

## Teamwork: Is It Compromising Strengths?

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I recently read an article in the local Sunday paper about GM Executive Robert Lutz. He said three things that got my attention: 1) “the customer isn’t always right,” 2) “too much quality is a bad thing,” and 3) he is “skeptical of the concept of teamwork.” [The quotes are attributed to the article, not directly to Mr. Lutz.] It’s the third comment I want to explore.

About teamwork, he went on to say “Teams more typically are not being harnessed properly.” And - I’m paraphrasing - when teams, not imaginative individuals determine what is marketed, then you get less than desired results. Finally he said “Teamwork demands compromise, and compromise does not usually produce quality films or unique cars.” [He was using film making as an example to make his point.]

I agree with his comment about “harnessing teams;” they aren’t. And I agree that imaginative individuals are a (maybe even the) driving force of innovation. But I don’t agree with his statement “teamwork requires compromise.” I will explain.

I believe it’s an individual, the visionary, who sees a problem to solve or an opportunity to develop that leads to an “idea or innovation.” I believe, in most cases, the visionary doesn’t create the idea or innovation alone and that he or she had help to “flesh it out” or test its viability. No compromise here, just good old-fashioned brainstorming that challenges the visionary’s thinking with “off the wall” ideas. Regardless of the help the individual received, he or she is still the “visionary.” But I also believe that each “visionary” needs a team to make the vision a reality.

The “teamwork” visionaries have in mind does not demand compromise. That’s because compromise is only needed when the goals are unclear and visionaries usually have very clear goals. Even then, visionaries aren’t “compromising” but bowing to the sought after expert advice used to clarify *how* to meet the goals. They have a vision; they just might not know how to get there. But they usually have a good idea on the general direction. That’s why they now can build a team of experts who share the vision – because they have clarity of purpose and a sense of direction.

This team is made up of individuals who bring certain strengths to the table in order to create the “form” (a product, service, or a company for example) the vision will eventually take. The visionary usually doesn’t care how the experts achieve their part in attaining the goal (they just don’t want the vision compromised). That’s because the innovator trusts each team member to gain a clear understanding of the vision and develop his or her role to create success.

Teams work well together because each member knows the other’s strengths and weaknesses as well as they know their own, putting the emphasis on strengths. These strengths are then applied to the appropriate activities. Sure, there are discussions that surround, for example, intersecting functions or processes, risks, and problems. But team members, experts who share the vision, are looking to the goals and each other’s strengths as a guide to creating the best “solution” to mitigate the situation. This isn’t compromise.

They know that compromise means finding a “moderately acceptable” solution when they are seeking to produce excellent value. Nobody on the team wants that, especially the visionary.

When team members compromise their strengths then they cease to be strengths.