

Leadership Letter

Working together?



Several years ago I visited a city outreach team who had seen quite a large number of people come to the Lord. They didn't appear to be a very high-powered team but they were remarkably effective. So I spent a few days with them to see if I could identify the secret of their fruitfulness. As we talked together, one of the secrets began to emerge – they worked together!

There's a couple that I have known for a while now, who are extremely comfortable with one another. They team-teach, have grown in similar hobbies and outdoor activities, prefer one another in their ministry together and are a great advertisement for marriage and ministry.

I remember sitting with a leadership team who had been through the storming phase with each other. They had grown to understand their strengths and weaknesses and now functioned so effectively, drawing on one another's gifts as the need required. They dreamed and envisioned, processed and planned, prayed and prophesied and cared for one another in a wonderful way.

These various teams had discovered the power of synergy. I'll give some details about these teams later, but first, let's look at the nature of synergy.

Working Together: A study discovered that birds flying in a V format had lower heart rates than birds flying alone. Why? The aerodynamic V shape formation reduces the air drag that each bird experiences when in flight in comparison to a bird flying solo. This allows them to cover longer distance (thousands of miles) with much less effort. For example, geese can achieve a greater distance of about 70 percent when flying in groups than each flying solo, using the same amount of energy.

As we look closely at the people we lead we find that they are very different from one another; but despite these differences, when we work together in right relationships, God promises to release His blessing. Psalm 133 shares, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! For there the LORD commanded the blessing—life forever." Matthew 18:19 encourages us that, "if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them." This process of working together with our differences is called synergy.

The English word 'synergy' is derived from a couple of Greek words that occur several times in the New Testament. The verb 'sunergeo' is usually translated 'work with' or 'work together'. For example in Mark 16:20, "And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord *worked with them*, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed." Then in Romans 8:28, "And we know that God causes all things to *work together* for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His purpose*." The noun is 'sunergos' and is usually translated as 'fellow workers' or 'workers together'. For example, Philippians 4:3 says, 'I ask you also to help these women.. and the rest of my *fellow workers*...' and 3 John 8, "Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be *fellow workers* with the truth." 'Synergy' could also be defined as co-operative action, united action or combined energy.

In the past, the word has been used mainly in a medical context, but is now being used more widely in management circles. It's use in describing the functioning of the human body makes it a very apt word for describing the way people should relate together in the Body of Christ.

Webster's dictionary defines 'synergism' as "Co-operative action of distinct agencies such that the total effect is greater than the sum of the several effects taken independently". 'Synergy' is defined as: "a. The combined healthy action of every organ of a system; b. The combined effective action of two or more drugs". For instance, when two drugs given separately are ineffective but when given together bring healing, that's synergy!

A Multiplying Factor: A great example of synergy can be found with a pair of horses. An average size horse can pull 2,000 pounds. Right next to her is another horse of like breed, age and size that can also pull about 2,000 pounds. Add it up and you could say that the two horses pulling together could pull about 4,000 pounds. Working together, the two horses could actually pull a load upwards of 8,000 pounds. It's like a miracle happens! Simple maths don't work anymore. It's when our working relationships are such that God can release a multiplying factor through us instead of mere addition! Synergy produces results greater than the sum of the parts. The Bible says, "One shall put a thousand to flight, and two ten thousand". That's synergy!

Creative Co-operation: In August this year Stephe's wife, Rite, was preparing to head out to Mozambique for a preschool project. She was there to train preschool teachers so that every church plant situation could establish a preschool alongside it. The challenge however, was that 85% of the participants of the seminar were illiterate. She created a preschool out of the Sunday school from church, got a friend to take pictures and then Stephe put it all together to form a picture manual for the seminar. Co-operation to the max!

In 1 Corinthians 3:9, Paul says "we are workers together with God"; or we could equally say 'we are synergists with God'. 1 Corinthians 3:6 defines three agencies working together in synergy, "Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth". Paul the pioneer evangelist had a good working relationship with Apollos the teacher, so God released power for growth of the church. This was creative co-operation!

Teamwork: A football team gives a good example of synergy, or lack of it! When footballers are selected to represent the nation, we have a team of the most skilful individual players in the country; but they can play a club team and still lose. This is because the club team normally has better synergy; they play together better. Because they have better co-operative skills they beat the team with better individual skills. A good captain will focus on developing these co-operative skills within the team.

As we examine how a good football team operates we see that two sorts of skills are necessary: individual skills, and equally, co-operative teamwork. Individualists don't win football matches, teams do! Likewise with the Body of Christ. Each person needs to develop their individual gifts, but also, should know how to work together with others. Individuals working on their own are not going to win the world, but bodies of God's people working together in unity have the potential to do it.

Synergistic Prayer: The Body of Christ meets in various types of groups and settings: prayer meetings, bible study groups, a congregation in worship, an outreach, etc. Many of these meetings do not achieve synergy and most prayer meetings don't. Why? Because it can so easily become a collection of individuals praying. To release God's synergistic power they

need to be relating and agreeing together with a singleness of mind and purpose. Jesus said, 'When two of you agree in prayer it shall be done by my Father in heaven', Matthew 18:19.

When a group prays in the synergy of the Spirit there is not just a bunch of individual prayers, but one united prayer going up to God. They may pray altogether or one after the other, but there is such agreement in the Spirit the individual prayers blend together as one. An example of this sort of praying is in Acts 4:24-31. There was such synergistic power released, the building they were praying in was shaken, and they went out speaking the Word of God with such boldness that many people were saved and healed!

Synergy & Unity: The words 'synergy' and 'unity' have similar meanings. 'Unity' describes the relationship, and 'synergy' describes the process and the result of different people working together in unity. Unity is not uniformity. Uniformity is when we are 'christian sausages' - everyone looking the same and with the same content. Nobody is allowed to be different. But synergy begins with diversity in unity. Different people with different gifts all working together in harmonious relationship.

Synergy & leadership: It is important that a leader understands synergy, and then he or she will encourage diversity. Insecure leaders tend to want everyone to be the same as them; people who differ from them threaten them. But good leaders see their need for people different than themselves.

Ephesians 4:1-16 emphasises unity, but also speaks of five very different gifts: the apostle is the visionary pioneer, always wanting to do new things new ways; the prophet won't move unless he hears the voice of God; the evangelist gets frustrated unless he's out reaching to the lost; the teacher wants to get everyone solidly based in the Word before they do anything, and the pastor wants to get everyone cared for. They are so different, yet God expects them to work together. Each of these people tends to evaluate situations from the point of view of their own gifting, but on their own their viewpoint is too narrow. They need each other.

We have spoken in the past about the five key gifts in the leadership team. In YWAM the teaching gift is lifted high and most leaders mix their gift with teaching. The evangelist tends to be a strong practitioner and doesn't like to spend time in leadership meetings. So these two gifts although needed are missed out. So, when the apostolic gift, the pastoral gift, the operational gift and the prophetic gift work together with the help of the team-building gift, you have a dynamic team. Then the multiplying factor of synergy can be released.

Harmonising Differences: Although we don't always use the titles of the above gifts, we often have people with these emphases (and others too!) in our teams and leadership groups. And if we are going to see God move powerfully through our work we must be able to co-operate together effectively. Some steps for doing this are:

1. Work with each person on your team to identify his or her main gifts and abilities.
2. Have each person describe the strengths of each of the other people on the team and how those strengths enhance the functioning of their own gifts.
3. Ask each person to acknowledge where they need the help of the others on the team;
4. Identify the team builder on the team, who will help the various giftings to function together and to see the appropriate times for the emphasis of their gift.
5. Pray together, asking God to teach you how to work together more effectively, so that His power will be more obviously working through your team.

Synergy Produces Fruit: Let's look in more detail at the outreach team I mentioned earlier.

The outreach team - consisted of five people who had seen many people come to the Lord. Two of the team had the gift of hospitality; one was a one-to-one evangelist; another had the gift of administration, plus the leader. There was no one person that stood out as being more strongly gifted than the others, but they were very effective. The warmth of the people with the hospitality gifting attracted outsiders to visit the team house, and in the relaxed atmosphere they provided, the evangelist was able to lead many to the Lord. The leader then stepped in, as he was good at leading bible studies. Their commitment to one another in the process made them function with synergy.

The marriage team – He is a thinker and introvert, she is a feeler and more extrovert. She is more adventurous, he is more cautious. Both have different interests but both seek to serve the other and prefer one another. One doesn't make decisions without talking it through with the other. They are team and want to think, live, act and function as one. It's like one person merges into the other and together they are so much more effective than they could be alone. They understand synergy.

The Leadership team – one was highly prophetic who stirred the gift in everyone else, another was apostolic to the max and was ready to jump into action yesterday, one kept everyone's feet on the ground with very practical down to earth logic, another brought encouragement and a positive feeling to all and took the people needs in his stride, then there was the team builder who spent time being the peacemaker and applying glue for all to stick together. What an effective team they were.

Discussion & Application:

- 1. What do you think are the main relationship skills and character qualities team members will need to develop if there is to be effective synergy on their team?*
- 2. In what ways could a leader encourage (or discourage!) diversity within his team?*
- 3. How can a team have people on it with different gifts and personalities and yet avoid destructive conflicts?*
- 4. What teams have you been on in the past, that have worked well together? Why did they work well?*