

The Monti Navigator

Be Greater than the Average



Tammy Mangus, Superintendent of Schools

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Do you think you know what collaboration means?

For a good 90% of my life, I misunderstood what [collaboration](#) actually meant -- and based upon my many experiences and conversations, I have a sneaking suspicion that I'm not the only one.

My understanding of [collaboration](#) had always been guided by quotes like these:

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

"If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself." – Henry Ford

"If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else." – Booker T. Washington

Not that there's anything wrong with these quotes, but because I always accepted them at face value, never digging into the deeper meaning, I understood the definition of "[collaboration](#)" to be closer to the definition of "kumbaya" – engagement through a show of harmony with one's opponents. I understood [collaboration](#) to mean "putting aside to unify," "meeting in the middle," "warm fuzzies for all!"

It wasn't till my son got a job that I learned the true meaning of [collaboration](#) – the meaning Webster had in mind when he penned the dictionary.

Here's the story (in summary):

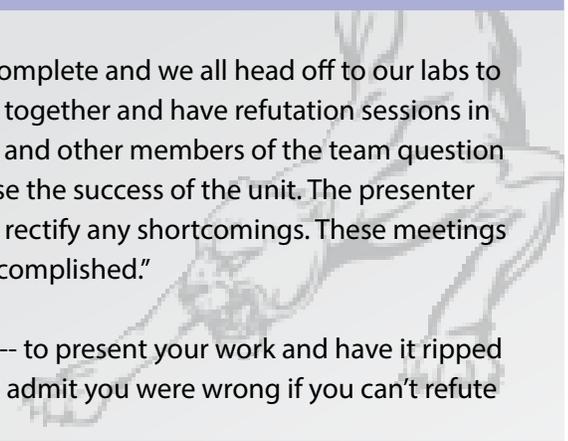
Son goes away to college. It's expensive, but each and every day Mom and Dad hope that the investment will yield a return of "job" so that "guest bedroom" is not his address.

Son graduates and gets "job" – 2,500 miles away.

Mom cries.

Son and wife fly home for the first time. Mom pretends to be cooking while carrying on a "conversation," answering every question asked of her with short yes/no answers and then swiftly turning the tables to ask question after question after question after question in an attempt to soak in anything he'd offer about his day-to-day tasks. After all, a mother DOES want to know anything and everything (without being too overbearing, of course).

Son remits the following fascinating story resulting in Mom's mind being blown and forever changing her (my) view of true [collaboration](#):



Son: "Project work is absolutely fascinating. We are given a mission to complete and we all head off to our labs to work on key components of the task. At established times, we all come together and have refutation sessions in front of senior management where we present the work we have done and other members of the team question us on feasibility and potential areas of weakness that might compromise the success of the unit. The presenter must disprove their theories or acquiesce to their recommendations to rectify any shortcomings. These meetings happen repeatedly throughout the project cycle until the mission is accomplished."

(Worried) Mom: "Wow, it must be really difficult to be in those sessions -- to present your work and have it ripped apart in front of your supervisors. Then having to refute their claims OR admit you were wrong if you can't refute them? Oy ve - that must be hard!"

Son: "It's really not that dramatic, Mom, but you do learn pretty quickly that:

- Not everyone gets their way, but that's okay.
- Everyone works very, very hard, and
- RESULTS are key.

People don't get in trouble for being wrong unless they haven't worked hard or if they are unwilling to listen to input to improve. The project's mission is what really matters. It's not personal, but it sure would be if our mission failed."

My mind was BLOWN as I realized for the first time that **collaboration** isn't about kumbaya at all. If everybody comes together and works really, really hard but with the wrong result, is anyone REALLY happy? No, absolutely not. In fact, this form of "collaboration" leads to disappointment, backstabbing grumbles and genuine morale issues.

True **collaboration** happens when every person on a team is laser-focused on achieving the mission. There is no room for egos, nor is there room for self-interests. To truly **collaborate**, all must genuinely be invested in achieving the goal at all costs. Futurist Don Tapscott gave an incredible example of **collaboration** in a recent TED talk called "Four Principals for an Open World," when he illustrated the starlings of Edinburgh. These birds swoop and sail in impressive formations in the sky and use a collective sense of interdependence to ward off predators, find food and in essence, to survive. Instinctively, these birds understand that the collective mission trumps the individual -- each and every time.

Perhaps these are better, more accurate quotes and citations to help us all understand what TRUE collaboration means:

"**Collaboration** (N.): The action of working with someone to produce results."

"Many ideas grow better when transplanted into another mind than the one where they sprang up." –
Oliver Wendell Holmes

“Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.” – Andrew Carnegie

“It is the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too) that those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed.” – Charles Darwin

We’ve spent the **ENTIRE** year working towards developing the **LIFE-READY** traits that we know will lay the foundation for success in our students when they leave our care and head into the workforce. But we can’t teach these traits if we’re not embodying them ourselves, so let’s make sure we are personally building these skills; and remember:

1. The mission REALLY, REALLY matters. We must set goals and maintain our aim in accomplishing them (**Goal-Setting/ Goal-Getting**: October).
2. We must gather a truthful awareness of where we currently stand and understand that our current actions actually cause our current standings to be what they are. Once we are AWARE, we must use that information to create our plan of action to get where we want to go and accomplish our mission (**Awareness**: November).
3. We must check in on our progress to see if our new actions are leading us down the appropriate path and to create interventions to rectify any intermittent snafus we may have discovered through our new work (**Goal Check-In**: December).
4. We must speak forthrightly and directly close to the source of our contentions and maintain our keen focus on mission outcomes (**Integrity**: January)
5. We must work with one another by seeking out varying viewpoints to rip apart our pre-conceived notions that might weaken our successful outcomes in order to truly unite and succeed in our organization’s goal of educating our kiddos successfully, because ensuring an education matters more than our own egos, in fact, our very survival depends on it (**Collaboration**: February).

Be Well,
Tammy Mangus