

Why Team Work Generally Works Best

The problems caused by not working as a team is perhaps most evident in couples therapy. It's not unusual for me to sit with couples where both explain how they see the problem, and how very hard they have been working towards what they see as the solution, without any reference to their partner at all. Unilateral problem solving within a couple of a team can often makes matters worse, even if it is successful in sorting out the identified problem. It leaves the other players feeling that they haven't been consulted or involved. It puts them in the position of victims or grateful recipients of the problem-solver's wizardry.

When I am asked to teach courses on team working I often give the class a decision-making activity. At first, I ask the class to find answers to the problem quietly on their own, and then I ask them to work as a team. Three findings consistently emerge from this experiment. First, team decision-making is a much slower and more frustrating process. Second, that people are more committed and convinced by the team decision than the decision they arrived at working alone, and, third, that the team decision is a better decision.

Talking about problems and decisions is stressful. People rarely agree or have the same points of view, initially at least. However, through the process of people justifying their ideas and seeking to persuade one another a well-considered consensus eventually emerges. Because everyone was involved in the decision-making, everyone feels a sense of ownership of the decision and is therefore more willing to enact it.

Living in the face of problems is not in itself a problem. We are by nature creatures that like to strive, and grow, and make changes so we often face problems. Feeling isolated and alone with our problems can however, make them seem much less manageable. Team working, even unproductive team working, does at least confer a sense of community in the face of adversity. The couple that faces problems together is far more likely to endure than the couple that faces them separately.

Think of decisions and problems you face. Do they affect anyone else, and could you work as a team to make progress together?

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Responses to this article are warmly welcomed.

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