

Pulling Together: The Power of Teamwork
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Summary by Mark R. Elliott*

INTRODUCTION

Go put your creed into your deed.—Emerson

It has become very apparent to me how quickly and consistently people bypass the principles of teamwork and behave in a “me-opic” or “what’s in it for me?” manner (11)

CHAPTER 1: CULTIVATING TEAMWORK

We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.—Aristotle

The “How many squares are there?” exercise. The message in this exercise is twofold. First, people can look at the same thing and see something quite different. Second, people often come up short because they jump to conclusions and don’t prove far enough.

How do you define teamwork? Do you think that your definition is consistent with your co-workers’? What are the implications if it isn’t? Could people be thinking they are performing as team players when in fact they are not? Could you be one of them? (14-15)

Teamwork is a cooperative effort in which individual interests are subordinated to the interests and needs of the team. (16)

A principle is like a lighthouse. It is a constant. The winds may blow and the tides may change, but the direction always remains clear. Principles serve as guiding lights. Teamwork is a principle-based value. . . if you value teamwork you must commit to the principles that govern it. Here are the principles of effective teamwork.

Principles of Effective Teamwork

1. Put the team’s interests and needs first.
2. Share information pertaining to the team openly.
3. Get involved; be part of the solution.
4. Use a rational process when making decisions.
5. Work cooperatively; eliminate internal competition.
6. Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
7. Encourage and respect divergent points of view; challenge assumptions constructively with fact.
8. Ask and encourage questions.
9. Never compromise honesty and integrity.
10. Treat one another with dignity; build self-esteem in others.
11. Commit to excellence; seek ongoing improvement.
12. Seek to learn continuously and offer knowledge to others.
13. Promote interdependence and cross-functional understanding.

14. Be patient and persevere.
15. Use honest mistakes as learning opportunities.
16. Manage your own behavior in line with these principles; be accountable for your actions.
17. Pull the “weeds” (continuous violators of principle).

Aristotle once said, “We are what we repeatedly do.” Applying these principles consistently elicits teamwork. Violating any one of them breaks the process down. Think of cultivating teamwork like growing a perennial garden. In other words, the essence of teamwork depends on the roots established beneath the surface and nurtured throughout the year. . . As a natural process, teamwork must be cultivated. (17-18)

For the most part. . . society teaches people that in order for them to “win,” others must lose. (21)

[Each of us can] perceive teamwork differently. . . When combined with “me-opic” vision, these differences in perception result in what can be called “Perception Warp.” Perception Warp is when one person’s interpretation of something is different than another person’s, or when the message “received” is not the message “intended.” (22)

If left undetected, Perception Warp can destroy relationships at both the personal and organizational levels. . . Leonard sees himself as a well-educated, strong leader. His staff sees him as an autocratic, self-serving, close-minded bureaucrat. . . When it comes to team-work, it is the **team’s** perception that matters.

Perception Warp can be very difficult to detect. . . First, people who are subjected to an environment of fear and distrust (whether perceived or real) will hesitate to express a divergent point of view to those in authority. . . Second. . . People who look at things from strictly a “me” point of view will also overlook Perception warp by failing to listen with an open mind, empathize with their co-workers, and pay attention to alternative points of view. A third reason. . . is over sensitivity. Some people will simply hide the truth if they think it will hurt someone or create problems. A fourth reason is the tendency for people to jump to conclusions by basing opinions, interpretations, and decisions on assumption rather than on fact. . . open communication and mutual understanding destroy Perception Warp and lead to a healthy team environment. (23-24)

CHAPTER 2: ESTABLISHING ROOTS

The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.—Einstein

People committed to continuous improvement value “reflecting” and “envisioning” as priorities and resist the temptation to push them aside. They take time to reflect on past performance, constantly searching for ideas on how to improve in the future. In doing so, they question the assumptions they make in life and seek to understand the impact these assumptions have on their behavior.

. . . many people, and as a result, many organizations do not [reflect and envision]. Instead, they get trapped between the “experience” and “decide” stages of the cycle, concentrating more on efficiency than effectiveness. People operating in this mode tend to come off as biased, rigid, close-minded, and resistant to change. (27-28)

. . . attitudes and behavior are driven by the assumptions people make, ranging from simple opinion to absolute conviction. If you do not continuously check the assumptions you make, you could very well be limiting your effectiveness. (30)

. . . if an organization’s assumptions are not team-oriented, its behavior never will be. (31)

Nothing can resist the human will that will stake even its existence on its stated purpose. A consistent man believes in destiny, a capricious man in chance.—Disraeli (39)

Principle 1 Put the Team’s Interests and Needs First—It is this “we-opic” focus that builds trust and creates synergy—the power of teamwork.

As Aristotle said, “Excellence is not an act, but a habit.” When employees see this steady commitment to action and the systems actually improving, their own assumptions will begin to change and a commitment to the “we” will follow.

Principle 2: Share Information Pertaining to the Team Openly—Information is power. With it, team members are enabled and empowered to act responsibly. Without it, team members are held captive.

This requires that . . . new methods for communicating with people and for keeping them continuously informed [must be created].

Principle 3: Get Involved; Be Part of the Solution—For the team leader, it means getting people involved and giving them ownership for solving problems.

To change[a group] needs to create opportunities for employees to speak out and share ideas. This requires that [the group] take a proactive approach to gathering ideas. This process includes removing any obstacles preventing people from speaking out. . . initiate regular anonymous surveys of the employees.

Another option is to conduct face-to-face meetings with employees using a trusted, objective third party facilitator.

Principle 4: Use a Rational Process When Making Decisions—A rational decision-making model typically begins with a situation analysis (defining the situation and gathering the facts), followed by brainstorming (gathering options and ideas), analysis (applying logic and empathy), and coming to a consensus on how to proceed. This process builds synergy.

You get what you “inspect,” not what you “expect.” A useful rule of thumb applies here: “If you want it, measure it!”

Principle 5: Work Cooperatively; Eliminate Internal Competition—In a rapidly changing, dynamic organization, people must be prepared to cover for one another, to work through their differences, and to concentrate on mutual gain. Synergy comes through cooperation, not competition.

People are isolated and kept in the dark, departments are segregated, performance is measured solely on an individual basis, and few people appreciate the need for interdependence within the organization [of a non-team work group].

Principle 6: Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood—Members understand one another and the various roles each plays.

This can be accomplished through cross-functional training, internal and external customer meetings, a redefined orientation program, job rotation, pay-for-knowledge incentives, “field trips,” cross-functional meetings, two-way (face-to-face) information sessions, and “state-of-the-business” meetings.

Principle 7: Encourage and Respect Divergent Points of View: Challenge Assumptions Constructively with Fact. Synergy is created when people come together, share ideas, explore possibilities, challenge assumptions, constructively debate, and learn from one another.

The new criteria must include: asking opinions, encouraging divergent points of view, listening empathically, soliciting ideas, sharing knowledge, keeping people informed, building self-esteem, involving people in decisions, removing obstacles, facilitating teamwork, serving people on the line, and other leadership habits covered in chapter 3.

[Leadership] must support the new direction by creating a specified transition period. The purpose of the transition period is to create a sense of accountability and to allow time for managers to adjust to the new leadership expectations. . . The transition period will also need to include manager training that focuses on leadership. . . Genuine teamwork cannot be cultivated without true, committed consistent leadership.

Principle 8: Ask and Encourage Questions—Questions lead to continuous learning and understanding. Failing to ask questions leads to ignorance and limitation.

Questions must be perceived as welcome and good, not disruptive and bad. Communication systems and role responsibilities must be redesigned to build the principle of questioning in as a priority.

Principle 9: Never compromise Honesty and Integrity—Honesty breeds trust and builds credibility.

Information is not shared, people are not trusted, the “walk” is inconsistent with the “talk,” and decisions are often based on assumption rather than fact.

If [the organization] is going to talk about working as a team, it must begin to consistently act like one—using the principles as guidance. Living by these principles is the only way [the organization] can honestly convince anyone that it is serious about teamwork.

Principle 10: Treat One Another with Dignity; Build Self-esteem in Others—People must feel comfortable with the “me” before they will feel comfortable giving some of it up for the “we.”

To prepare for the future [the organization] must begin to grow its people and liberate them to perform responsibly. This means leading them rather than managing them. Self-esteem is built through leadership and empowerment, not through management and control.

Principle 11: Commit to Excellence, Seek Ongoing Improvements—High performance team members commit to doing their very best and expect the same from others. Violation of this principle distracts attention, misdirects energy, and destroys the bond that must exist between team members.

Principle 12: Seek to Learn Continuously and Offer Knowledge to Others—This requires that team members grow their minds and openly share their knowledge and expertise with one another to advance team performance. Shared knowledge builds synergy.

Unless the roots of an organization—its underlying principles—change it doesn’t make any difference what is budgeted for employee training and development

Principle 13: Promote Interdependence and Cross-Functional Understanding—High-performance team members stretch beyond the level of “independence” to the level of “interdependence.” This means asking for help, offering help, and knowing when help is needed. “Interdependence” is fundamental to creating “we-opic” vision and win/win solutions.

Principle 14: Be Patient and Persevere—Cultivating teamwork takes time. Pulling up the “Roots” before the process has matured is a sure way to confuse people and destroy what has been started.

Too many organizations assume that there isn’t time to just sit around and think. Organizations must recognize that “Reflecting” and “envisioning” are not matters of time but of priority. Ineffective people use time as an excuse. Effective people resist this temptation and focus instead on priorities. If ongoing improvement is important to you, “reflecting” and “envisioning” must be defined as priorities.

Principle 15: Use Honest Mistakes as Learning Opportunities—Utilized constructively, mistakes lead to growth and experience. They prepare people for the future by helping them understand the past. Mistakes are essential to success. High-performance team members understand this principle and accept the risk associated with trying something new as a necessary step toward improvement.

Mistakes must be accepted and used as learning opportunities, not as excuses.

Principle 16: Manage Your Own Behavior in Line with These Principles; Be Accountable for Your Actions—Once a team’s principles are defined, each member of the team must honor them. An organization cannot expect its people to honor principles that do not exist. To really make it work, people at all levels need to be intimately involved in the process.

Principle 17: Pull the “Weeds” (Continuous violators of Principle)—Violators of these principles disrupt the organization’s integrity and if they are not dealt with, they destroy the trust and credibility the team needs to work synergistically.

Summary—People learn teamwork by experiencing it, not by hearing about it.

CHAPTER 3: THE LEADERSHIP ROLE

Convincing people that you are serious about cultivating teamwork involves more than issuing directives. In fact, the very act of issuing a directive about a subject like teamwork tends to send a contradictory message.

Like the “gardener,” the team leader needs to view his or her role as that of a servant. The leader exists to serve the people and to facilitate growth. This includes providing the team with a shared sense of direction (purpose and principle), aligning members with this vision, enabling and empowering members with information and authority, investing in team growth, removing obstacles, coordinating team efforts, building self-esteem, and inspiring members to think and to act responsibly.

Teams perform best when the people on the line know what is important and have the information and authority to act quickly and responsibly.

Critical Questions to Ask: “Things which matter most must never be at the mercy of things which matter least.”—Goethe One way to help team members mutually understand what is most important is to get them together to discuss questions like the following:

1. Why do we exist? What purpose do we serve? These [questions] help teams focus on what is most important and establish rational priorities. Team members begin to think in terms of “customers,” “process,” and “service.” . . .distinguish[ing] “process” from “result.” . . . concentrating on continuously improving the process is a more effective way to focus team members’ attention and to improve results.
2. Who is the customer? Who is closest to the customer? In what ways are we customers to one another? These questions help teams break through some of the traditional paradigms and define customers as “people we serve.” Team members recognize that customers exist internally as well as externally.
3. Who is closest to the actual work being done? Who must implement the decisions made? Are we involving these members in making the decisions that most impact their work? Are we involving these members in the planning process? These questions focus on team member involvement and planning.

4. What prevents us from doing a better job? What obstacles are in our way? What do we need to do to eliminate these obstacles? How can we improve our performance? These questions focus on identifying and removing obstacles. One of the most common obstacles to teamwork in corporate America today is management itself. Very little will change if the people who need to lead the transition choose to resist it.
5. What really matters? What do we need to do to be successful? Where should we be directing the majority of our energies? These questions concentrate on determining an organizations priorities.
6. How must our roles and responsibilities change to increase our effectiveness? What role must we each play? How is this different from the past? Why is it important? These questions let the team discuss role changes.

From Managing to Leading: “Any fool can make a rule—and every fool will mind it.—
Thoreau

Here is a comparison of “traditional management” and “team leadership” habits:

Traditional Management Habits

Define “how” (plan)
Focus on maintenance
Take responsibility
Solve problems
Create systems
Regulate people
Negotiate agreement
Use power to control
“Do things right”
Focus on efficiency
Dictate
See workers as subordinates
Push (use authority)
Train
Judge; evaluate
Organize tasks; supervise
Policy-based

Team Leadership Habits

Define “what” (vision)
Focus on growth
Teach responsibility
Remove obstacles
Inspire Change
Liberate people
Foster commitment
Use power to empower
“Do the right things”
Focus on effectiveness
Motivate
See workers as partners
Pull (use attraction)
Develop; grow
Coach; facilitate
Align people; improvise
Principle-based

Building Self-Esteem: “What lies behind us and what lies before us are tme matters compared to what lies within us.—Oliver Wendell Holmes

Stop for a moment and ask yourself, “Who is the best boss or mentor I have ever had? What was so special about this person? What distinguished this person from other bosses? How did this person make me feel?” Now compare your answers with what most people across America say:

- ◆ Make me feel important

- ◆ Asked for my opinions and ideas
- ◆ Listened to me with empathy; paid attention to me
- ◆ Competent; shared knowledge with me
- ◆ Kept me informed; gave me meaningful feedback
- ◆ Let me try new ideas; take risks
- ◆ Tolerated honest mistakes; was patient with me
- ◆ Helped me learn; encouraged growth
- ◆ Involved me in decisions that impacted me
- ◆ Gave me a sense of autonomy and space
- ◆ Gave me responsibility; trusted me
- ◆ Treated me with dignity; made me feel valued
- ◆ Recognized my efforts; praised me
- ◆ Kept an open mind; sought to understand me
- ◆ Created opportunity for me; helped me grow
- ◆ Helped me see my accomplishments and progress
- ◆ Respected my differences

Most bosses still operate under the traditional control mind-set. One way to determine this in your own organization is to ask people. An anonymous survey taken on company time is one way to get an objective response. A third-party intervention is another.

Involving People: “It is not enough to have a good mind; the main thing is to use it well.”—Descartes One of the most effective ways to build self-esteem and to create synergy is to involve people in decisions.

Learning to Facilitate: Effective leaders know how to facilitate. In other words, they know how to make success easier for the team by making people aware of how they are working together and inspiring them in a positive way to get involved and to become part of the solution.

Staying in Touch with the Line: Viewing himself as a servant, the effective leader stays in touch with the people on the line. This is where the real information is.

CHAPTER 4: TEAM PLAY

“If we all did the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astound ourselves.—Thomas Edison

Managing the Process: To distinguish “team play” from traditional play, look at the following chart. In particular, notice the emphasis on “we-opioc” vision in team play.

Traditional Play

Do as you are told

“Responsive”

Static

Mind your own business

Team Play

Participate in decisions

“Responsible”

Dynamic

Interact; get involved

Work within the system	Help design the system
Delegate problems upward	Solve problems
Reactive	Proactive
Look out for self	Look out for team
Be managed	Manage self
Shut up	Speak up
Do	Think and do
Apply learned skills	Learn to apply new skills
Do thinks right	Do the right things
Follow	Lead and follow
Compete (internally)	Cooperate (internally)
Compare	Share
Independent	Interdependent
Avoid risk	Manage risk
Ignore non-performers	Confront non-performers
“That’s not my job”	“How can I help?”
Suspect	Trust
Serve the boss	Serve the team; customer
Understand few tasks	Understand many tasks
Focus on task	Focus on purpose
Singular	Plural
“Me-opic”	“We-opic”

Team Skills: As the team leader’s role becomes one of clarifying direction (vision), aligning people, and facilitating teamwork, the team members’ role becomes one of designing and managing the process.

In addition to broadening task skills, team members must also develop good interpersonal and rational problem-solving skills. Interpersonal skills focus on the human side of the process. These skills include:

- ◆ Asking others for their opinion and input
- ◆ Listening attentively; paying attention to others
- ◆ Seeking first to understand; empathizing
- ◆ Sharing information pertaining to the team openly
- ◆ Encouraging and expressing divergent points of view
- ◆ Challenging assumptions (including your own) with fact
- ◆ Keeping an open mind; perceiving
- ◆ Cooperating; constructively working through differences
- ◆ Treating others with dignity
- ◆ Building self-esteem in others
- ◆ Using tact; being sensitive to others’ needs and feelings
- ◆ Offering assistance and support
- ◆ Involving people in decisions that impact them

Traditional problem-solving skills are the skills team members need to make productive decisions and effectively solve problems. These skills include:

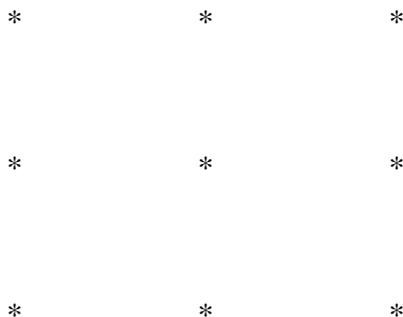
- ◆ Defining the situation
- ◆ Gathering the facts, data
- ◆ Clarifying objective(s)
- ◆ Identifying obstacles
- ◆ Exploring ideas without judgment
- ◆ Gathering alternatives, options
- ◆ Analyzing options objectively; applying logic
- ◆ Analyzing options empathically; weighing the human impact
- ◆ Drawing conclusions; reaching consensus as a team
- ◆ Implementing
- ◆ Tracking progress; results
- ◆ Reviewing; amending; attending

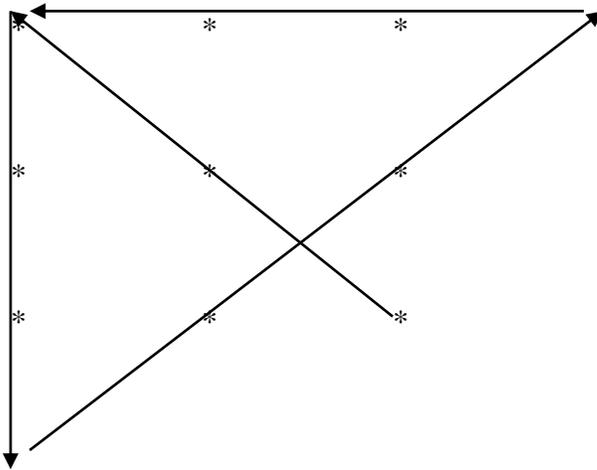
One way to elevate the team’s awareness of their interpersonal and rational problem-solving skills is to give them problems to solve together and to follow up with a team performance review. Below are twelve sample questions you might consider asking. “ To what extent. . .

1. Did the team ask you for your opinion?
2. Did only one member speak at a time?
3. Did the team treat people with dignity?
4. Did every member participate?
5. Did the team avoid internal competition?
6. Did people listen and pay attention?
7. Did people express themselves openly?
8. Did the team begin by gathering facts?
9. Did the team clearly define its purpose?
10. Did the team clearly define obstacles?
11. Did the team avoid premature judgment?
12. Did the team follow a rational process?

The important thing for team leaders to remember is that empowering people is not an “all or nothing” endeavor. People must be ready to be empowered.

Creating Opportunity: “Man’s mind stretched to a new idea never goes back to its original dimensions.—Oliver Wendell Holmes Working with the “dots” below, try to connect all nine dots using only four straight lines. You may not lift your pen or pencil from the paper and you may not retrace your lines.





CHAPTER 5: NURTURING THE PROCESS

Hiring for Teamwork Using the team in an interview process with a prospective new team member has generated the following questions:

- ◆ How do you define teamwork?
- ◆ What do you believe is required to perform well as a team?
- ◆ What attributes do you bring to the team?
- ◆ Have you ever had any team training? What did it involve?
- ◆ Have you ever participated on any teams? What kind? In what role?
- ◆ Did your past employer have any work teams in place? Did you participate? In what role? With what results?
- ◆ Why is teamwork difficult for some people?

This excellent list continues on pages 111-113.

Growing People: The Japanese have a saying, “When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.”

Reviewing Performance: “The important thing is not to stop questioning.—Einstein

Performance review systems have become one of the most mismanaged activities in corporate America. Managers have learned to hate giving them and employees have learned to hate getting them. The process has become “judgmental” rather than developmental, and is almost universally ineffective in terms of its results. This is because the assumptions driving these systems are often fundamentally incorrect. . . . most people will agree that the purpose of a performance review is to establish accountability and provide continuous feedback.

Whatever your measurements are, make sure that the team can see them for themselves. To be meaningful, the score must be visible.

Some of the most effective performance review systems in use today are nothing more than a list of powerful questions focusing on what really matters. These questions can apply to both the team and the individual. For example:

- ◆ What specifically do you believe is expected of you?
- ◆ What are your current objectives and priorities?
- ◆ What obstacles stand in the way of your progress?
- ◆ What information do you need to move forward?
- ◆ What annoys you?
- ◆ What can I do to help you meet your objectives?
- ◆ What can your teammates do to help you meet your objectives?
- ◆ What new skills have you learned?
- ◆ What new skills do you desire?
- ◆ What sacrifices have you made for the benefit of the team?
- ◆ What new ideas have you come up with? Where do they stand?
- ◆ How have you helped your teammates? How have they helped you?
- ◆ What have I done wrong? What do I do that limits you?
- ◆ What mistakes have you made and what have you learned from them?
- ◆ What have you done to go beyond standard?
- ◆ What do you consider your greatest recent accomplishment(s)?

The leader's role becomes one of pulling information up rather than of pushing judgment down. The leader is serving the team by clarifying objectives, identifying obstacles, listening for ideas, seeking feedback, and focusing attention on what really matters.

Nurturing the process of teamwork requires paying attention to what is important. This means aligning members with team principles, hiring people with good character, providing people with constant training and support, holding team members accountable for their behavior, keeping team members well-informed, and maintaining an open dialogue focused on development and ongoing improvement rather than judgment. Like the perennial garden, the process of teamwork needs attention in order to flourish.

CHAPTER 6: MANAGING DIFFERENCES

Because personalities vary, your ability to understand these variations will help reduce conflict often associated with differences. In fact, it will help you turn diversity into synergy.

This chapter (pages 123-176) has an extensive discussion of the MBTI. Excellent chapter.

CHAPTER 7: PULLING TOGETHER “When mores are sufficient, laws are unnecessary. When mores are insufficient, laws are unenforceable.”—Dirkheim

Getting Started

Understanding the process of teamwork and actually applying it are two different things. Applying it involves plugging the principles of teamwork into everyday living. It means “walking the talk.” In time, this repetition creates a team culture. “We are what we repeatedly do.”

Calling a group of people a team is easy; creating productive teamwork is not.

Here is a collection of what thousands of team members across America have identified as high-performance team characteristics:

- ◆ Clear common objective: members are focused on team purpose
- ◆ Information: members are well informed; they know the score.
- ◆ Participation: all members actively participate.
- ◆ Sense of ownership: members are involved in decisions
- ◆ Open communication: members are allowed uninhibited expression of ideas
- ◆ Open minds: members are receptive to ideas for change
- ◆ Empathic listening: members listen with empathy, not judgment
- ◆ Trust: members feel they can count on one another
- ◆ Diversity: there are unique differences among members
- ◆ Respect: members value one another
- ◆ Cooperation: members work through their differences
- ◆ High self-esteem: members work through their differences
- ◆ Commitment: members are inspired to perform well
- ◆ Growth: members are continuously learning
- ◆ Interdependence: members understand one another's roles and how they fit together (impact each has on one another)
- ◆ Patience: members have the ability to let the process grow
- ◆ Tolerance: members have the ability to view mistakes as opportunity
- ◆ Wisdom: members have the ability to use mistakes as learning experiences
- ◆ Perseverance: members have the ability to learn from mistakes and press on
- ◆ Flexibility: members adapt well to change
- ◆ Initiative: members focus on solutions; act responsibly
- ◆ Competence: members know what to do; have capacity to learn
- ◆ Alignment: members are selected and organized effectively
- ◆ Leadership: team efforts are coordinated by a service agent
- ◆ Integrity: violation of principles are not accepted

These items stem from the principles of teamwork. Remember, you don't force these characteristics. You grow them.

Cultivating teamwork also requires placing leadership before management and vision before action. Change without focus confuses and alienates people.

*Mark R. Elliott served as a Director of Missions (Associational Mission Strategist) in western Iowa and eastern Nebraska for almost three decades. He is a strong advocate for obedience and Biblically based disciple making. As such, he knows that making healthy disciples requires Christian leaders to be constantly pursuing spiritual maturity—be lifelong learners. Because of the time constraints of ministry, most pastors focus their reading list on resources that assist them in teaching and preaching the Word of God. As such, books focusing on church health, leadership development, and church growth tend to find their way to the bottom of the stack. With that reality in mind, Mark has written discussion summaries on several books that have helped him to personally grow in Christ and that tend to find themselves on the bottom of most pastor's stack. Many pastors have found them helpful as they are able to more quickly process great insights from other pastors and authors.