

THOUGHTS ON PROFOUND LEARNING

By Kathleen Ryan

In *Extraordinary Groups* (Jossey-Bass, 2009), Geoff Bellman and I offer a set of core concepts as a lens, through which you can **see** and **be** in groups differently. This new view will enable you to take action to support your group's ability to be high performing in all ways—in achieving results and in the experience of working together. This article engages you in thinking more deeply about Profound Learning, one of eight performance indicators of extraordinary teams. This profile served as the basis for the development of the *Extraordinary Teams Inventory*, to be published by HRDQ Press in 2013.

Profound Learning as when individual and collective learning exceeds expectations, reaching beyond the work at hand to members' careers and personal lives. In an extraordinary group you'll know that Profound Learning is alive and well when members frequently...

- Comment on what they are learning or new insights they have gained
- Take on new roles that previously they felt unable to perform
- Ask for feedback
- Make statements about what they want to learn as the team moves ahead with its work
- Offer to help others who want to learn new skills
- Encourage each other to take the risk of doing something new
- Ask others for coaching around a particular skill set, role, or topic
- Initiate debrief sessions where the goal is to learn from something that has happened

Before reading on, consider:

- What themes do you see in this list?
- What behaviors could you add to this list that would be signs that one of your groups was truly outstanding when it comes to Profound Learning?
- What could you do or say within your team to encourage any of these behaviors?

One of the strong themes that emerged from our book's field study was how frequently people said that a result of their amazing group experience was how much they had learned and how surprised and delighted they were by that learning. That's why in *Extraordinary Groups*, you'll notice in Chapter Two, that we describe this performance indicator as Unexpected Learning. We understood that those we interviewed came to their group experience wanting to contribute to its Compelling Purpose. They were relatively unaware that personal learning would emerge as a powerful result.

As our research continued with the development of the *Extraordinary Teams Inventory*, we began to see the learning that happens in exceptional teams as much broader than simply learning that comes as a surprise. We know that members of such teams report that they learn about themselves, others, new subjects, new skills, and about how effective teams work. All of this often combines synergistically into the transformative personal shifts that distinguish an extraordinary team from simply a high-performing team. Frequently, the end result from this powerful learning is an increased sense of confidence that lasts long after a group's work is completed. We also know that one way a team member, leader, or facilitator can encourage a group to move toward extraordinary is by doing or supporting others in doing the things that are listed at the beginning of this article.

Simply put, when we help individuals stretch and grow within a team, we help the entire team move toward a higher level of functioning. This learning is a bit like the frosting on a cake. It's not the reason members work so hard to help realize a team's goals. But this development is a powerful motivator once it kicks in, building an even stronger commitment to make the group's work a priority. For further thought:

- How have you developed your knowledge, skill, or personal insights by serving on a team?
- What difference has this learning made in your career or in your personal life?
- For one of your current groups, what could you imagine yourself doing now that would encourage other team members to grow their knowledge or skills?