



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

If Your New Ideas Are Causing Chaos For The Team, Try This Approach

Shannon Waller: Stay tuned for a very simple, but crucial distinction that prevents teamwork chaos, confusion, resentment and frustration.

Hi, Shannon Waller here and welcome to *Team Success*. Today, I want to share a very simple but crucial distinction that when you get it can prevent chaos, hurt feelings, resentment, poor teamwork, makes your culture stronger when you fix and solve this problem, all the things. You're going to think, "It's too simple, Shannon," but guess what? It really isn't. Because I have watched this problem happen for decades and I keep coaching on it because it bears repeating. Here's what it is.

What's interesting in terms of engaging other people with teamwork is that we tend to just start, we just plunge in, "Hey, I've got this new thing I want to do, this new project, this new idea," whatever it is. Depending on what kind of side, I want to almost say, of a spectrum or continuum that you're on, you're going to approach it one way, but the people you're talking to might approach it a very different way. That's the crucial distinction.

When I was coaching this with a team the other day, because they're brilliant and they want to know these things, the distinction is when you are talking out loud about a project, you have to be incredibly clear: are you looking for a thinking partner or are you looking for a doing partner? So, **thinking partner or doing partner?** Let's talk about what each of those things are. Again, they're quite different.

A thinking partner is, this is where you simply want to engage the other person's experience and intellect. You do not necessarily want them to be engaged in solving the problem with you, starting the project. You may be still in the very, very, very beginning phases of this and you simply want a sounding board. Do you want someone who's going to listen, hopefully have good facial expressions when you share the idea—depends on what their thinking face looks like. But you want someone who can actually kind of like, "Oh, okay, well, if you want to do that, then you'd also need to take this and this and this into account. Have you thought about this? What are your thoughts on this part of it?" Someone who can just, again, bring their intellect and their experience to bear on this particular situation, but with a very clear intention that there is no yet commitment to take action.



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This is an enormous source of confusion and chaos and, as I said, resentment on a lot of teams because—and if this is you, you'll know you—if you're an entrepreneur, visionary, team leader, someone who just loves brainstorming, then you're like, "Oh hey, I've got this new idea." You actually want to test it on an audience before you commit anyone's talents, work, time, energy, effort to putting it into place. However, you are probably surrounded by some incredible doers. People who, when something comes out of your mouth, they take it really seriously and they start to go to work.

An issue/complaint that I've heard about for years is like, "Oh my gosh, my entrepreneur said that he wanted to do this. Then I worked on **it** for three weeks and I came back and it's like, 'Here's the project.' He's like, 'Oh! No, I don't want to do that anymore.'" And there's this amazing sense of like, "Oh my gosh. I just wasted three weeks and all my thinking and all my efforts to make this happen, and he doesn't even care anymore." That's incredibly frustrating.

Or, the other thing happens from the other side, somewhat less often, where the visionary puts an idea out and the other person takes action. Like, "Hang on a second, I didn't actually say I wanted to do this yet. I didn't want you to waste your time." This is part of the coaching we give in the Team Programs is be very, very clear: is this an idea or is this something you want to take action on?

Because if you're a visionary talking to your team of doers, the thing that you need to understand is that nothing comes out of their mouth unless they're already committed. They're not going to brainstorm ideas with you. In fact, sometimes they actually just don't brainstorm. It's just not how they're put together. They're put together to execute. If you are talking, they're going to assume that you've gone through that same mental process, weeded out all the bad ideas, and if you're saying it, you must be committed and you want them to take action. That assumption is not always true. Therefore, you need to set up the context of your conversation—absolutely essential that you do this.

What you want to say to someone, "Hey, would you be willing to be my thinking partner on this? I don't want you to do anything yet. I simply want to be able to think this through with you." Which by the way is a pretty big compliment, because not everyone's good at helping other people think things through. I think this is... I love being a thinking partner. I love being a sounding board. I love reflecting back, "Oh I think this is gold, this is confusing, this not so much. Oh my gosh, ramp this sucker up. This is going to be incredible. It's going to make such a difference for people. Do more of this." That's kind of how I talk, actually. People are like,



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“Really?” I’m like, “Yes, that is gold.” I do this with Dan; I do this with clients all the time. I’m a good person to reflect what should be multiplied. Because that’s how I look at things.

Now, if you are a doer and you work with people who brainstorm, then you actually also want to ask the question—yes, it is absolutely within your purview to do this. Please, I’m giving you permission to ask the question: “Oh, right now are you looking for a thinking partner to help think this idea through? Or are you looking for a doing partner to help execute on it?” I guarantee they will probably pause for a second, and it’s kind of 50-50 as to what the answer is. They may go like, “No, actually I just want a thinking partner. I’m not 100% sure if I want to do this.” Or you just asking that question may have them go, “Yeah, I really am committed to this; I need a doing partner.” And they’re like, “Great.” Then you know exactly the context in which you’re operating.

But it is crucial to set the context from both sides. Now, as I said, I’m drawing a little bit more of an extreme on the continuum, but frankly I see it happen all the time. It’s a massive source of frustration and it diminishes teamwork when we don’t set the context. Dan Sullivan is really fun. He’s got a really good line for visionaries. He goes, “One of the things I’ve learned is to never brainstorm in public.” Yeah, exactly. “Never brainstorm in public” because with the team that’s around him, who are incredibly capable, very, very committed, very smart, dedicated people, they’re just going to take and run with it and he may not yet be committed. One of our amazing tools is called the Impact Filter that’s available through strategiccoach.com—if you want to go check it out, it’s one of our free downloads, which is amazing—because we want you to actually think through your ideas and sell yourself on them intellectually and emotionally before you communicate them to your team.

The great thing about the Impact Filter is that it has: what’s the project (or what’s going on); what’s the purpose (so, what is it); importance (why); ideal outcome (when it works really well, what does it look like); what is the best case scenario if we take action (so, if we totally win at this, what’s the benefit?); and then, if we don’t take action, this is the worst result (or it does not go well). So, I actually really like the worst because it also measures what’s the cost of maintaining the status quo? What’s the cost of *not* doing something? Usually, results will diminish or stay really flat. No one wants that. That’s boring. Especially if it’s not very good. Or if you don’t do it well and it just blows up in your face—also bad. Good way to tell. Cautionary tales, in my experience.

Then you’re, well, five to eight, depending on the size of the tool you’re using—our fast one or our full one, so Fast Filter and full Impact Filter—is what are the five to eight success criteria? What needs to happen, what’s the little checklist to produce the ideal results—in other words, produce the best and prevent the worst from happening? You get very clear. It’s a great way to make a list if you’re *not* a list-maker. And it’s a great way to make a list if you *are* a list-maker. It really helps to pull that out. By the time you’re done the purpose, importance, and ideal outcome, you are sold intellectually. By the time you have done the best and worst, you are sold



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emotionally, which means that when you need to hand it off to someone—because that’s the first 80% of the project—you’re actually fully committed.

It’s called an Impact Filter for a reason. Because we expect that some of those ideas you’re going to filter out: you’re not going to be sold on it, it’s not going to be a big enough win, status quo actually isn’t that bad, you’re not sold on it enough. I’ve had people... Actually, this one woman ran seven companies and the seventh one was taking all of her time and energy, and she did an Impact Filter, came back the next quarter, she said, “Yeah, I shut it down. I wasn’t sold on this company.” Yet it was taking so much of her time. Dramatically improved her profitability in 90 days. There’s lots of different ways to do that. But I love the Impact Filter because it helps you filter through the ideas that really are worth your team’s time.

So, if you want to be a great leader, and if you’ve just moved into this role, if you’ve always been in this role, really getting good at communicating, especially new initiatives, is absolutely essential. I’m in this role also at Coach and I do Impact Filters on what I’m seeing. I also love to do Impact Filters with the team because I want everyone bought in, both intellectually and also emotionally. When we’re all bought in, then we’re all literally, not just figuratively, on the same page. People leaving meetings with very different interpretations of what happened: incredibly common. When you complete a thinking tool like the Impact Filter, it just really helps to fix that.

Bottom line, just going back, if you are a visionary and you do want help thinking through your idea, make sure that you set the context that you are looking for a thinking partner. If you want someone to help you get it done, specify that you need a doing partner. That’s probably the default. You almost probably need to speak up more if you want a thinking partner, unless you have someone who just plays that role for you, which are brilliant. Often those people are outside of our companies. But again, there’s one frustration for visionaries is that they don’t have thinking partners like, “Every time I say anything, people just go do it. I’m not even sure if I want to do it yet.” But if you add this context in with someone who can just, again, bring their intellect and their experience versus their striving, their will, their Kobe, then I think you’ll find great success. And you’ll find some people who actually would love to think through your ideas.

I’m one of these visionary people, so I want to lay out to you how it looks. I’ll be thinking of a project or of an idea that’s going to require some fact-finding, some organizing, some planning, none of which I have a lot of mental energy for. What I’ll say is, “Okay, if you are going to take on this project—but I’m not saying you are, but *if*—what kind of questions for you need to be answered? What kind of things come to mind?” They’ll bring out, oh my gosh, this myriad of ideas and thoughts and questions that I never in a million years would ever think of. I’m like, “Oh, that’s good.” I’m thinking of cost, timing, and people—kind of my three things I look at.



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But they're like, "How does it integrate with our current software? What would it mean in terms of a shift of habits for our team? Will it actually have the impact on the clients that you're thinking about, Shannon? Is it something that we can do that will produce faster, easier, cheaper, bigger results? Yes or no?" I'm like, "Oh my gosh, those are all such really good questions." Then we work together to answer them. But I still haven't decided yet. And there's something really great about having a thinking partner who will help you figure out the criteria. You may go, "Oh, you know what, this is way too much time and effort. I thought this was going to be simple. I thought this was going to be fun and fast. It's none of those things. Nope, that one goes in the garbage bin." Excellent. That 15-minute conversation you had just saved you hours of work and acres of time, all the things. It saved you money, it saved effort on the part of your team. I think that's really useful.

When you can be that thinking partner for someone, oh my gosh, so satisfying, so fulfilling. When the idea moves ahead, you know you've been a part of it. And if the idea gets trashed, you know you just saved a ton of time, energy, and effort, which I think is very validating. It's nice to know that you've helped efficiency in the world, at least in your company. That's really useful. We need both thinking partners. We need both doing partners. We are both of those things to other people. I love being a sounding board and a thinking partner.

I'm very careful about what I take on to say I will do. There's a few things at which I am superb and fabulous at; most everything else, not so much. So, if it's to a webinar or a presentation or a speech or coaching, I'm a hard yes. But if it's not that, I'm a little more cautious. Other people are the complete opposite, which I love. That is the basis of Unique Ability Teamwork. We're all unique "Whos" in some ways, where we've got the "Hows" down, but in other ways we need to really be interdependent—not co-dependent, not independent, not just dependent, but *interdependent*—with other people. Really setting a context by saying, "Thinking partner. Doing partner." Making that distinction is absolutely essential for healthy, long-lived, collaborative, cooperative teamwork.

I hope I've added something to your teamwork repertoire and communication repertoire today. Please let me know your thoughts. If you're good at doing this, if it needs a little more practice, if you're like, "Oh, that's been the problem," I love knowing those details. Please let me know at questions@strategiccoach.com. Thank you so much for listening and as always, here's to your team success.