

THOUGHTS ON STRENGTHENED RELATIONSHIPS

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 Strengthened Relationships, 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 2014.

Strengthened Relationships is when trust, respect, collegiality, and often friendships form among group members. In an extraordinary group you'll know that Strengthened Relationships are alive and well when members frequently...

- Find opportunities to spend time with each other, even briefly, outside of the structure of team meetings
- Share things about themselves, their interests, their lives with other team members
- Initiate conversations designed to get to know others better
- Support each other when personal challenges or issues outside of the team's work arise
- Ask about and sincerely want to know the answers to questions such as, How are you doing?
- Tease and joke with each other in ways that reflect good humor and genuine caring for one another
- Greet or take leave from each other in a friendly way

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 Strengthened Relationships?
- What could you do or say within your team to encourage any of these behaviors?

Based on Bellman & Ryan's *Extraordinary Groups: How Ordinary Teams Achieve Amazing Results* (Jossey-Bass, 2009)
For more information, go to www.extraordinarygroups.com

When it comes to an exceptional group experience, Strengthened Relationships is much like Profound Learning. Both appear as an added and delightful result for people working together. And, just as with Profound Learning, when team leaders, members, or facilitators intentionally do things to encourage the strengthening of relationships, they increase the likelihood that the team experience will be outstanding. This happens because when relationships are strong, people trust and respect each other more. And so they take greater risks in their teams by offering up possibilities, calling out the risky issues, challenging each other, asking and offering feedback, hearing feedback, and being open to changing one's mind because of something someone else says. They not only want the best for the team's results, but they want the best for each other. They don't want to let each other down and so they are even more inspired to do their very best. This positive motivation becomes obvious and synergistically encourages greater levels of commitment and participation.

Perhaps you've had an experience similar to what Geoff and I have had in our co-authoring. We began the book project because as great friends and colleagues, we wanted to have more reasons to see each other. We thought it would be great fun! Thus, we began with a motivation to strengthen our relationship and we eventually discovered the Compelling Purpose within our book topic. And, we were determined that we wanted to be extraordinary partners to one another. In the four years of our collaboration, we had many 'learning opportunities' all of which strengthened our relationship. If you have a copy of our book, turn to Appendix C, Practicing What We Preach, on page 210 to see what we intentionally did to increase our effectiveness as both colleagues and friends.

For further thought:

- Overtime, have you formed or strengthened a relationship because of working with someone in a group or team? What are the reasons for this happening—or not?
- In your current groups, are there people you would like to get to know better? Why? What actions might you take to do so?
- Consider the People column in the article on Full Engagement, needs we humans have when we come to a group to bond with others, grow into our own potential, and accept ourselves for who we fully are. How might Strengthened Relationships influence your ability to have those needs met in one of your current groups?