



LEADERSHIP LAB

How team discord will put your plans out of tune

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For any organization to operate at its most efficient it is imperative that its members work in concert as one team. When individuals or groups are not co-ordinated with the objectives of others, the results are costly in both financial and other terms.

These are lessons I learned in my first career, as a professional singer, that I have since applied to my life in consulting. As a young singer I had to learn how to blend my voice with those who were singing beside me to create a professional, polished sound that engaged and delighted the audience.

When I became a consultant, I would partner with other professionals who were usually within a client's organization. The intent was to make sure that the services and interactions I had with these people would have the same harmonious, effective impact I had achieved in my musical performances.

In his recent address to the Curia, the civil service of the Vatican, Pope Francis compared its performance to that of an orchestra playing "out of tune" because, he said, they failed to collaborate and had no team spirit. This is an excellent analogy for the business world.

When an orchestra works well together and plays in harmony, it succeeds. Trust is high and people have each other's back. There is agreement on tempo, dynamics, and beginning and ending together. Any conductor will say the most important skill of an orchestra member is listening for the right moment to start, so your part is aligned with others and you don't overpower the instruments with the melody. The same principles apply to any organization.

In business, a mining team we worked with was behind schedule, over budget, and constantly arguing. We discovered they all had different versions of the work plan. In music, that's like some people starting at bar 15 and others at bar 20. Also, their co-ordination was off so, for example, if one group in the team was behind schedule due to the late arrival of equipment, others were not informed and so unable to adjust their own plans. As well, two different parts of the team thought the other was handling a critical step, and by the time they had learned their mistake, time and money were lost.

We helped them address these problems, agree on a universal work plan, and set goals for working together as a team. They began to consult with each other, and plan together. Conflicts were resolved early and trust went way up.

A team leader, or conductor, always focuses the efforts of individuals and team members, and chooses talented people who will perform to the best of their ability. At the same time, all members must modulate their playing so the team succeeds.

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