the roundtable

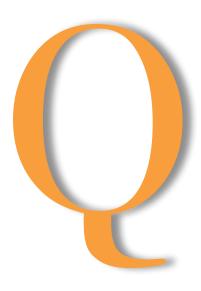*Where Leaders Cultivate Leadership, Together* ™

Roundtable Mentor, **Christine Pietschmann**, Founder, Paradigm Strategies, shared her tips for creating team unity in a dynamic environment.

Mentoring **MATTERS**

Q *My team is made up of individuals with very different personalities which often makes it hard for our team to have unity. It seems one coworker is always bumping heads with another. How do I unify the team to create a civil working environment?*

One of the best teams I ever led was made up of people who saw things from very different perspectives and had very different personalities. So how did they become one of the best teams I ever worked with? Here are two powerful lessons I learned that made a big difference.

#1 - What's my part in this? (Every Wise Person, Ever)

First, I had to explore how I was implicated in the problem, even though at first glance it had nothing to do with me (I told myself). I had joined as the team leader during a somewhat chaotic time in the organization and after a string of short-term leaders, the individuals on the team weren't sure whether or not to invest in a relationship with me.

In the midst of this cynicism, when the team started opening up to me with their complaints with one another, it felt like connection – they were finally starting to trust me! The downside, of course, was that in getting closer to me, they were getting farther apart from each other.

I knew that the best teams didn't work in a hub and spoke way (me as the hub, them as the spokes), but rather, they were highly interconnected. That's what I wanted, and I had to acknowledge that my mode of operation was getting in the way. I started to change my approach. I would still listen to their concerns about each other in our weekly one on one meetings.

But instead of commiserating, or taking it away to 'handle it' myself, I would ask them if they had spoken to the other person. Usually they hadn't. This provided an opportunity for me to help them think through what a conversation with their peer might look like.

It also provided an opportunity for them to consider whether or not the issue was one that was worth addressing. Often in the course of the conversation they would realize that this was as much about them as the other person, and they would opt to change their own behavior rather than trying to fix their colleague.

Soon, the only complaints I would get were those that they really didn't know how to resolve themselves. There was a new level of integrity for both the work, and the relationships – we didn't talk about one another anymore – we talked with one another.

#2 – Focus on strengths. (Markus Buckingham)

The second thing that made a big difference was shifting the focus of the team and our work to align with one another's strengths. We all did a strengths assessment and got together to explore and understand what we were good at. People talked about what they loved to do, and the ways that played into their strengths. They also talked about the things they loathed doing, which most often, was a lifelong weakness they'd avoided.

Hearing from colleagues about what they love to do allowed us to see one another at our best. We could understand how one person's brain would get into a flow state with a messy process to fix, while someone else would feel completely drained by the same situation and procrastinate endlessly instead of taking action. We heard about how one person would jump out of bed in the morning, excited by the prospect of developing a new strategy, while someone else would be paralyzed by the same task and struggle to figure out how to start.

In addition to seeing our colleagues light up when they talked about what they loved doing, we developed empathy for them when we heard them talk about what they loathed doing. Suddenly, the behaviors that might have confused or annoyed us about one another were normalized. We started to recognize when someone was in the 'loathe' zone, and reach out to help.

Over time, we reorganized the portfolio to align to what people were great at. It wasn't always easy and sometimes we all still had to do things we didn't love. But we got to really know and cherish each other's strengths, which left people feeling valued and respected for their unique contributions.

These two practices of looking in the mirror first, and identifying people's strengths, have served me well in many messy situations since that time. I hope that they can open up a new area of exploration and possibility for you and your team.

Christine Pietschmann is driven to create organizational cultures that inspire great performance. A hazard of the trade, she is an insight junkie; constantly on the lookout for ideas, concepts, and data that might elicit breakthroughs in performance.

She has worked with senior leaders to expand organizational capacity at companies such as CBC/Radio-Canada, Astral, Rogers, Bell, Aeroplan, Canadian Tire, Guy Carpenter, Marsh the Royal Canadian Mint, and The Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons.

In 2013 she wrote an Amazon Best Seller on People Strategy. She holds a BA focused on Human-Computer Interaction and an MA in Transpersonal Psychology.

Glain Roberts-McCabe is passionate about the art of leadership and supporting ambitious mid-career leaders. She created **The Roundtable** to provide emerging leaders with the navigational skills, tools and savvy needed to manage increases in scope, pressure and leadership complexity.