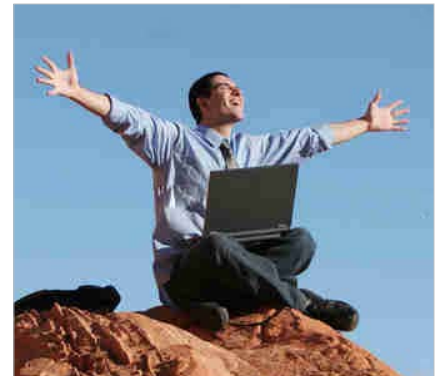MANDAT
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Growth Focus: Collaboration

CEO-Tip
of the Month

by Guido Quelle

The Senior Management as a Team—Is It Really Necessary

Let's get right to the point: the answer to the question above is an unequivocal "no!" That was the short version of this month's article.

Now for the long version: the word "team" is likely one of the most overused terms there are when it comes to collaboration, projects and interaction. The strategy team, the accounting team, the project team—everybody's on the same team, and we're all one big, happy family. Besides the fact that the constant inflation of the word "team" isn't remotely helpful, the idea of a team can be extremely out of place at the Senior Management level. For example, some management authors claim the Senior Management should be a team, and should present itself as one. The question that remains unanswered here is: why?

A team is a small group of people who work together toward a shared goal, often for a fixed period of time, and who support one another in reaching that goal. That may not be an absolutely precise or detailed definition of the word "team," but let's take it as a working definition. Now you could argue that above all young companies that were founded by two or three people tend to have a highly team-like Senior Management. The founding of a company is often based on private ties and friendships, and especially during the initial phase of these start-ups the Senior Management very often truly is a team.

So much for the exception, now let's talk about the rule: in most cases, the Senior Management is something that has grown and evolved over years, and the CEO often only works with the other members for a few years—in some cases, because the CEO him- or herself switches companies. The top level of companies is usually populated by self-assured personalities who already have successful career paths behind them and who have very clear notions about what they want to shape in the company and how. Needless to say, the members of the Senior Management very often have to come to an agreement, and of course it can't hurt if individual members have an interest in the success of their fellow members. But in most cases these concerns about their fellow members' success definitely have their limits—just as they should.

Neither should CEOs go to any great lengths to ensure the Senior Management becomes a team, nor should the remaining members waste too much energy on making it happen. It's much more important that the members of the Senior Management agree on a way of working together, actively live out shared leadership principles within the company, and ensure that agreed-upon results are actually delivered. If these actions are based on a shared foundation of values, then there's nothing to keep the Senior Management from successfully cooperating as a "work group." If a CEO can successfully keep the animosities often found in the Senior Management in check, if they also succeed in increasing members' interest in the success of their counterparts, and if by so doing they manage to channel energies in the right direction, namely growth, then they've done a good job. Generally speaking, at the Senior Management level classic team-building is neither necessary nor helpful.

Strategy & Leadership

by Guido Quelle

"Let's Sit Down and Talk About It Sometime"—No, Thanks.

If we take a look at our calendars we can very often see that a great deal of our time is wasted on meetings, some of which have quite doubtful outcomes. Or, more accurately: it is doubtful whether the results of the meeting will justify the time invested in attending it. Plenty has already been written on the inefficiency of meetings, the inordinately high number of meetings, and about how to make meetings more efficient and hopefully more effective. But less thought has been given to the reasons for meetings, or to the question why—despite all the warnings—the number of meetings continues to grow.

Very often, the root of miserable meetings can be found in the attitudes of those in attendance, which are reflected in the language they use. "That's an interesting topic, let's sit down and talk about it sometime."—a catastrophic start for a meeting. I personally start looking for an escape route whenever someone tells me they want to "sit down and talk about something." And if I can't avoid these "friendly chat" meetings being scheduled, I still do my best to make sure I don't have to be there for them; in my experience, they almost never produce results.

Moreover, not every interesting topic is automatically important. All too often, meetings are scheduled because an interesting idea (which actually is very much worth contemplating) is meant to be discussed. But the question that arises on a regular basis is to what extent the idea or concept is compatible with the company's declared priorities. Is it just an interesting concept, or is it something worth pursuing by investing our most valuable commodity—our time? Of course, if a company has no declared priorities, it can't complain if every interesting idea is also considered potentially important; it has nothing to guide it.

And that leads us to one of the first causes of "meetingitis": the lack of priorities or insufficiently communicated priorities on the part of a company. Needless to say, this is clearly a job for the Senior Management. It's simply not enough to have the priorities clear in your own mind; nor is it enough to have precisely agreed upon and defined them among the members of the Senior Management. It isn't even enough to have communicated those priorities to the staff, because they could easily be misunderstood. The question is whether your employees have truly grasped the priorities, and whether they can also implement them in their own work. If this aspect isn't given due attention, a rising number of meetings can be the result.

Another reason for the flood of meetings is the lack of a clear goal. I'm not (just) talking about the goal of a meeting, which should of course be defined in advance, but much more about a vision of the desirable target status the meeting is supposed to help the company attain. After all, a meeting is nothing more than something that helps you to get where you want to go. Even though in the meantime many companies are doing a better job of giving intensive thought to the purpose or reason for a meeting, and even though at good meetings a list of goals is sent to the participants in advance, there still seems to be little planning with regard to the ultimate target status the company is trying to reach.

As such, a lack of vision is yet another key reason for superfluous meetings. The question isn't so much "What do we hope to accomplish with this meeting?" and instead more: "What exactly does this meeting contribute in terms of reaching our target status?". In order to answer this question, the necessary first step is to describe the status you're trying to reach and to ensure everyone involved is in agreement. Once this is done, you will have accomplished three important objectives:

o Everyone involved has a clear understanding of the goal.

o Since everyone involved was given the chance to contribute, there's no need for further efforts to motivate them.

o You now have a decision-making aid with regard to what the most direct route is between the company's current status and target status.

If we leave Einstein and Heisenberg out of the picture, then the shortest distance between two points is still a straight line. Once the target status you're pursuing has been defined, you can also determine the shortest way to get from here to there, and that also cuts down on the number of meetings.

Here is a quick guide to help you boost the effectiveness and efficiency of collaboration. Ask yourself:

o Which goal will the meeting help us to reach?

o Is that goal compatible with our declared priorities?

– If not: Is the goal so important that it merits deviating from our agreed-upon priorities?
  . If not: Cancel the meeting

– If so: Is the meeting truly necessary, or is there some other form of collaboration that would be more suitable?

o If the meeting is truly necessary: Do I need to attend?

o If I do need to attend: How can I contribute most efficiently and safeguard my own time?

Even if the topic is so important that it warrants working together in the form of a meeting, you should still consider alternatives: would a teleconference or videoconference be a good idea? Are there certain aspects that could be worked on separately? Do we really need to involve such a large group? Could we prepare certain points in advance, making the meeting much shorter than planned? Is it an informational, discussion or decision-making meeting? This distinction determines not only the necessary degree of preparation, but also who needs to be invited.

Especially the alternatives to meetings offered by today's technologies should be kept in mind. People often complain about ineffective teleconferences, or about how videoconferences just don't measure up. But in my experience the real root of the problem is most often a lack of familiarity with the technology and/or lack of discipline. A well-organized teleconference is every bit as valuable as a well-organized meeting—after all, there's a time and a place for all things.

But what you should be sure to remember: the next time you hear the words "let's sit down and talk about it sometime," turn and run!

Profitable Growth—Release Internal Growth Brakes and Bring Your Company to the Next Level

Almost every company wants to grow—at least officially. Shareholders are demanding further growth and no management team would deny that the growth of their company is one of the top issues they are working on every single day. However, there are barriers to growth, and these are not only external barriers. Most often it is not the economy, not the market and not the customer who just "hasn't got it." The main barriers can be discovered inside every company, because growth always comes from within. If the organization is not ready to grow, initiatives to increase market share, to enter new markets, and/or to increase profitability are destined to fail. This book systematically addresses the main internal barriers to growth and provides practical guidance not only for discovering these barriers, but to systematically overcoming them.
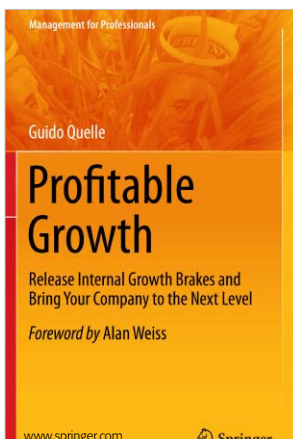
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Professor Dr. Guido Quelle, "The Growth Driver," is one of the rare people worldwide who focuses on creating profitable and sustainable growth as an entrepreneur, consultant, author and speaker for more than 20 years. His clients are active CEOs, general managers, senior executives, and entrepreneurs who are committed to consistent growth. With his consulting firm, Mandat GmbH of Dortmund, Germany, he successfully conducted more than 350 projects with 120+ renowned private and listed companies. More than 5,000 people were involved just in those projects that he himself managed. Prof. Quelle is always in demand when companies are seeking the support that will enable them to continue on a course of sustained profitable growth.

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"The nuance that distinguishes this book is the orientation that growth is measured, planned, and pursued in an orderly fashion, never growth for growth's sake. Guido wisely takes the reader through a strategic approach which leads to intelligent tactics, not a frenzied tactical charge that undermines strategy."
Alan Weiss, PhD, President Summit Consulting Group, Inc., Author Million Dollar Consulting and The Consulting Bible

CEO-TIPP

Strategy & Leadership

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