAS

for Non-Profits

In This Edition

February 15-19, 2021

How Do We Spell Team? V...P...T...

Continuing the focus on teamwork, Tom adds the final piece of the puzzle...trust.

Blast from the Past

BIG Ideas reader David Green sends along version of our picture for the Blast from the Past section.

The Importance of Social and Emotional Skills for Success at Work

Research by the Conference Board of Canada says to focus on social and emotional skills while hiring and developing your employees.

In the Absence of Information, People Will Make Things Up

This week's Blast from the Past explores the importance of communication within organizations.

Headline News

How Do We Spell Team? V....P....T

The Story

Last week's BIG Ideas newsletter confirmed that teamwork is the key to organizational success. It identified having a vision and a plan as the first steps in creating an environment that fosters teamwork. With those in place, everyone would understand the goal and how they were going to get there. The other key aspect of teamwork is very simple, yet very profound at the same time, and that is trust.

The Skinny

To prove the point about trust, let's consider two real life examples. First is rehabilitation organization Agilec, formerly Northern Lights Canada, a for-profit that operates like a non-profit. Its founder, Val Lougheed, who I have referenced often for her intellect and her wisdom, instilled a number of guiding principles in the organization:

- 1. *Treat everyone as you would like to be treated yourself***
 - Respect others
 - Remember that you are hiring adults who already lead competent lives outside of work, so they don't need to be managed like children when they are at work
 - Give people autonomy over their work
- 2. *Involve people in decisions that affect them***
 - Follow the mantra: "Nothing About me without Me"
- 3. *Be nice, appreciate others***
 - People are more inspired to be loyal when they are around people who are nice and when people get recognized for doing good work
- 4. *Lead by example***
 - People learn best by observing and copying other people

Val's logic went like this: "The basis for all this is trust, which means trusting that if you do everything listed above, then people will give you loyalty and commitment, and will work and behave in the desired fashion. I think that is what trust inspires. People find it so refreshing and empowering to be in an environment where there is trust....they don't want to leave!

Val found that not only did people work well individually when they were trusted, they supported other members of their groups. Hence teamwork was a valuable consequence of an environment of trust.

The second example is Community Living Owen Sound and District. It has embedded the concept of self-directed teams in its employee group since the 1990s. In looking more closely at CLOSD's approach in 2020, I found it to be highly successful and concluded: *The success of self-direction appears to be based on a very human preference, a preference for independence, independence in fulfilling job duties, independence that carries with it the message that staff are trusted by those with management responsibilities. So, trust is at the heart of self-direction. Trust is a must!*

For CLOSD, this was the case both at the individual and team level.

The BIG Idea

My BIG Idea for this week is that even if you can't pronounce VPT, you can make it an operating principle within your organization. Vision, Planning and Trust will foster teamwork and teamwork will produce success.

Emails... We Get Emails



Big Ideas reader David Green advises that the 1959 Chevrolet pictured in the Blast from the Past section reminds him of his first vehicle, also a 1959 Chev, in his case a four door hardtop. "I don't even have a good picture of the car but attaching what I do have for a smile of the day". Smile indeed! Thanks to Reader David. Here's a question: Whatever happened to fins anyway? Shouldn't every car have them?



This Week's TomBit



The Importance of Social and Emotional Skills for Success at Work

The Conference Board of Canada conducts important research into subjects of interest to Canadian enterprises, including non-profits. Here is the Board's summary of a study it did on the skills people need to succeed in their careers. What the Board found is that social and emotional skills (SES) top the list and that credentials need to be taken with a grain of salt.

- *The changing nature of work is increasing the demand not only for technical skills but for social and emotional skills (SES), such as communication, leadership, cultural competence, resiliency, problem-solving, and collaboration.*
- *Employers often find that entry-level new hires lack these skills.*

- *Most tools and resources for developing SES are designed for K–12 learners. But helping adults develop and assess these skills is an important priority when it comes to responding to Canada’s skills gaps and the future of work.*
- *Not everyone has the same opportunities to develop SES in the same ways at the same time.*
- *Closing social and emotional skills gaps will set up learners, workers, and employers for career success. But it will require rethinking SES training and development, including considering it as part of a lifelong learning process.*

To read the full report, go to the Conference Board of Canada website.

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 2017.



In the Absence of Information, People Will Make Things Up

The Story

When the topic of management-staff communication comes up, if you listen to my colleague Nancy Collins (which you should because besides being a good hockey goalie she is the font of much knowledge), she will share this wisdom: “In the absence of information, people will make things up”. She will then follow up with her other homily: “Ergo, you can never communicate enough”.

To prove her point, she will tell you about the time we were just beginning to facilitate a staff focus group as part of a strategic planning exercise, when a participant asked us if the reason we were there was to cut staff. This was a surprise to us because there had never been any discussion with the Board of Directors or the management team on that subject. We explained that strategic planning was a constructive, positive exercise, while dealing with a restructuring was totally different, but clearly there was a communications gap if staff had that concern.

The Skinny

Communication is one of those organizational functions that demands a strategic approach.

And that strategic approach should start with ensuring that communication is viewed as being two-way. No amount of top-down communication will satisfy the needs of the organization. "Listening to employee issues and concerns builds loyalty and improves productivity."

Wherever possible, communication should be tied back to the organization's vision, mission, values and strategic plan.

According to Eryn Travis in "*Organizational Barriers to Communication*", effective communication is dependent on how you structure the message: "... without an introduction, body and close, audiences will have a difficult time retaining, recalling and processing the information. These rules apply to any communication, ranging from emails to public presentations, and to audiences of any size." Content is also critical – the message needs to be clear and to the point.

Travis goes on to note that: "Two common communication assumptions spell disaster for the success of an organizational communication. One is presuming that all members of the organization have the same knowledge base as the message sender. The other is thinking that information will spread accurately and effectively on its own after only one or two members receive it." Travis also cautions against providing too much information.

Other barriers can be physical (executives are cloistered on one floor or in a separate location), cultural and language, distractions and presentation style.

When you want to communicate, it's not that you don't have a range of options:

- In person: One-to-one or in groups
- Paper: Letters, notes/memos
- Electronic: Phone, email, text, social media, webinars, website, survey
- Paper or electronic: Handbook, newsletters

Which of those options you choose, depends on a number of considerations, including:

- The nature of the message – e.g.
 - If it's personal and a thank you, a note that is mailed (does anyone remember the envelope, stamp and post box?) can be very well received
 - If it's breaking news, email or text would work best
- The location of your audience – e.g.
 - If everyone works in one building you can hold in-person meetings
 - If you have multiple locations or if employees work from home, electronic options make more sense unless the topic is very sensitive, in which case you will want to shift to an in-person approach

There are a few caveats, however:

- Different people prefer different modes of communication, so use more than one as possible and as needed.
- Bear in mind that with email, text and social media, in the absence of context such as facial expressions or emojis, the intended message may be misconstrued.

- Remember too that if you invite input from staff, you must provide feedback on that input and on how you used it.

Finally, consider moving beyond just management-to-staff and staff-to-management communication by mobilizing staff-to-staff communication, such as in the form of e-blasts where a staff member can make everyone else aware of something impressive that a fellow staff member has done.

If you develop and implement an effective communications strategy, you will advance the organization in a number of ways:

- Information about how the organization goes about its work will promote consistency and effectiveness
- Information about what is happening within the organization will help staff know what is going on and the reasons for it, increasing their understanding and engagement
- Providing input and knowing the results of that input will increase staff satisfaction and morale

To be good communicators, organizations are advised to make communications training a component of managerial development, and to include proficiency in communication as an important element of management performance evaluation.

The BIG Idea

My BIG Idea for this week is to put communication on your organizational priority list and keep it there. As Nancy says, you can never communicate enough, but you can communicate more, and that will move you in the right direction.

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, Camphill Foundation Canada, Community Living Ajax-Pickering and Whitby and Tollendale Village.

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.

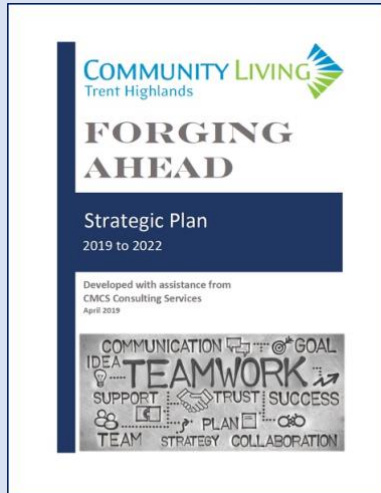
You don't just get ideas either. The book contains all kinds of resources for implementing them. For example, *BIG Ideas* includes samples of strategic and Board yearly action plans, and of evaluation formats Boards can use to rate their own work.

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.

CMCS Consulting Services
97 Sherwood Avenue
Oshawa, ON
L1G3L7
905 448 2428
www.cmcsconsulting.ca
cmcs@cmcsconsulting.ca