



Rifka Schonfeld **STRATEGIES**

THE NEWSLETTER FOR OPTIMUM SUCCESS

TIPS ON SOCIAL SKILLS FOR ADULTS & CHILDREN

When 1+1 is Better than 2!

Dear Readers,

This week's newsletter will discuss the importance of working together to achieve.

Rifka Schonfeld
STRATEGIES

QUESTION:

How can I help prepare my children for a more successful life?

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ANSWER:

The challenge: in groups of four, build the tallest structure you can out of twenty pieces of uncooked spaghetti, one yard of transparent tape, one yard of string, and one standard-size marshmallow.

Who would win this contest that depends on collaboration and teamwork? A group of kindergartners or a group of business students?

If you guessed the business students (like almost anyone would), you'd be wrong! The groups of kindergartners built towers that averaged 26 inches tall. The business students? Their towers averaged 11 inches tall. Why did this happen? And, more importantly, what does this mean?

In his book, *The Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups*, New York Times bestselling author Daniel Coyle explains that situation that led to these different levels of success:

The business students got right to work. They began talking and thinking strategically. They examined the materials. They tossed ideas back and forth and asked thoughtful, savvy questions. They generated several options, then honed the most promising ideas. It was professional, rational, and intelligent. The process resulted in a decision to pursue one particular strategy. Then they divided up the tasks and started building.

The kindergartners took a different approach. They did not strategize. They did not analyze or share experiences. They did not ask questions, propose options, or hone ideas. In fact, they barely talked at all. They stood very close to one another. Their interactions were not smooth or organized. They abruptly grabbed materials from one another and started building, following no plan or strategy. When they spoke, they spoke in short bursts: "Here! No, here!" Their entire technique might be described as trying a bunch of stuff together.

Coyle explains why these interactions made a difference and why the seemingly disorganized kindergartners were significantly more successful than the seemingly organized business students:

The business school students appear to be collaborating, but in fact they are engaged in a process psychologists call status management. They are figuring out how they fit into the larger picture: Who is in charge? Is it okay to criticize someone's idea? What are the rules here? Their interactions appear smooth, but their underlying behavior is riddled with inefficiency, hesitation, and subtle competition.

The actions of the kindergartners appear disorganized on the surface. But when you view them as a single entity, their behavior is efficient and effective. They are not competing for status. They stand shoulder to shoulder and work energetically together. They move quickly, spotting problems and offering help. They experiment, take risks, and notice outcomes, which guides them toward effective solutions.

The kindergartners succeed not because they are smarter but because they work together in a smarter way. They are tapping into a simple and powerful method in which a group of ordinary people can create a performance far beyond the sum of their parts.

Ok, so we understand that the kindergartners work together in a smarter way and are therefore more successful. If that's the case, what are the characteristics of all successful groups? When in a group, when is one plus one more than just two?

Coyle identifies three core characteristics that are crucial for group success: (1) build safety (2) share vulnerability (3) establish purpose. Let me explain what he means by each of these characteristics:

Build safety. Groups that make people feel that they belong and are accepted are the most successful. Coyle gives examples from the Navy SEALs to Pixar that explain how building a sense of an accepted community is important through the following example: he describes an experiment of someone asking to borrow someone's cell phone while it's raining on a train platform. In one instance, the person simply walks over and asks, "Can I borrow your cell phone?" In another instance, the person walks over and says, "I'm so sorry about the rain. Can I borrow your cell phone?" People were four times more likely to lend their cell phone to the person who began the request with "I'm so sorry about the rain." We work better as members of a group when there are clear, steady signals that we have a safe connection.

Share vulnerability. When I read this section, I thought of Brene Brown, author of *The*

Power of Vulnerability. Coyle writes that in successful groups people feel safe sharing vulnerability, even the leaders. People admit when they need help and acknowledge failures. They can talk honestly about what mistakes they have made in order for everyone to understand how to learn from it in the future. Coyle shares how Steve Jobs, the founder and CEO of Apple, used to present his ideas to the group, “Here’s a dopey idea...” If we are able to expose our weaknesses without reprisals, we can be stronger as a group.

Establish purpose. There are lots of different ways to establish purpose. You can have a mission statement, a catchphrase, or a vision board. Companies and even kindergarteners can do this very simply by stating the goals and values and ensuring that everyone has signed on to the mission. Through this purpose, the group has a shared vision of where it wants to go, and often, how it is going to get there.

Coyle includes practical suggestions at the end of each chapter in order to give the reader a more hands-on application of each of these essential characteristics of successful group. Want to build the highest tower (or any other group endeavor)? Work on creating a safe, vulnerable, and committed group. The sum will truly be greater than the addition of the parts.



STRATEGIES FOR OPTIMUM SUCCESS

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