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Dear Reader,

We all have heard a lot about leaders who engage their teams, leaders who know how to delegate, leaders who are empowering. This month LIM President Ernie Turner shares in an interview his very pragmatic way to developing shared leadership.

Enjoy the reading!

Isabel Rimanoczy  
Editor

#### Quote of the Month

*"One of the hardest tasks of leadership is understanding that you are not what you are, but what you are perceived to be by others."*

Edward L. Flom



Issue 122

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October 2010

## SHARED LEADERSHIP

### An Interview with Ernie Turner

#### LIM News: What is shared leadership?

ET: I call shared leadership when team members jointly own success and failure; being jointly responsible and accountable. It means going from a 'this is mine' to 'this is ours' mindset. In some ways it feels like a partnership. It means that each member has a dual responsibility — his or her part as well as the whole. It doesn't mean, however, that everyone is interchangeable and should be able to do everything; it means that if anyone on a leadership team feels that something is not

working, instead of complaining, it is his or her responsibility to speak up and make an offer or a request. Everyone on the leadership team needs to have an owner's mentality.

**LIM News: Is it a process specifically for leadership teams?**

ET: No, I believe that a 'shared leadership' mindset will benefit any team that believes that 100% engagement is important for the team's success. Of course, a team needs a certain level of competence and maturity to truly share leadership. However, when given the chance most teams rise to the occasion with adequate support and encouragement.

**LIM News: How did you get interested in this concept?**

ET: Over the years several of my clients have been interested in ways to get their leadership teams to take on a greater sense of ownership, responsibility and accountability for regional or global priorities other than their own geography or function. Many leaders find it difficult and stressful to be the only one who can 'fix' a problem, set direction or address business, organization or relationship challenges that constantly emerge in the life of global organization.

At the same time I noticed on several occasions that the members of the leadership teams were ready and eager to undertake greater responsibilities when they saw what was in it for them personally and professionally in terms of influence, professional growth and financial reward.

**LIM News: How did you notice they were ready?**

ET: Through many face to face conversations with individuals in preparation for team meetings as well as through anonymous surveys that I've conducted with teams prior to a meeting as a way to get what's really on their minds. And I've discovered that when team leaders and also team members ask for 'help' their requests are answered by willing offers of support. "Help!" is a magical word.

**LIM News: So if leaders and their teams spontaneously want to share leadership, is it just about waiting for this to take place?**

ET: It usually takes someone, usually the team leader, but not always, to suggest that the team look at ways they can work more effectively and efficiently. When the team leader suggests that this is something she or he wants then it makes the conversation much easier to have. And usually a good place to begin is to define what shared leadership really means to everyone.

In a recent meeting I conducted with a team, the team leader requested that the team operate in more of a shared leadership model. The leader stated what shared leadership meant to him and why that was important. Then we had a dialogue session to define what that meant to everyone. After the meeting I met with him and we identified a number of things he could do to support the team and himself in the transition from a 'hub and spoke' type of leadership to a shared leadership model where his entire leadership team was part of the hub.

**LIM News: What if the leader doesn't think of sharing leadership?**

ET: It's a little more difficult to move from one-person control or a hub and spoke model of leadership to shared leadership if the team leader is not the one requesting the change. However, I've seen a couple of team members make a case for shared leadership and get the team leader excited about the possibilities. In many cases, the team leader is afraid of losing control and thinks

that power-sharing will diminish his/her power when the just the opposite is the case. Once a leader realizes that power is not finite then the infinite and the impossible are truly possible. And work in the team becomes more fun.

#### **LIM News: Fun? Can you say more?**

ET: I'm a strong believer that work can and should be fun. And 'fun' to me is both enjoying what I do and enjoying the people with whom I'm working. Most of us spend 8-12 hours a day with colleagues 'working' either face to face or virtually so why not ensure that it is enjoyable time so that we're not coming home with stress that disrupts family time and individual time and constantly looking at our watches and calendars waiting for 5pm or Friday.

Imagine if in addition to TGIF (Thank God It's Friday) we would hear a TGIM (Thank God It's Monday). Ideally, we should be excited about every day of the week, don't you think?

#### **LIM News: How do you know when shared leadership is working?**

ET: This is a good question. We know what a rabbit looks like but how can we know what **Shared Leadership** looks like? Here are a few signs I look for:

1. when it is very difficult to tell who the titular team leader really is. Everyone is sharing the leadership — summarizing, paraphrasing, including late comers; making timely offers or requests; being time-conscious; rotating chairing meetings or taking notes; ensuring everyone is part of the decision-making process; paying attention to the team process; exchanging insights; providing feedback; keeping commitments; following the team norms; etc.
2. the level of engagement is very high. Everyone is listening to one another; blackberries are turned off; there are no side conversations; people are on time;
3. no one is afraid of speaking up and offering a different point of view. There is as much, if not more, interest in what others think as in providing one's own point of view;
4. there is good humor across the team with frequent moments of laughter and appreciation for one another;
5. the work of the team is truly being shared. One or two people do not always end up with responsibility for taking all the next steps.

#### **LIM News: What were some of the specific things a leader can consider to make shared leadership come to life?**

ET: Some of the things I mentioned earlier — like rotating chairing of the meetings, taking notes, minding the process, and keeping track of time; asking for help when and where it's needed; being more of a mentor and a coach to different members of his team; being a role model regarding the team norms; asking more questions rather than telling; being more appreciative and visible to not only his team but to the entire organization.

In one case, a leader I was working with was so imposing that his presence inhibited open communication. So with some coaching he opted to be 'absent' periodically for the entire meeting or parts of the meeting. Two very important things happened: his team realized that he truly trusted them to take good decisions and he truly realized they were competent.

**LIM News: So what do you do to "guide" teams and team leaders in the direction of shared leadership?**

ET: There are a number of very practical processes that lead naturally to greater team engagement and ultimately shared leadership. For example, when a few team members tend to dominate a meeting I suggest that the team leader give everyone a couple of minutes to think before speaking and then go around the table to hear everyone's point of view. What this simple technique does is acknowledge that thinking is real work, and that everyone's ideas matter. It allows the introverts on the team the time they need to sort out their thoughts, while it gives the extraverts some time to edit. Ultimately, better ideas emerge as well as greater ownership for these ideas.

I also encourage the team and the team leader to have an 'explicit' contracting conversation so both parties are aware and aligned on what they need from one another to work most effectively.

And I've discovered that in most teams there is ambiguity around what one another's roles are. So I invite them to describe what they understand their role to be; what they will do to bring their role to 'life' and what support they need from the others in order for them to be successful. This very simple process gives everyone a chance to get validation and feedback as to how they add value.

Peer coaching is another technique that allows teams to very quickly and effectively support one another with current challenges. In some teams this has become a replacement for numbing power point slide presentations that become invitations for under the table 'check my email with my Blackberry' time.

These are just a few of the many ways teams can ensure fuller team engagement.

**LIM News: What are some of difficulties or hurdles that leaders must overcome?**

ET: The belief or feeling that the 'best way is my way' and the need for perfection. These two 'mindsets' along with the belief that power is a limited commodity are the biggest roadblocks to shared leadership and become real handcuffs to empowerment. When a leader can realize that he doesn't have to hold his team members' hands any longer then the team's power can truly be unleashed. When mistakes are viewed as opportunities for learning rather than occasions for punishment then a true learning environment can be created which is vital for growth on every dimension — personal, professional, team, organizational and business.

Of course, this all requires a bit of humility and a real recognition that others have brains and a desire to add value too.

**LIM News: What about the team members, what mindset is required of them?**

ET: Both leaders and team members need to acknowledge that change doesn't happen only because of good intentions. It takes some effort, encouragement and feedback. So we look for very practical feedback mechanisms.


For example, a set of norms can be converted quickly into an instrument that a team can use to take its temperature on a periodic basis. And instead of having lengthy debates on what we 'should' do differently I suggest that each individual simply state, "Here's what I will do to help us get better at 'x'" So going from a 'we should' to an 'I will' is a very simple but very powerful step in terms of changed behavior and it gives everyone an opportunity to make a small difference. Never


underestimate how much how little will do!

**LIM News: So in summary what would you describe as the most important benefits of sharing leadership?**

ET: Greater engagement, more creative ideas, stronger ownership, increased learning, reduced stress, better results and more fun! What else do you wish!?



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