

# Exploring Co-operation

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As a Business Advisor, Mentor and Executive and Personal Coach, Co-operation intrigues me. Co-operation is a strategy which offers the greatest rational collective gain per unit of individual input - yet the practice of Co-operation is a dying art. Why is that? Why are we so determined to not co-operate in so many aspects of our lives?

When was the last time you did not close up the gap in the traffic - you allowed someone to merge easily? That long huh? Deliberately closing the gap has become your standard driving habit. It's a Win/Lose approach - if I don't close you out, I lose!!

Now scale it up - where else in your life do you 'close up the gap' and not co-operate? Why is that? Other than an emotional hit, what do you win? More importantly, what are you losing?

For most people, that question is unanswerable ..... they just don't know what they are losing because that is the way they have always done it. They think it's normal. Therefore there is no sense of 'losing' anything.

On a whim, I typed 'Co-operation' in Microsoft Word and went to the 'Look Up' function - this is what came back, referenced from the Encarta Dictionary, North America:

Co-operation - co-op·er·a·shun: (noun) - meaning:

working together - the act of working together to achieve a common aim

compliance - doing what is asked or required

Seems like definition 1 is 'internally' motivated - we want that common goal - while definition 2 is externally motivated - the achievement of someone else's goal. Let's explore.

Definition 1 suggests co-operation might actually be good for us .... but there's the rub. What if the common aim of group one is opposed to the common aim of group 2? Both groups listen to that well known radio station, WII-FM - What's In It For Me!! Both groups are motivated by the sense of value attaching to their respective common aims. Winners and Losers.

This brings us to definition 2 - the externally motivated (imposed) model. This definition presupposes the existence of a 'Higher Authority' which determines a certain type of 'co-operative' behaviour - compliance. In short, where the individual common aim of various groups is not shared across all the groups, the 'Higher Authority' - 'Parents' 'Government', 'the Boss', 'the wife' the husband' - imposes rules to achieve its aim. In this scenario, none of the competing groups wins - all groups and all members lose. We just can't seem to get it together can we?



Consider your workplace or your business. What rules do you have? What is the purpose of 'the rules'? Why is it necessary to force compliance? Think about that for a moment..... why is it necessary to force compliance? Why do you, the person reading this, need rules to ensure your appropriate behaviour? Why do others need rules? How hard do you and those around you, work to avoid those rules?

Consider a workgroup of 10 people – workgroup A. Each of them is committed to their own natural inclinations, their own WIIFM. Therefore, each of them has 9 competitors against whom they pit themselves day in and day out, each of them wanting to be right and continuously defending their positions from the attacks of the others. Sound familiar? Tiring isn't it?

Now let's say we have workgroup B - 10 persons who consciously work to achieve their agreed, common aims – the common goal. They consciously override their natural inclinations - each of these persons has nine others looking out for them. WIIFM players have only one – themselves. Studies have shown that Workgroup B members are happier, healthier, more productive, more alert and live longer.

Sounds like Co-operation is in fact good for us.

Give it a try for a week and see what happens. Enrol others in your whacky ideas – just for a week and see what happens.

Let me know.....

Let me be a little kinder, let me be a little blinder  
To the faults of those around me, let me praise a little more  
Let me be when I am weary just a little bit more cheery  
Think a little more of others and a little less of me

Glen Campbell

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