



Don't Tell Me It Can't Be Done

By Steven L. Anderson, Ph.D., MBA

"At the moment of commitment the universe conspires to assist us." Goethe

"It can't be done," said the fortieth person in a row. "We have been trying to fix this problem for decades. It can't be fixed. Don't kid yourself." I had just been hired by a clinic/hospital to help them change their culture from one of low-trust and poor communication to one where people worked together for successful outcomes. In addition, they wanted me to assist in the integration of the clinic and the hospital, two entities that had a long history of mistrust and tension. To make matters worse, the hospital was in the process of losing millions of dollars. They had to get their financial house in order if this whole entity was even going to survive.

I must admit, I went home with a big headache, "What in the heck did I get myself into?" I thought. Truthfully, I wondered if we could succeed in our mission. But I told every person I worked with in the ensuing months, "I don't know how, but I know this can be done. Just focus on your part of the problem and work to fix it. Also, when we become cynical we bring about the very problems we complain about. When we get busy finding a solution, answers present themselves that we cannot imagine when we first start to tackle the problem." Now, a year later, even I cannot believe how true those statements are. True not because of my ability as a consultant, but because of the courageous efforts of many leaders in this organization and from a source that none of us could have dreamed existed of when we started this venture.

Over the course of the year in question, I had the opportunity to facilitate many meetings in this organization designed to increase trust and communication. I also had the opportunity to work one-on-one with about forty members of the leadership team. All I can say is that many of those individuals made incredible personal sacrifices to make the dream of an integrated, successful clinic/hospital a reality. A year later that hospital is at breakeven and it looks as if the integration will go through as planned. Just as important, everyone I am working with reports that the level of trust, communication and alignment in the organization has improved significantly. There are still problems to be sure, but the mood has generally swung from one of cynicism to one of optimism.

Those results in and of themselves are impressive, but what came next was right out of a Hollywood movie. A wealthy member of the community had been watching in interest as the leadership of this organization struggled with these problems. After a year of observation he contacted the CEO of the clinic and said to him, "I have been watching your progress over the past year. I am so impressed with the results and I am so committed to the success of this organization because of its importance to this community that I am going to donate \$1,000,000 to the hospital to make sure this merger is a success."

Wow, unbelievable! Needless to say, the CEO was flabbergasted and elated to receive this generous gift for the hospital. This, in a way I never could have imagined, convinces me that when we courageously strive to make our dreams come true we create the very solutions to our problems in ways that are hard to imagine when we commence the fight. I feel so blessed to have been a part of this transformational process and the amazing leaders I have had the opportunity to work with.

Don't tell me it can't be done!