

Catalyst

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The Bigger Game – It’s All About Allies

[This is part seven of a series on the Bigger Game leadership and change model. For the rest of the series, see *Writings* at www.DancingStar.com]

By definition, you must have allies to play a Bigger Game. If you can do it alone, it is not a Bigger Game.

Although this may be the best news in the model, for many of us the idea of getting allies is a gulp. Asking for help, talking about our “big ideas” with colleagues or friends who might not understand, can feel challenging.

And, it's true, it's challenging to ask for help. People can feel they have to “solve your problem” in a way that doesn't fit with your vision. They can find it difficult to say no. They may misunderstand your request or reject it for many reasons – from “stove-pipe” thinking to concern that implementation will strain already taxed resources. If they give the requested help, they might have unreasonable expectations for what you now owe them, or you might find you have unreasonable expectations of what further help is available.

Such reactions (which can put us into the realm of Comfort Zones – see December's newsletter) can make it feel like too much hard work... unless your Compelling Purpose and Bigger Game are clearly defined. Then what's paramount is the game. It's not about you, it's about the larger goal. Rejections or misunderstandings lose importance. With clarity

such as this you gain a sixth sense for people who want and know how to play your game, so you can weed out those who won't yet 'get it'.

So, who are these allies?

The Bigger Game Model

Comfort Zone	Hunger	Compelling Purpose
Sustain-ability	The size and quality of the game you play designs who you become	GULP!
Allies	Bold Action	Investment

Obvious ones include:

- family and/or friends who know, love, support, and believe in us, and help us believe in ourselves
- colleagues who have seen what we're capable of, encourage us to keep going, and give honest feedback
- coaches who see our potential and commit to help us achieve it
- mentors who have traveled the path and will share their experience
- bosses or teachers who push for better work, knowing we're capable
- angel investors and others who offer funds, resources, ideas, support

In addition, there are others which are less obvious. There's the stranger you meet when you're ready to quit, who reminds you why you undertook this project by asking a transforma-

tive question which helps you see it from a different perspective.

There's the power greater than yourself, however you understand it (God, intuition, the universe, whatever) which will guide the process, albeit in ways you may not immediately understand.

And there are the allies who help you clarify what you don't want – the “enemies” who help you sharpen your instincts or skills; the disappointments which lead you to discover new ways of making things work; the irritants which help you realize “no, I don't want that, I want this”.

Ultimately, the game dictates what you need and helps you design your allies accordingly. Maybe it's someone who will call you regularly to help you remain optimistic, or a weekly meeting which continues to refine, reframe, and refocus the goal, or someone who won't let you get lost when you're overwhelmed.

Perhaps most important, to have good allies, you need to be a good ally, willing to call forth the potential in those around you, tell them the truth even if it feels risky, hold them to their best even when it's hard. And, you need to know how to recognize allies, even in unlikely people, places, and circumstances.

Next time: sustainability.

– by Deborah Huisken (original material derived from and published with permission of the Bigger Game Company, www.thebiggergame.com).

ARE YOU UP FOR IT?

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"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." - Helen Keller



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Deb's Corner



What kind of people do you choose to surround you?

Bill Strickland (*see also Vol. 5 Iss3, May '03*) is a role model for cultivating allies.

Strickland, who built Manchester Art Guild and Bidwell Training Center – a pioneering, state-of-the-art training and crafts facility in the middle of one of Pittsburgh's poorest and roughest neighborhoods – is clear about his choice. "I hang with people who are positive about living, 'cause those people respond to my ideas."

When going for big dreams, you may appear crazy. Through history, geniuses have been thought crazy – think about Einstein, Churchill, van Gogh, Newton. Allies help you stay true to yourself and your vision when others around you don't understand.

Strickland talked an architect friend into designing his dream facility. He then carried the model for it around in a green plastic bag, approaching groups of people in suits standing on street corners asking them to finance building it. Crazy? It's built.

Strickland is a master at taking Bold Actions which generate allies for his projects. And he's built powerful allies over the years. Among them – a Mellon investment manager. A Harvard professor. One of the founders of eBay. The chairman of Steelcase, who supplied state-of-the-art workstations. A US Senator.

They have different roles. Says Strickland, "One validated my ideas by doing two Harvard Business School cases about the place, which

gave us tremendous visibility. Some people introduced us to funding. Other people listened and said 'you are onto something, don't give up'."

Asked if naysayers had ever benefitted him, he says "When I prove them wrong. They helped my cause by trying to construct all these elaborate arguments for why this is not going to work. Then it does work, and you get people's attention. They say 'black kids can't learn', and I put 82% of the kids in college every year for 15 years. Then people say 'hmm, I guess those guys were wrong'. He doesn't seek the naysayers out, but he turns their negativity on its ear.

He recently built a for-profit orchid greenhouse to help fund the not-for-profit craft and training centers. He says "people would run away from me at cocktail parties. They'd say 'here he comes with that crazy greenhouse idea again.'" They aren't walking away now – recently 'they' drove into that rough Pittsburgh neighborhood in furs and limousines to enjoy fabulous food, music – and orchids from the newly opened greenhouse.

What's to learn about allies here?

- Know what help you need
- Observe if the goals and values of potential allies align with yours
- Boldly approach all possible backers, staying strong in your vision
- Be open to all types of help and allies; synchronicity favors the aware
- Turn negativity into positives; use negativity as a driver to succeed.

– thanks to contributors Kathy O'Connor and Mary Ann Stein



THE CHOICE OF ALLIES

I once heard a professor pose a scenario like this to an MBA class:

An "up-and-comer" had some big successes doing "necessary" slashing and burning to turn around struggling operations. People had tried to talk to him about his harsh approach, but he'd ignored them, as he wasn't in it to be liked but to get the job done.

Then he noticed the positions being offered him were always those of a "turnaround cowboy", never the long-term, climb-the-ladder positions he thought he wanted. He started to wonder if he was in a rut. He talked about it to a friend.

If you were this person's ally as well as friend, would you tell him where you see his interactions being ineffective, or that he should maintain the status quo and stay with his strengths? Alternatively, if you were he, what would you seek from your ally? To be challenged to grow or to stay comfortable?

How does your choice design who you, and people around you, become?

UNEXPECTED ALLIES

In 1935, when Fiorello La Guardia was mayor of New York City, he showed up in court one night in the poorest area of the city, suggested the judge go home for the evening, and took over the bench.

La Guardia's first case involved an elderly woman arrested for stealing bread.

When asked whether she was innocent or guilty, she answered softly, "I needed the bread, your honor, to feed my grandchildren."

"I've no option but to punish you" the mayor responded. "Ten dollars or ten days in jail."

Proclaiming the sentence, he simultaneously threw \$10 into his hat. He then fined every person in the courtroom 50 cents for living in a city "where a grandmother has to steal food to feed her grandchildren."

When all had contributed their 50 cents, the woman paid her fine and left the courtroom with an additional \$47.50.

-- recounted by Glen Van Ekeren