

## Collaboration

# Welcome to the real world!

Cathy has been working in the learning industry for many years as an employee, but set up Like-Minded Learning at the beginning of 2014, so that she could be more in control of her own projects and manage the way on which she did business. Tired of the usual money-driven approach, she is shifting the balance to put the primary focus for Like-Minded's projects on quality and standards, and she is enjoying what has been quite a challenge!

She sees working collaboratively as critical to achieving quality work. It allows you to put the right people on the part of the job where they perform best, if you can accept that the best people may not always be employed within your own organisation. She has tried a few different models of collaborative working and has had wins and losses, in this talk she shares her experiences of both.

## What does it take to be a collaborator?

Here are just a few guidelines around collaborative working that you can consider. This is based on our experience in the case studies described and summarises our learning from three years of working collaboratively ... or at least trying to ... in the 'real' commercial world:

### **You need to lose your ego and arrogance**

Recognise that other people can do parts of a job better than you can. Aim for getting people doing the role they are best at, and the client then gets the best outcome.

### **Trust – trust and more trust**

Distrust is where the rot sets in. You must start with a positive attitude, but not an ignorant one. Stay alert, what works in the beginning can drift into distrust.

### **Speak openly**

How you raise your concern is at the heart of maintaining a collaborative relationship. If you have a problem, raise it! Explain how you feel and invite them to help you think differently.

### **Acknowledging that people don't always have hidden agendas**

This ties in with trust. Don't look for problems unless there is clear evidence that you can share with them and discuss openly.

### **You can't be solely driven by money**

Being in business is all about earning money – but it's not all about getting rich. How much is enough? What do you need to make to have a good standard of living and do the things you want to do in life? Water the plant and the flowers come. Create the fertile ground and believe that the business will come. If money drives the relationship it can impact on collaborative thinking.

### **Decide what you want to get out of it – it may not always be money**

You don't have to always want money out of a collaborative effort. Reward can come in many different formats. Shared learning, connections, tools etc.

## **Learn to let go and see things from a different perspective**

You need to be able to share and not protect your knowledge or IP 'at all costs'. For example, in a room of 10 people, you have one item that you share with everyone else and everyone else does the same ... you go into the room with one item, and leave the room with 10 items. Everyone is better off!

## **Stop being territorial**

You don't own everything out there! If you have developed a new diagram and choose different words to describe the a commonly used process ... it's still the same underlying publicly shared process! You may not actually be sharing new IP after all!

## **Be strong, sticking to what you hold dear**

In a collaborative arrangement, don't be swayed by other people if their standards don't match up with yours. If you have process stick to it; if you have a QA standard, stick to it.

## **Don't compromise your standards, but you will need to be able to compromise approaches**

Remember that you can get to the same outcome more than one way. Active listening and looking for opportunities to learn or do things differently will bring you greater reward. You are looking for your own learning in a collaborative arrangement and you may pick up some tips on process or procedure that save you time and money down the line.

## **Believe that there is enough work to go around everyone!**

Get rid of that gremlin that tells you that collaboration is always about giving stuff away. Your relationship with clients and with other collaborators is the single biggest reason why people come back for repeat business.

## **How do you not get hurt?**

Believe in your quality standards and deliver you work to those standards. At the end of the day, the client will go with the best outcome for their business.

You can't be so driven by the dollars that you can't think in a collaborative manner – much of the thinking for these two approaches is at odds.



### **Note and thank you!**

These are just Like-Minded experiences over the first three years in business. There will be more, and different exchanges, in the future, and you may have experienced other behaviours yourself.

We are sharing some of the enlightening parts of our journey to date, in the hope that it saves you falling into some of the potential traps that cost you time, money or simply create stress.

I hope you enjoyed the snippets we shared in this talk. Please get in touch if we can help you in any way.

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# PIE MAN

**The person who wants to take a cut of everything.**



**The go-between who can introduce you to potential clients, but they always want a piece of the pie.**

They are happy to introduce you but want to be compensated for that, which is a fair enough expectation. However:

- Is it really collaborative working?
- How much is it worth?
- How long should you be paying them?

Why have they introduced you? Probably because they can't provide that service themselves.

So if you pay them 10% of your business and the contract brings in around \$5,000 per month:

- One year costs your business \$6,000 – is that a big fee for a simple introduction.
- If you don't create an end point, that is \$6,000 per year for the duration.
- At what point have you generated the business by your own relationship management and the Pie Man is getting money for jam!

It starts as a win-win and you can trade under your own name. However, it turns into a one-sided gain unless you put an end date on the arrangement. It can be costly when you add it up. It is money driven arrangement.

# SNAKE CHARMER



**Look nice on the outside (charmer) but something else is going on underneath (snake).**

**Watch your back! What you see on the surface is not what is happening beneath!**

This type of organisation looks like they are happy to work on the surface but can't be trusted, as they are doing something else in the background to protect their own interests.

They say they want to work collaboratively but there is a lack of trust.

For example, when there is a joint arrangement – the client has employed two or three different companies on different parts of a project, but there is a cross-over of skills between the companies.

Behaviours we have seen are:

- Withholding information
- Not recognising the project structure and chain of authority
- Phone calls to raise issues with the client that should have been raised with the collaborative party first.
- Lack of trust that we were going to stay within the scope of our part of the engagement.
- They appear threatened by our different or higher standards.

It is a mindset problem and a trust issue. The challenge here is how to reassure a company that you are honest and transparent, and are sticking to what you have been employed by the client to do – not increasing the amount of business that comes your way, at all costs!

Consider creating a Memorandum of Understanding.



# COMPETITOR

**Only sees us as competition.**



**In their eyes, you exist purely to steal their business!**

A tricky group of people to even get to a point of collaboration. They think that if you work with them, your sole purpose will be to steal the client from their books onto your books.

There is no recognition of specialist skills, often these organisations try to be a jack of all trades and end up being a master of none.

They may be happy for you to work as a sub-contractor but then you can't promote your own business name.

- How do you hide that fact, when you have emails and websites that promote your own company?
- What do you, and what can you say to them, if the client does approach you directly, wondering why they are paying a 'middle-man'?

This is a mindset which needs to change before you even begin to think about working collaboratively with these groups.

Sometimes – just give up – they are not thinking in your space!

# SCORPION

**Appears to be collaborating but has a hidden agenda/sting in the tail.**



**You think you are working collaboratively but there is a sting in the tail.**

For these people they work collaboratively but actually get fed up of having to include other people in their decisions. It starts with a hiss and a roar, but then you realise they are just waiting for the end of the project, at which point they can go off and do what they like with it.

In our example, we worked with a group of several organisations. Some gave time and expertise, some gave money. There was a long term view for all parties to reap the rewards, e.g. recognition for contributions in a specialist field, new work connections and opportunities. However, once the project was live, they pulled out of the collaboration, and took all the glory!

Working in a collaborative is a long term commitment. The rules don't change just as the project comes to a close.

You need to check the balance of who is bringing what into the collaborative arrangement and making sure that agreements are in place to recognise the source or contributors long in the future, just like with copyright law.

You can't work collaboratively and then go on to promote the work as your own.

# SOULMATE

**Thinks and Feels.**



**They can finish your sentences, they know what you are thinking before you say it!**

**The good news is that collaboration can work in the real world!**

A soulmate can finish your sentences; know what you are going to say before you say it! Essentially, they think and feel the same as you do ... but that doesn't mean they are identical.

We have shown that we can work together as one team with another organisation carrying out similar work, where everything is built on trust:

- We stick to agreed work areas in our projects.
- We share work without taking a cut.
- Give preferential rates to each other so that profit is shared fairly.
- Share learning and help each other keep current.

It is win-win, even if sometimes, one side wins more than the other.

The downside is that this is still new to some clients. It is hard to bid for work as a collaborative unless you can prove how you can work as one unit. Sometimes one of the party must make the sacrifice to be the side-kick, not the hero. That doesn't matter if you know you will still get shared work and shared recognition.

## **Internships**

This is another good way of working collaboratively where everyone wins. We get work done, support tertiary education and help the interns get a foot on the career ladder.

- Note that the balance of a win-win changes when an intern is not paid.
- As an organisation, we need to make a commitment to entoring, at least some of which doesn't bring in revenue.