Corporate Symbiosis: Just Talk to Each Other

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About a month ago, I found myself at 65 Broadway New York, New York. In our company with three offices, I am based out of our NJ office where mostly marketing, sales and service sit. Our headquarters in Brooklyn has all the rest of our departments, along with our CEO. So what is 65 Broadway? A small office in the heart of the financial district that has one critical department for a SaaS organization. This one department remains a mystery to many of us who usually write in words and not symbols, whose screens are generally white with black writing and not black with white writing and whose offices are a mix of sounds and not silence. Yes – development. The almighty department that takes ideas and turns those ideas into reality.

A Day in the Life of Marketing

So I asked Sabrina, one of my coworkers, to describe her day in the marketing department in a paragraph. *My life in the marketing department changes quite a bit day to day! But here's an average overview: When I sit down at my desk in the morning, one of the first things I'll do is check on our many website forms to see if we've gotten any new leads. Then I'll work on writing and scheduling emails for our ongoing email marketing campaigns. More writing follows – anything from blogs to landing page copy – before I switch my brain over to numbers and pull updated data from our Google AdWords account for analysis. And, of course, at some point, I'm meeting with the rest of our team to brainstorm and catch up on all of our marketing initiatives.*

A Day in the Life of Development

And I asked Grant, one of our full stack developers, to do the same. *On our Development team, we use the Agile Development methodology. Mornings start with daily stand-ups where we discuss what we've done the past day, our challenges, and where today will bring us. Knowing each other's work status helps to smooth the process of development because team members help contribute new insights to unforeseen issues of a task. After our morning meetings, we jump into our work. Development is a tricky task – one uncaught mistake and you're constantly fixing and making up for it for the rest of your life. So, understandably, most tasks start with heavy research on a topic. Research is the most important. With so many ways to create software these days, it's imperative to work with technologies that are reliable and will have future support. After we've done the research groundwork, it's time to develop and plan the architecture. Once we complete the task, it's heavily tested and sent to a round of reviews, where our peers comment on our code. Almost every time there is something you can improve, so this cycle happens a few times until the task is complete. This is the average day of a developer - assuming you can complete this cycle in a day (sometimes this occurs over a week or longer depending on the task).*

A Symbiotic Relationship

Remember high school biology? Remember when you thought you would never use the term symbiotic again? Well, guess again. Merriam-Webster will refresh your memory: Symbiosis (n.)

- the living together in more or less intimate association or close union of two dissimilar organisms
- a cooperative relationship

So, let's dig into the second definition since we aren't talking about clownfish and anemone today. In a 2013 Harvard Business Review article, To Overcome Your Company's Limits, Look to Symbiosis, author Rafe Sagarin discusses six key guidelines for creating adaptable symbiotic relationships that can be applied to today's organizations. What are they?

1. Make your symbiosis count
2. Love thine enemy
3. Don't wed your partner
4. Forget quid pro quo
5. There's no such thing as a perfect partnership
6. Prepare for the unexpected

One of the most interesting points that Sagarin makes is that first one; as he puts it, "symbioses have no intrinsic value." There's no point in having different types of employees work together if there's no problem for them to solve! The most apparent symbiotic relationship in the workplace is probably sales and service. They need to work together to ensure that the service can follow up and give the client the experience promised by sales. But an equally important symbiosis exists between the departments of marketing and development. Marketing knows the target audience – what they like, what they dislike, and what they're looking for. We can then bring these results to development, who can use them to make real improvements that will help our clients. Although plenty of corporate departments tend to work in silos, cross-departmental coordination can truly boost not only the brand's strength but also the satisfaction and engagement of its employees. According to SHRM's 2016 Employee Job Satisfaction and Engagement Report, 39 percent of employees indicated that teamwork between departments is an essential contributor to job satisfaction.

Bottom Line – Communicate!

Oh! I never told you why I, a marketing person, went to our developers-only office. When Hadas, our Director of Software Development, called and said "Terra, let's talk," two days later I was in Manhattan. Hadas and I left that day with a plan on how we could close the loop between departments, including two joint working days - one with marketing and one with sales. And not only that, his developers were interested in writing LinkedIn Pulse Articles and blogs! Who knew? That same SHRM report shared research on the importance of communication skills – on an individual level, it's the most valuable skill that companies look for among job applicants, and on an organizational level, communication and collaboration across departments is the key to success. 36 percent of employees label this communication as very important to their job satisfaction. So, as it turns out, there is the intended result of closed-loop communication – but maybe the even more significant part is a sense of oneness. In life, people tend to be well-rounded and enjoy many different facets of work. If you have employees in one department with interests in another, there are creative ways to work together that will result in overall camaraderie and will keep the day-to-day pretty interesting. 65 Broadway – you haven't seen the last of me!

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