

PHIL GELDART

the
**SEVEN
CORNERSTONES**
of **TEAMWORK**



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of **TEAMWORK**

BY PHIL GELDART



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*To my friends and colleagues at
Eagle's Flight who themselves make
up a world-class team*

*With thanks to John McAuley for his
inspired suggestion which brought the
characters of this book to life*

“Humble yourselves...under the mighty hand
of God...casting all your anxieties on Him,
because He cares for you.”

1 Peter 5:6a & 7

CHAPTER ONE

"Frank, that's a great opportunity...and an honor," I said.

"You've earned it, and I think you'll do a first-class job," he replied. "It won't be easy. We haven't made any real money there for the last three years, and the Board said fix it or dump it. I thought we should try 'fix' first."

"I'll do my best."

"I know that. But it's not your best I need, it's success. It will be far from a slam dunk, you realize?"

"So I've heard! The last couple of guys we sent down crashed and burned."

"Yep. And I think it wasn't because they lacked the functional skills to do the job. They were experienced, and knew business. But they knew it from our retail side; they didn't know the service side well enough."

"What do you think caused them to fail?" I asked.

"I think they weren't strong enough on the people skills. They could manage really well, but not lead. Leadership is about winning hearts as well as minds and talents. It's a lot more about releasing human potential than anything else. I don't think they really got that."

"And you think I do?"

"I hope so, or you're going to be looking for another job!"

That got my attention.

"You mean..."

"I mean, if you take this assignment I expect you to succeed. If you do, great. If not, then you either come back here to a lesser job and get red-circled for a few years, or you decide to voluntarily exit. Do you still want it?"

Chapter One

I'd just glanced down at the notes he'd handed over earlier to catch my breath, so to speak, and looked up to see if he was joking. No. He was deadly serious.

"But Frank – my track record, while good, has never included something this big. It'll take a learning curve, and...well...your help," I commented hopefully.

"Bill, you're on your own for the results. I will support you, but I won't do the job for you. I will fully support you, but the accountability is all yours. If you feel you need time to learn, take it. Just don't put the end at risk."

And with that assurance, and challenge, I accepted the new assignment. I left Frank's office and went home to tell Bridget and the kids we were moving to the Caribbean, where Dad was about to take over responsibility for Sunspray's global resort...and figure out how to make it seriously profitable.

CHAPTER TWO

Sunspray was huge – a multinational global conglomerate operating in 60 countries, selling everything to do with “Fun in the Sun.” That was our motto, and we meant it.

Sunspray sold mostly to consumers through retail outlets, had an average 73% market share in its core categories, and was well recognized for quality, integrity, and just plain fun. It was a great company to be part of, partly because of the nature of the products (who wouldn't want to be associated with activities like surfing, sailing, suntanning, and kids in inner tubes?) but much more because of its values.

We operated as if our own family members were always using our products, and we wanted to make sure they loved every one. If you were travelling on vacation anywhere and had a need (say, lost your passport), you could call your opposite number at the local Sunspray office, and they'd not only help, but invite you and the family over for a barbecue while you waited for the paperwork to get done. It really was a very special company.

Half a dozen years ago some senior exec at Head Office had suggested we needed our own resort, so we could be close to our consumers, watch them in action, and have firsthand experience with how our products were used, could be improved, or even identify new ones we could create by observing our customers' needs and activities.

So, we bought a world-class facility in the Caribbean. It was serving the original purpose well, but at the cost of being a significant drain on profits. We'd tried guys there who knew that business, but they'd failed. Maybe they didn't get our culture, or maybe they just weren't good enough. Then we tried sending our own skilled managers down, but, according to Frank, they were too retail minded.

Whatever it was, now they were trying me!

Chapter Two

My background had been heavily on the people side. I was running Human Resources at present for Frank (but not for many more days!), but had experience in Sales Management, Supply Chain, Process Improvement, and Distribution. I guess Frank, like many senior execs these days, was moving more and more towards the realization that the real competitive advantage comes through people, and felt I could do what needed to be done.

As I sat in the plane coming in for a landing over the crystal clear, tantalizingly blue water, I sincerely hoped he was right! People I knew, but running a resort...

CHAPTER THREE

It didn't take me long to realize we had strong people in place. Not surprising... Sunspray did know how to recruit based on talent. And we had a great facility. That was obvious from the number of guests, and the great time Bridget and the kids were having. What I couldn't figure out was why it wasn't delivering the profits. This would take some time to nail down, and then fix.

"We need a safer waterfront. The policy is good but it's not being followed." Pam was the head of Beach and, as such, anything that touched sand was her responsibility.

"It's both a safety issue, and it's about crowd control. With so many people on the waterfront at times, there's no way we can keep an eye on everyone." Pam was adamant as she spoke. Her job included waterfront safety, which meant everything from lifeguards to life jackets. She was tanned a deep brown from being on the job every day, and was well respected just because she really was on the beach day in and day out.

"I disagree," said Keith. "We post signs, we give lessons, we have lifeguards, and we've never had an accident. This is a nonissue. Let's concentrate on something that's a problem. Like check-in time." Keith was our Finance guy. He was good, but felt the heat from corporate more than most over the poor profit performance.

"Just because we haven't had an accident doesn't mean we're as good as we could be. It may just mean we've been lucky." This from Sue, who runs Guest Relations.

"I agree about safety," said Pam. "But are you saying what I do is luck?" Pam was immediately on the defensive.

"Hey, what about the slow check-in times? Keith is right. We need to fix that." This from Juanita, our IT head.

Chapter Three

Sue sighed. Pam looked upset. Keith jumped up to the whiteboard with some papers he'd just pulled out of his folder, and Juanita seemed to perk up a bit.

When I finally decided I'd had enough and excused myself from the meeting, they were debating safety vs. crowd control, and how maybe a better check-in system could be used to incorporate a safety video. And now no one seemed really engaged.

As I walked down the path mulling over what had just happened I must have looked as I felt – depressed – because, as I rounded the corner on the path from the main building down to our glorious white sandy beach, Granite looked up at me with his warm smile and said, "Hi. You look...um...depressed. Something wrong?"

My concentration broken, I looked over and automatically mumbled, "Noooo. Not really." Not too convincing a response.

Granite put down his tools for a moment, straightened up, stretched, and said, "Let's go get a Coke and some fries. I could use a break."

Sounded good. I'd missed lunch, and we do make amazing French fries.

Granite was from Northern Ontario, in what I thought of as Canada's Far North. He was truly a master stonemason and looked like he'd been doing it for 40 years. His hands were hard and dry, strong and weathered. Even in the tropics he'd kept his scruffy salt-and-pepper beard, wore a sweat-soaked bandana that changed color every day (today it was wet yellow), and a tattered Toronto Blue Jays ball cap. His shorts and shirt were covered in stone dust and with his Nike rope sandals he looked like a cross between a beachcomber and an archaeologist.

I'd met him through some neighbors who'd used him to build them a large stone fireplace back home, and we'd become friends. I felt the resort needed a focal point, and wanted a stone waterfall to make the transition between the main lodge and the beach cabanas, so had hired him to come down and build one. He'd begun a few weeks ago and was just now starting some actual stonework.

"How's the waterfall coming?" I asked as we made our way to one of the well-shaded tables down near the beach.

Chapter Three

"Really well," he replied. "I'm starting to lay stones today. It took a while to get the right material and prepare the foundation, but I think now I'm ready to build."

"That's really great," I said enthusiastically. "At least something is getting done here the way I want it."

He looked at me inquisitively.

"Well," I began, "we have really good people, and they all want to do a great job, but it's like a whole lot of really talented single individuals in the same room. No matter what I do I can't seem to get them to work well as a team."

"For example?" he queried.

"Well, like just now for example. I asked for a meeting to look at things we should do here that would improve profit. Pam suggested safety would be a good place to start since, if we ever had a safety problem, it could cost us a lot of money. So I said okay. Work on that, and I'll drop in on the meeting for a while to see how you're progressing."

"And?"

"A disaster. Everyone is well meaning, and I want to be careful not to micromanage, or disenfranchise them. They need to own their areas. But they just can't seem to focus. Today it was on safety. Yesterday I was in a meeting with a totally different group trying to decide if we should raise prices...equally scattered. Last evening the team working on Mr. and Mrs. Shaw's wedding did a great job for the Shaws, but behind the scenes it was like trying to make a movie with ten lead actors.

"No matter where I turn I see highly motivated people wanting to do the right thing...and all tackling it from their own vantage point.

"It gets worse when we involve some of the more junior people. They don't know which road to take, whose lead to follow, or what should be their true priority.

Chapter Three

"No wonder we're not making money," I mused as I looked down, had a halfhearted sip of Coke, and munched a few fries.

Granite sat there in silence with me for a few minutes and then asked me to join him on a short walk. Puzzled, I grabbed the last of my drink and stood up.

We headed back to the waterfall he was building, and as we walked he said, "Today, I'm starting the stonework for what will be a huge and visually inspiring sight. I just laid the first stone when you came by, and I'd like to show it to you."

We made our way to where he was working, ducked under the "Please Don't Enter – Danger" tape, walked around the Bobcat he used to move the heavy stones, and came to the first one he'd just laid.

It was indeed massive. Huge. And very black. It sat at the exact corner where the waterfall began, and would provide the reference point for all the stones to follow. Clearly it was important.

"This is the cornerstone," he said. "Everything else is based on getting this one right. If it's wrong, the waterfall will be flawed, and my work will not only be much harder, but include a lot of wasted effort compensating for not having the right cornerstone in the right place.

"Your teams are like my waterfall. They need to do the job and do it well, but they've been built with no cornerstones, or the wrong ones. I think that's your problem."

I paused and thought.

"OK. Good concept. But what's the cornerstone?"

"Leadership."

"Huh?"

"Leadership."

"We have leadership. Lots of it. And they're good leaders."

"Hmmm," he responded. "I agree they're good at their jobs, but I don't think they really understand that the cornerstone to every team must be that it has a leader. A clearly identified leader. And one who knows what it means to truly lead a team.

"For example, who was the leader at the last meeting you just came from? And did he or she know their leadership role? And did the others know who the leader was, their supporting role, and, more importantly, their role as followers in that meeting?"

I thought about what I'd just seen. "No one. No. No. No. And no."

"That may be your problem," he repeated.

I finished my drink as we gazed thoughtfully at his cornerstone. I touched him lightly on his dusty shoulder, thanked him, and turned to leave. As I did, he said, "Wait a moment." He picked up his hammer and stone chisel, nicked off a small corner of the big black rock, and handed it to me.

"You might want to keep that in your pocket for a while to remind you to make sure every team you form, or that your staff forms, first identifies the leader, and that everyone can then answer yes to those questions."

I took the small stone, said thanks again, and walked...and thought.

CHAPTER FOUR

By the time I'd made it to my office (a beautiful one, by the way, with a stunning view of the ocean and golden sunset at each day's end), I was convinced Granite was on to something, and picked up the phone.

"Hi Ruth...is he in?"

"Oh, hi Bill," Ruth replied. Ruth is Frank's Executive Assistant and Gatekeeper Extraordinaire. "He is. I'll get him. How's that dream posting?"

How do you answer that question? "Challenging," I finally answered.

"Well, good luck," she said sincerely. "I'll get Frank."

"Hi Frank."

"Hi Bill. What can I do for you?"

"Frank – I have a pen and paper right here in front of me. In the next five minutes, tell me everything you know about leadership." He laughed. "Five minutes, huh? I may know a bit more than that, but I will give you my top-line thoughts. How's that?"

"Great," I answered. "Go."

That's what makes Frank so great. No "Why?" No "How's it going?" (He gets the numbers every week.) Just giving me the help I'd asked for.

"Three perspectives," he said.

"First. The leader's. They're in charge. They make the final decision. They can get input, but the final decision is theirs. They have full accountability for the outcome...just like you do," he reminded me!

"Second. The team's. They are there to support the leader. They may disagree during the input discussions, but once the final decision is made by the leader,

their job is to support it fully. Their accountability is to that leader, to deliver what the leader has committed to.

“Third. The whole group’s – leader and team members. They are there to deliver the outcome their leader has been assigned to produce. There’s no place for ego on anyone’s part. The only ego is the ego of the task that they’ve been assigned to address.”

“Wow” I said, writing furiously. “Pretty clear. Do you think a team can be maximally effective without a clear leader?” I asked, thinking of Granite’s small black stone in my pocket.

“Absolutely not,” he replied quickly. “I’d love nothing better than to have the opportunity to compete against an organization that has teams without clearly defined leaders!”

I thanked him, and hung up. “Hmmm. I think I need a bunch more of these little black stones,” I said aloud to no one but the warm blue ocean outside my window.

CHAPTER FIVE

As I thought about Frank's comments, I realized there was still a lot I and my team had to learn about leadership. Time to get started.

"OK, why are we here?" asked Sue the next morning.

There were general murmurs of a similar nature around the room as my direct reports looked inquiringly at me. "Less inquiringly, actually, and more impatiently," I thought to myself.

"I think we need a better understanding of leadership among ourselves," I began. "Not that we don't each fully understand the concept of 'leadership' when it relates to our own functional areas of responsibility. For example – Pam, when you run Beach, you get it. You're in charge and fully understand what leadership means there. And you Keith, in Finance, and you Mike, in Hospitality.

"But there is another kind of leadership that shows up when leading teams."

"How can there be two kinds of leadership?" Juanita asked with a puzzled look on her face.

"Well," I explained, "I think it's best understood by thinking of leadership skills as one thing, and leadership mindset as another. The skills remain the same regardless of where you find yourself. Great communication skills in a leader are always the same. For instance, as a functional head running IT, you have direct-line authority over your teams. Your mindset is that of someone fully responsible for every aspect of your staff's performance.

"But when you're in a group of your peers the situation changes, and so should your mindset as it relates to leadership."

"Hang on a second," jumped in Mike. "When we're together you're the leader!"

“But how about when you meet to tackle an issue and I’m not part of that meeting?”

“Never happens,” said Keith.

“Ah. How about that safety meeting a couple of days ago that ended up looking at late registrations?”

“Oh yeah,” he admitted.

“There are lots of times when people meet in teams to work together that include people from several functions and several levels. Hospitality, Housekeeping and Room Service staff all met yesterday, for example, to discuss how to deliver hotter meals around the resort, and to the cabanas.”

“That was a disaster,” jumped in Mike, head of Hospitality, and obviously still frustrated at the thought of yesterday’s meeting. “We got nowhere after an hour of talking. Too many conflicting, but well intentioned, opinions,” he added more quietly, to no one in particular.

“See? That’s what I mean. That meeting had no real leader. We have lots of team meetings that are unproductive because they have no leader.”

“But how do you do that when there are several different functions and levels represented?” asked Sue.

Sue is a genius at solving guest-related problems. Any problem. She’s always calm, confident, and the first to move to a practical solution.

“That’s the mindset issue I talked about. First – and we’re going to do this from now on – every team needs a leader. Period. And that leader needs to see themselves as fully responsible for the team’s result...and everyone on that team needs to accept that fact. Each person needs to recognize that, for the work of that team, whoever the leader is, they’re in charge.”

There was a moment’s pause, and then everyone started talking at once.

To give them credit, it wasn’t so much to challenge the principle I’d just described, but rather to figure it out.

After we talked it through for a bit, I suggested we take a short break and then come back and try to codify how this would work. They all agreed, made their way out to the warm sunshine, and started catching up on their emails. I ordered some cold drinks from the kitchen and moved the flip chart into the center of the room. I then checked my own emails, only in my case unfortunately without the benefit of being outside.

As they filed in I took a small bag from off my desk and set it in front of me on the table, and then went to the flip chart.

"OK," I began. "Where do we start?"

Sue jumped in quickly. "I think if we could ask questions to which there were simple answers that would help," she suggested.

"Good idea," said Mike.

"Smart," echoed Juanita.

"And here's the first question," she went on. "Who's in charge when the team 'leader' is more junior than someone else in the room?...And can that happen?" she added after a moment's pause.

"Two questions. Not fair!" said Pam, reaching for a Coke.

And off it went for another hour, at the end of which everyone was pretty jazzed. They were excited about what this would mean going forward. Greater efficiency. Greater clarity. Faster meetings. More productive teams. Improved alignment. They were definitely on it!

As we wrapped up I reached forward and grabbed the small bag. Opening it, I poured out several small black stones similar to the one Granite had given me. "If I keep running meetings like this, there isn't going to be much left of his cornerstone," I thought.

"Here," I said. "Put one of these in your pocket to remind you of today's meeting and that leadership is the most important part of any team's success." I then told them of my chance conversation with Granite, which in turn led me to today, pulling out my own black stone from my pocket.

“Cool.” said Sue.

“Neat,” echoed Juanita.

“Yep. I’m in.” said Mike. Followed by similar comments from the others.

“We’re off to a good start,” I thought. Aloud, I closed by saying, “I’ll summarize this last hour by writing a few guidelines that capture our thinking and fire them off to you later today.”

They filed out and I turned to look at the sun glinting off the ever-rippling water. Mesmerizing. It always was. This was definitely a great place to work, and would be even more so if this little black stone delivered on its promise! I reluctantly turned from looking at the water to my iPad and began typing...“Leadership of Teams.” Great title, I thought, as I went to work.

Every team must have a leader.

The leader should be the person responsible for the issue the team is addressing. This may often not be the most senior person in the room.

The leader is accountable to deliver the promised result the team is meeting to address.

The team members are responsible to the leader to fully support the approach being taken.

Every person is encouraged to participate fully in all discussions, but the final decision is the leader’s.

Working on a project or issue on a team doesn’t alter the relationship with that person’s functional leader the rest of the time.

Teams can be formed any time it would help to move things ahead, and can be made up of any number. Two people working together on a project or issue are a team.

Teams can form and disband with ease. They don’t have to stay together when the reason for the team is no longer an issue.

It's the leader's job to run the team meetings, keep the individuals on track, and ensure that the team delivers its mandate.

Respect the team leader for the responsibility they carry, not necessarily the rank they have.

"Not bad," I thought as I finished, "but it needs a new title." I stared out the window for a moment, and then turned back to my list: "Ten Truths for Leading Teams." Done. I hit send, and off it went to my direct reports.

Over the next few days these truths began to play out. It was a bit ragged at first, but when people got off the rails during meetings, the leader would pull out the little black stone, set it on the table and pause. They'd then review the Ten Truths and ask if there were some behaviors going on in the meeting that didn't align to the Truths.

I think it was Sue who first started doing that, but soon the black stone and the Ten Truths became synonymous, and everyone was doing it, which really helped.

The safety issue got resolved (perhaps the ultimate test!) and as I walked around the property, I began to notice that my own team had shared this principle with all of their own people, and it was now cascading down the entire organization, to everyone's benefit.

Time to buy Granite a cold beer and say thanks!

CHAPTER SIX

I had just come in from running one of the Sea-Doos in the big waves at the end of a particularly busy day. I love taking out the RXP 260 just for the fun of it when the water is really rough. These things have 260 horsepower, and the beach staff and I race them out on the course on the odd evening, which is how Jim, who worked on the beach, and I had become friends.

"Good run?" asked Jim. "The best," I replied. As Jim helped me pull the 850-pound machine up out of the surf, I asked him how things were going down on the waterfront. He helped guests all day, so was particularly well tuned in to how they were feeling.

"Things are good, Mr. B." he replied, "but not great."

"Not great?" I quickly looked up.

"Well...the guests think they're great, but they could be a lot better. You know what I mean?"

"Not really," I responded, reaching for a towel. "What do you mean?"

"Well...we don't seem...um...focused. Pam is great and she really wants the guests to have a special time on the beach; but the Finance guys don't seem to share the same vision, so never really support her ideas. And they're really good! I think it would make the guests' time here more memorable if we could put some of Pam's ideas into practice. Word of mouth back home, ya know?"

"True Jim. But we're trying to be more profitable and that's the role of Finance."

"Maybe." He hesitated. "But maybe their goal should be the same as mine: happy guests. Well, maybe not 'happy.' More like 'really happy.'"

"And," he continued, "maybe Hospitality should feel the same," he said hesitantly.

By now he had my full attention. "Hospitality? What about Hospitality?"

"It's just that we all seem to be working for a different company, Mr. B. Yesterday the Rathenson family – you know, the ones with the three boys under eight – wanted me to get one of the larger catamarans ready for a day sail, and asked if I could also arrange for it to have a picnic lunch on board.

"Well...we usually don't do that down here, because that's Hospitality's area, and they like the guests to order from Guest Services. But I could see that family had their hands full, so to speak, and it was just one thing less for them to have to worry about. So I said 'Sure.' They were thrilled. Like, really thrilled, and it wasn't that big a deal for me to do.

"But when I went up to the lodge, the guys at Hospitality were really unhappy! Whew. They were worried about how it'd get charged, what needed to go in it, how much of what, what kind of cutlery, which 'lunch package' it was to be – basic, full, or luxury – and a bunch of other stuff.

"I said I'd seen this family every day this week and knew what they'd like. Man, they'd just like anything that the boys would eat! Anyway, it was a federal case. Finally I went to Sue, in Guest Relations, and she called someone and it got done. But they were none too happy...you'll probably hear about it from Mike."

Mike, although head of Hospitality, probably wouldn't raise it because no one wanted to tangle with Sue. She was just about the most respected leader on my staff.

"See what I mean?" Jim concluded.

"I do, Jim. Thanks. Very insightful. Let me think about it."

"See you on the racecourse tomorrow evening?" I asked as I headed back to my own cottage.

"Absolutely," he replied. "I can't let you beat me by those two seconds much longer, or I'll have to take up horseshoes!"

As I walked back to change, I thought about Jim's comments. He'd struck a chord, articulating something I'd been feeling, but not been able to put into words. We were like several different organizations somehow. I just didn't know why, or how it got that way.

This was still on my mind later as I walked back to the office. I took the longer route to see how Granite was coming along, and maybe subconsciously wanting someone to talk this out with.

"Hey, Granite. It's looking good," I said as I came up to him. Slow work though. It didn't look like he'd made much headway yet.

"Yeah. It's going great. It'll be beautiful when it's done."

"But it doesn't look much further along than a few weeks ago," I said.

"It looks that way," he smiled gently. "But you're looking at the wrong thing. Look there," he said, pointing to large piles of rock off to the side.

"The most important thing is to sort the rocks so once I start building they all 'do their part.' Before I sorted them, they each had their own 'personality.' But now they're sorted so that once I start building they can each play their part by bringing that personality to the larger whole.

"You could say they now all have the same focus...that's the key to building. You look for it when it's done Bill; you'll see."

I stared at Granite for a moment or so, lost in thought.

"You OK, Bill?" he asked.

"I am," I said. "Actually, I'm very okay. Thanks, Granite. I think you just brought some things into focus for me."

I left him hard at it and made my way to my office...and my phone.

"Is he available?" I asked Ruth.

"And good afternoon to you too, Bill," she replied.

I chuckled. "Sorry Ruth. I was a million miles away. Good afternoon! How're the grandkids? Did they get the Sandcastles books I sent your way?"

"They did, and they love them! Thank you!"

"My own kids loved them when they showed up in the gift shop here, so I

thought yours might too.”

“Very thoughtful. And yes, he’s in. I’ll tell him you’re on the line. He’ll be glad to talk with you.”

“That’s always a good sign,” I thought to myself.

“Hi, Bill.”

“Hi, Frank. How’s the world without sun and sand?”

“Not nice, Bill. Not nice! Just because you have it all day doesn’t mean you need to remind me that I don’t!”

“Sorry.”

“No you’re not.”

“You’re right. I’m not.” I chuckled.

“So, things seem to be improving a bit, am I right?” he asked.

“You are. We’ve made a big breakthrough on team leadership, based on the thoughts you gave me last time. But...”

“But?”

“Well, firstly, I think we still have a long way to go, but one step at a time. And I’ve been trying to figure out what that next step is. And I think I know. What do you think about ‘goals’?”

“Goals? I think they’re important. I think they have to be met. Yours for example – increase profitability down there.”

“No, I get that. I understand those kinds of goals. I think I mean ‘psychologically,’ or for a team, or what’s in a person’s or team’s ‘heart.’” I then told him Jim’s story about the Rathenson family and their rambunctious boys.

“Oh. I see what you mean,” he replied.

“In that context I think you need three things.” He went on, “I think for sure, even psychologically, you need ‘goals’ as we know them. Plain, ordinary, crystal

clear objectives.

"Then secondly, everyone needs to have the same ones, and be well and truly, viscerally even, bought into them. Then thirdly, I think they have to be a real focus. A constant rallying point."

Granite had talked about focus.

"Very helpful, Frank. As usual. I got it."

"OK, Bill. Stay strong." And with that he hung up, and I turned to look at the setting sun, now golden on the water, to think about "goals."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Goals. Not just “goals” in the classical sense, but what Frank had called visceral ones. But it wasn’t just the goals that we needed, it was how the team linked to those goals.

I began doodling on the page in front of me, writing down the words that had been used in my various conversations that day...I felt somehow the answer lay in those words, and getting them right.

Clearly the word “focus” was important. Also something about “everyone,” to deal with Jim’s Hospitality story. I liked Frank’s straightforward belief that no matter what, goals needed a “goal” (boy did that sound silly, but still true, I thought). Then there had to be something about the larger mission, or how, even if it were a team just working on a simple project, they still all had to see it as their own.

“Hmmm...”

As I began to better understand what I was trying to sort out, the potential power of getting this right started to dawn on me. More doodling, yet this time with increased excitement. Finally I got it. What we needed for every team was for each person on that team to have “Unanimous Focus on a Common Goal.” “Brilliant,” I thought to myself modestly. I jotted down my rationale:

Unanimous: *Everyone needed to buy in. In fact, I was now willing to say that if someone on the team didn’t buy in, they shouldn’t be on that team.*

Focus: *Single-mindedness. A laser-like attention to the promised outcome. “Focus,” in that other issues wouldn’t sidetrack effort or attention from delivering the result.*

Common: *The goal was shared by everyone. They knew their role in achieving it. They had all made it personal. They saw themselves as integral to making it happen.*

Goal: *In Frank's words, "crystal clear." Actionable. Measurable. Specific. Probably even best if it were written.*

If every team met this criteria for what they were tasked with, we'd make really significant headway. "Time to bring my team together and explain this," I thought.

As I was about to schedule the meeting, I thought about how I'd lead them through my conclusions, which got me thinking again about leadership, which naturally made me think of that small black stone in my pocket.

That worked really well last time...another stone? Maybe one for Leadership, and one for Goals. That way they'd see them as two very different things, yet each vital in improving team performance.

But I'd need a different color...I looked around the room, and saw some light green glass beads at the bottom of one of the floral arrangements in my office – put there no doubt by our very attentive Housekeeping staff, who were really very good.

Perfect.

I fished out enough for each member of my staff, sent an email organizing the meeting for tomorrow over breakfast, and called it a day. "A very good day," I thought. "I think I'm one step closer to where we need to be," I said out loud, as I looked around the now shadowed and empty office, one that 12 hours from now would be hearing about Unanimous Focus on a Common Goal for the very first time!

The next morning I got in early and went to the flip chart. In my not-the-world's-best penmanship, I printed out: "Our guests' experience...brilliant for them, profitable for us." I ordered up some coffee and fruit for my team, and cleared off some emails needing immediate attention.

By the time the team arrived an hour or so later, I was ready.

"Grab something to munch on, and have a seat," I began. "We're about to take another big step towards great teamwork!"

"We're already a great team," said Mike, trying to skewer a mango slice. The others mumbled similar sentiments while making a significant dent in the fruit trays. You'd think they skipped breakfast just to eat at my meetings!

"We're a team, yes. And we're mastering the concept of leadership within teams. All the teams on the property are getting better. But we're not really a great team." I then told them of my experiences yesterday, and the corresponding observations.

"I think," I continued, "that we're not all focused enough on the same goal, and that this is true across the resort."

"We all have goals," chipped in Sue. "And metrics. And standards. And objectives. And...well you get the idea. We definitely don't lack for goals around here!"

"And they help a lot," said Pam.

"I know, and I agree," I said. "But those goals tend to be tactical. They're very specific, and very useful. What I think we need is greater clarity for the teams working to achieve these tactical goals. Let me show you what I mean, before you all jump into this discussion." I quickly added, "Look at the flip chart and what's written there." They all dutifully looked.

"That," I said proudly, "is a Unanimous Focus On A Common Goal!" I tore off the sheet, asked Juanita to stick it up on the wall, and wrote, in capital letters UNANIMOUS...FOCUS...ON...A...COMMON...GOAL. I then stood back and gave them a moment to process.

"Hey, that's pretty good," said Keith. "Did you come up with that?" he asked, slightly tongue in cheek.

"Which?" I asked. "The 'guest experience...' statement, or the 'unanimous focus...' one?"

"Um...both, I guess."

"Yep," I answered proudly. "You're looking at the fruit of your leader's brain, and how I spent some of my time yesterday.

"That goal: 'Our guests' experience...brilliant for them, profitable for us' should

be what we all aspire to. All of us. It applies equally well to Beach, Finance, Hospitality, and all our other areas. As a senior team, we should all be focused on that.

“How we execute in our functional areas, at the tactical level, is up to each of you as individual functional heads. But it’s our team’s goal. For all of us in the room. If we all focused on making that a priority, then the kind of conflict Jim experienced between Beach and Hospitality wouldn’t occur. They’d have to work together on that common goal.”

I sat back, and let them begin to think and talk about the power of what they’d just heard, and I’d only just recently realized. And I got to grab some watermelon while they talked.

CHAPTER EIGHT

After they'd had a chance to work this through, and I'd finished my melon, I asked them for their thoughts.

Keith was the first to speak up.

"I get it. We all need to work as a team – and that's the key learning here – with a goal common to all of us. From that we can execute with greater efficiency, and with fewer crossed wires."

"That's my thinking," I confirmed. "So, how do you think this applies below this team?" I asked. "How does this principle apply?"

Ever the quick study, Sue just pointed to the flip chart. "Every team, regardless of its composition, should begin with a clear statement of what that team will have as its unanimous focus."

"And everyone must buy in," confirmed Mike. "It must be common to all."

"Not just buy in," said Juanita, "but be fully committed. Focused on it."

"Absolutely, and if we think about team leadership, it should be the leader's job to clarify the common goal, and ensure unanimous focus on it," added Keith thoughtfully.

The room grew silent after that flurry of input, as everyone began to think about the implications, and power, of this dynamic of teams.

"We are definitely on to something great here," seemed to hover like an invisible bubble over everyone's head. "Very cool," I thought.

As the silent energy subsided I reached into my pocket and pulled out the light green glass beads. "I think we have another 'Cornerstone' of teamwork," I said, as I handed one out to everyone. "We now have two clear ways to diagnose and improve the performance of every team on property, beginning with our own."

Chapter Eight

“Keep this one with the black one and let’s commit to being sure we all operate and lead our teams in a manner consistent with these two Cornerstone principles.”

They took the light green glass beads thoughtfully and headed out for the day.

“Now comes the real test,” I thought. “Can they, and will they, put this new thinking into practice as well as they did the insight on team leadership?”

The next couple of weeks flew by.

Mrs. Culver was here again this year. She’s 98 and thinks she’s 55, is warm, friendly, and full of stories. Having her is always a delight, and this week she offered watercolor classes down on the beach. She’s a truly talented artist and the kids love having her teach them.

One evening our own kids took Bridget and me down to a class she was giving on how to paint sunsets. Incredible. We had a great time, met some of our other guests, and then we all went up to the outdoor barbecue. So many of us offered to help Mrs. Culver up the path that it looked like she had her own entourage.

There are definitely some pluses to this job that offset the daily problems of sunburned kids (they need to buy our sunscreen!), delayed deliveries of Coke products (and consequently some very testy dyed-in-the-wool Coke consumers), and guests who rent sailboats but don’t really know how to sail and end up unwittingly drifting out of the bay.

The next day on one of my daily walks around the property, I visited Jim down on the beach where he was just finishing up getting some guests set up to parasail.

“Hi, Mr. B.” he called out cheerfully.

“Hi, Jim,” I replied. “How’s it going? I see the Rathensons are out on the big Cat again.”

“Oh yeah. They’ve fallen in love with that sailboat. Yesterday the boys spent 20 minutes telling me about how they jump off the front of the tramp holding onto a rope, and pop up at the back after the Cat’s passed over them. Apparently the family record from ‘front to back’ is 13 seconds. Their mom must have nerves of steel. Today they’re going to play pirate on the island.”

Chapter Eight

"Excellent!" I responded.

"You know, Mr. B., I don't know what you said last week, but Hospitality has really turned around."

"How so?"

"Well, the last couple of days I've been doing the lunch thing again for our friends in the Cat, and Hospitality's whole attitude has changed. I was asking Mary about it over a beer after work..."

"Mary?" I interrupted.

"Yeah. She works in the kitchen. Just started a couple of weeks ago, and pretty talented. Has a degree in Food Science."

"Got it. And she said?"

"Well, about a week after she started, they all got pulled together and shown the same goal Pam showed us. Brilliantly happy guests, profitable resort. Mary was told the same thing Pam told us: 'Let's all focus on that goal.' Made sense, and has really helped us figure out together how to get whatever it is we're trying to do without turf defense. It's good."

"That's good to hear," I said, and meant it.

"After our meeting on that topic, Pam pulled us together again the next day and showed us a big poster with 'Unanimous Focus on a Common Goal' on it in big pink letters...along with all those seashells she likes around the edges."

"And what was the purpose of that?" I asked.

"She said that here on Beach we often have to work in cross-functional teams, you know, like Safety, Water Sports, and Maintenance, and that whenever that happens we should start by identifying the leader (she's been on that for a while now and it's really helped), then agree on the Unanimous Focus on a Common Goal. Then, either buy in and help the team, or buy out and ask to get off the team. She was very clear on that."

"And?"

“Everybody got it. She gave an example that helped...for the little team I’m leading for example.”

“What was that?” I asked. I wasn’t aware Jim was now leading a team. I was pleased at this because I think he has a strong future here if he wants to stay.

“Well, my team is trying to keep as many watercraft as possible available to guests who come down to the beach. Maintenance always wants to rotate some out for preventative service and the guys over on Events are always looking to use our crafts for trips, diving training, and stuff. Everyone has been agreeing that we should improve what we’re doing somehow, but until Pam did the Unanimous Goal thing it was tough to lead and make any headway. She said our goal should be the ‘best predictable experience for the greatest number of guests.’

“She’s the boss, so we said okay, then started working to that goal. All of us. It really focused us and we got serious traction. It was easier, a lot easier, to lead, too.”

“How’d it help?” I asked curiously, feeling a bit of mounting excitement that we’d really hit on something here.

“Well, the maintenance guys said they’d start working on ensuring predictability, like what was the likelihood something would go wrong vs. just scheduled maintenance, even if a craft hadn’t been used that much that month. Then the Events guys and I did an inventory of what they really needed, and cross-referenced that to what I saw as boat usage patterns. That way the most guests got the most out of the boats. Sure, once in a while I might be short of something for one person, but only because at that time there were lots of people over at Events using the equipment.

“Those kinds of things. We’re still a few weeks away from our team finishing up this project, but already we’re working on a Unanimous Focus on a Common Goal for all of Beach for the next six months. Very, very cool!

“So thanks, Mr. B. What you did really helped...and she gave us these nifty little light green stones.” he said, reaching into his pocket. No wonder the flowers in my office weren’t standing up quite as straight as they used to!

Chapter Eight

As I made my way back to my office, I realized that Pam had definitely “got it.” Over the next few weeks I began spotting other examples in every area. My team were really showing their professionalism in that they were executing, not debating.

“Very gratifying,” I thought as I made my way back to our cottage at the end of the day and another beautiful sunset, pausing to watch our big Cat come gently into the bay. It had started with the Rathensons; and now they were heading home tomorrow, but, unbeknownst to them, they had contributed greatly to leaving us a stronger team.

CHAPTER NINE

The next couple of weeks passed quickly. The teams around the resort were working much better, and in fact the power of teams seemed to be multiplying. There were many more teams being formed as people got a better idea of how to work within them. It was exciting to see.

Looking out my window early one morning, I was struck by just how many guests were on the property at any one time using these beautiful facilities. I saw our registration figures every morning and knew we had upwards of a thousand on average here in any given week, but seeing them during the day, in the dining areas, on the beach, and at the evening beach barbecues lately, it just seemed to register more forcefully how many people were actually here and enjoying the efforts of our teams. Were we doing enough, I wondered?

I decided to begin my day with a stroll around the resort's periphery. I usually walk through the main areas, but today, I thought I'd take a different route. As I did so, I passed a number of areas, fenced off from the guests, where we stored equipment not in use, kept the rubbish bins, and accessed the storage containers.

There seemed to be a lot more stored here than I'd realized. In fact, as I looked more closely, there was too much! Clearly we didn't have a very well defined sense of thrift. It looked like a lot of unnecessary waste lay everywhere. This observation was reinforced as I continued my walk, now that I was focused on seeing it.

Coupled with my musings from earlier this morning, a plan of attack began to form.

On my way back to the office, planning the launch of my newly conceived "attack," I literally bumped into a couple as we both rounded a corner from opposite directions. A large hibiscus had served to effectively screen the path from both sides.

"Oh, excuse me," I said.

"No, no. Our fault." replied a...um..."differently" dressed gentleman.

"Quite entirely our fault," echoed his wife, also somewhat uniquely attired.

As we exchanged pleasantries, I took a moment to absorb this rather eccentric couple. He wore a madras jacket (which I thought had gone out of style long before I was born!), a bright pink shirt, yellow polka-dot bow tie, yellow vest, and pure white Bermuda shorts, complete with bright yellow knee socks and brown loafers brushed to a dazzling shine.

I didn't know whether to hint that he might be a bit overdressed for the tropics, or ask if he was an ad executive with a paint company!

His wife wore sandals, and a full-length tie-dyed kimono-type dress, with a turquoise scarf that was wrapped around her neck at least four times, yet still was long enough to reach nearly to the ground on both ends. She wore bright turquoise earrings that were at least six inches long, and a vibrant pink sun hat that matched her lipstick shade perfectly.

As I pondered this unique couple, and attempted to say something more intelligent than "Oh wow," I noticed they were both wearing matching name tags. I looked more closely.

"Ah, Mr. and Mrs. Montague. I see you're attending this week's conference of Dental Surgeons. It begins this morning, doesn't it?"

I was well aware of this event. They always started off the first morning with a casual meet and greet on the large terrace. It was one of the few times we're asked to do a welcoming reception-style catering event first thing in the morning.

"Oh yes!" Mr. Montague replied, "and do call me Monty. I'm a motivational speaker, and my wife" – turning to her as he spoke – "is a great authoress."

"Authoress?" I queried.

"Oh yes," she replied. "That's a female author."

"Oh," I said, somewhat mystified.

"Oh yes," she said. "My most recent book is: '365 Ways to Absolutely Fail Without Any Chance of Success!'"

"I see," I said, not really seeing at all. "And is there a market for that kind of..."

"... 'self-failure,'" she interrupted, completing my sentence. "Oh yes. People are completely tired of self-help books. There are so many of them! I think what we need is a self-failure book now, don't you?"

"Now, Marissa," interrupted her husband. "You can't ask people that. This nice gentleman hasn't read your book, since it's not yet published, so how could he possibly answer that?!"

"Saved!" I thought.

"And anyway," he went on, "he probably has work to do somewhere."

"I should be off," I agreed, "but I would like to at least hear about your speeches first."

"Oh, they're terribly boring," he said. "In fact I call them that. 'Boring PowerPoints Delivered in a Boring Style.'"

"And...um...is there a market for that?"

"Oh yes. Absolutely. Senior executives love to have me up before they go on stage so that, by comparison, they'll look dazzling!"

As I was absorbing that logic Mrs. Montague had pulled out her camera and was lining her husband and I up for a shot together. And she was using a – no, it couldn't be.

"Is that a Polaroid camera?" I asked, somewhat amazed. (Could you even get film for that now?)

"Oh yes," she said proudly. "No waiting. The picture is almost immediate." And with that she popped on a flash cube (!) and took the picture.

She handed it to me as they both continued arm in arm up to the unsuspecting

dental surgeons, leaving me with a smile on my face. As I looked at the picture, I saw she'd done an excellent job of capturing us from the neck down. Somehow she'd missed both our heads...but Monty's bow tie was very striking.

I made the rest of my way to the office, thinking once again of my new idea for the team, with periodic unbidden thoughts of the charming, if rather unique, Montagues.

The next morning at our weekly meeting I began with the word "Attack" on the flip chart.

"Attack what?" asked Sue.

"Maybe it's a 'who,' not a 'what.'" responded Francois shyly. Francois is our very talented Head of Operations, but a true introvert.

"No. It's definitely a what," I said.

"Here's what I want us to attack over the next three months," I said emphatically. "Our current guest satisfaction scores are 83%, which is good, but not great. And our waste is high. Too high. Over the next three months, I want to move the guest score up to 86%, and to reduce our costs by 3%. That's what we're going to attack. We'll call it '3 and 3!'" I announced.

There was a pregnant pause before everyone began to comment at once. I let them talk it though for a while, until the emotion subsided, the logic had run its course, and reality finally set in.

"You're not going to budge on this, are you?" asked Pam.

"Nope. I think it's doable, what we should be doing for our guests, and can play a part in getting us to a more profitable position for the company."

Quiet settled around the room.

"All right," said Sue. "Any ideas on where to start?"

"I have two ideas," I responded. "First, you need to put together a fairly large team, made up of your key people from those areas that need to be involved to tackle this mandate. Apply what we've learned about teams to keep them

focused. Secondly, look for waste. Wasted resources, material, time, energy, or potential.

"I think we must link these two objectives. That's important. If we were only to focus on one the other may go in the wrong direction; and that can't happen," I concluded.

Another brief pause as they thought about that, then Mike jumped up. "Good! Let's get on it! I'll be happy to act as team leader unless someone else wants it," he volunteered. Looking around the room it seemed as though people were okay with him as lead.

"OK," I said.

"Good," Mike responded. "Let's all think through who you want on the team from your area, then send the names to me and I'll organize it from there."

Sue and Keith both hung back briefly after the meeting.

Sue spoke first.

"This is absolutely the right thing to do. I'm thrilled! In fact I wish I'd been the one to come to you with it. I think it took us a moment to see how the two goals were related, but your comment at the end clarified that. One thing though, I think I'd like to personally be on the team, and not just my people, given that Guest Relations is my area."

Keith quickly chimed in. "I had the same thought, Bill. I'm with Sue that we need this, and we really do have a 'wasteful' mentality. Being CFO, and given the financial implications, I want to be in from the start too."

"Fine by me," I said. "I think that's great, and the team will be stronger for having the two of you on it. Thanks for the encouragement."

They left chatting among themselves, and I left feeling very supported, yet again, by such a willing group of individuals.

CHAPTER TEN

The paths around our resort are truly magnificent. We put a lot of energy and time into them, primarily through landscaping, flowers, points of interest, and keeping them extremely clean. They wander. They're not straight, but they're designed so that as you walk from place to place you see the ocean, then maybe a glimpse of the lush forest nearby. As you turn a small corner you may see some topiary or a rich spray of flowers.

I feel that guests should enjoy the journey as much as the destination, and so make our paths a priority for maintenance and groundskeeping.

As I walked across the property for a meeting with Francois, I was struck not only with the beauty of the paths, but also of something deeper.

Hmmm. Hard to put my finger on it.

I paused at a particularly spectacular spot that was a little higher than the others and gave a magnificent view of the ocean stretching far out into the horizon. Today was calm, with nearly no breeze, so the water seemed almost like a living mirror of deep blue, with ribbons of light where the sun would briefly catch a small ripple and then run off into the distance.

Something was missing in our teams. I looked down at the path and tried to puzzle it out. These paths connected us all, they were clearly marked, they never moved, and they were safe predictable ways to go from one point to another. They were used with confidence and they were not at all frustrating. Quite the opposite; they were always a joy to be on.

I'm not sure we always worked together quite like that. In fact, I know we didn't. And now with the increased focus on the power of teams with defined leaders and focus on common goals, this deficiency was showing up more and more.

I continued on to the meeting with Francois, recognizing I had to somehow tackle this problem.

Francois had been unusually quiet in all our meetings around teams and Cornerstones, even for him. I wanted to find out why, and see if he was as on board with where we were heading as the rest of my team.

Much to my relief, he was more than just “on board.” He’d felt that this whole area was completely new to him, and that his expertise had always been more with machines and equipment than people. He knew he had a lot to learn, and just wanted to listen, understand, and then apply. I couldn’t argue with that.

Relieved and encouraged, I spent another hour with him going over some staffing issues he had, then headed back to my office.

On the way, I took a path that brought me to Granite and the waterfall he was carefully building, and which was slowly and magnificently taking shape.

“How’s the master builder today, Granite?” I asked.

“Great, Bill!” he replied enthusiastically. Today he was wearing a dark green bandana and his jean cutoffs. Somewhere he’d picked up a Mickey Mouse shirt with Mickey looking very suave in a full tux. It suited him. I think he’d look like he was wearing the right thing whatever he chose. He was just that kind of guy – laid back, but thoughtful. And he loved his work – I think that must be what comes through when you see him.

“It’s taking a while, Granite. We can get you help, you know. I’ve said so many times.”

“I know Bill. But I like doing it myself, it’s cheaper for you, and I’m in no rush to head back north.”

“Fine by me,” I replied.

We both looked quietly at the work in progress for a bit. “Everything seems to fit together so well,” I commented.

“It does. That’s a big part of building something in stone that will last. It all has to go together well. Wherever you look it must be seen, and in fact be, well interconnected. Many stones, one structure.”

Interesting, I thought. I then shared my musings on pathways from earlier in the

day. "I think we need something here that we still don't have, Granite," I said.

"Like what?" he asked.

"I think we need to be more like your waterfall. Interconnected more effectively somehow. Like the paths. Everyone an individual, yes, like your individual stones, but interconnected, like the way you've put them together, and the ways these paths take our guests safely, happily, and predictably to their destinations."

"I think you're talking about what in your world would be 'communication,'" he replied thoughtfully.

"Communication? I don't think so. We're pretty good at that. We have great rapport with one another, and people are free to speak up on anything, and do. I think we're good there."

He considered. "Just because the stones are connected doesn't mean they actually support one another as well as they could. It takes a lot of work to get them in the right place so they actually add maximum strength to the overall structure. They each need to help, not just be there.

"The paths here are really beautiful," he went on. "They don't just go from place to place; they take you there. The walk is enjoyable, easy, engaging."

"I think your communication may lack some of that element, and that's what you're feeling."

I thought about that. Maybe team communication needed more than just communication skills, just as our paths needed more than just a hard surface, to provide the optimum experience. I wanted our teams' interactions to flow as effortlessly as our paths, and to support teamwork as effectively as Granite's stones, but they didn't.

"I think maybe it's time to give Frank a call," I thought. I thanked Granite for his insight once again, and made my way, on beautiful paths, back to my office.

"Hello, Ruth. How are you today?" I asked when she answered.

"Very well, thank you Bill. And I see from your reports that results there are trending well, yes?"

"They are Ruth. Thanks. Still quite a ways to go to satisfy Frank and the Board, but good progress so far, given the relatively short time we've been at it. I keep feeling like I have a lot to learn."

"Well, Frank's happy with progress so far, as you know, and that's what counts."

"That's true!"

"He's just off the other line now Bill, I'll put you through."

"Thanks, Ruth," I responded.

"Hi, Bill! How are you?"

It was always good to hear Frank's voice. Five words, but a depth of meaning. He really wanted to know how I was, and there was no one I'd rather work for and have ask that question. He really was an amazing leader.

"I'm good, Frank. Thanks. Bridget and the kids love it here, and I'm still a few seconds faster on the Sea-Doo course than everyone else. We'll have to be sure that if you ever bring me back home you do it before I lose those bragging rights!"

"Duly noted. How's your team?"

"Good. And getting better. I think the best thing about them is their teachability. They listen, ask, discuss, get clarity, then act. I can't ask for anything more. And they're fun to work with."

"Excellent," he said. "Teachability and integrity – those are the two things you need most. I'm pleased with how well things are moving there. Stay on it! How can I help today?"

"I think we need to improve our communication somehow, but I can't put my finger on it. We communicate well as individuals, I think, but as teams, we could be much better. I think it has something to do with elegant pathways and powerful waterfalls," I concluded with a laugh.

"Interesting choice of adjectives," he replied. "'Elegant' and 'powerful', you say."

"Yeah. Thoughts?"

"I think you know about as much about communication as I do, but I will share two things I've learned over the years that have been very helpful.

"The first is that communication isn't really effective if everyone on the team can't subsequently present the speaker's viewpoint as well as the speaker himself. People confuse effective message delivery with effective message receipt.

"The other thing is frequency. In teams there's usually a tremendous amount of information being passed, being analyzed, and being debated. The core communication itself then gets lost. The critical communication issues have to be resurfaced frequently.

"Thinking about your two words, I think the power comes from the frequency, and the elegance from everyone being able to predictably get to the same place at the same time."

"Wow. That was insightful," I thought.

Aloud I said, "Frank, that's just what I needed. Thanks. If you ever get time for a break, bring Helen down and we'll roll out the red carpet."

"Okay," he chuckled. "But that won't be until you get it to where we need it to be profit-wise."

"Got it," I said, and we hung up.

Effective and frequent.

What did that mean to us? And how could I make it part of our everyday team behaviors?

Late the next afternoon we had our weekly staff meeting and I put "Paths and Waterfalls" on the agenda. When we got to that point people looked up expectantly.

"So, Bill," asked Pam. "You want more paths and waterfalls? You certainly can't want better ones!" Everyone laughed.

"Noooo," I said slowly. "I think we're doing great with our team performance here. Everywhere in fact. But we can be better."

"What are you thinking?" questioned Keith.

"Well, just as our paths take us easily and effortlessly to the destination, elegantly almost, and just as Granite is building us a waterfall that will stand forever because every stone contributes fully, I think communication within our teams must be more effective and more frequent." I must admit I didn't say this to them with all the confidence in the world. It almost came out as a question. Almost, but not quite.

"OK. I agree," said Juanita as she jumped up to the flip chart.

"Absolutely," said Mike. "We've really moved the needle on teams, but I also don't think team communication is all it can be."

Pam spoke up thoughtfully. "I like those two words, Bill. Effective and frequent. Can we define those?"

Thinking back to my call with Frank I said, "I think so. How about: 'Effective' means you don't move on to another speaker or topic until everyone else on the team could say what the speaker just said, in their own words of course, but with equal impact."

"That's good," chimed in Francois. "That way, we all stay on the same page as we move forward. No misunderstandings, no time lost going in different directions, no conversations not to the point."

"Right," said Juanita. "And we have to hold each other accountable not to let the team's communication get too far down the road if we feel either ourselves, or someone else, is being left behind because they didn't fully grasp the thinking earlier on."

Murmurs of enthusiastic agreement all around.

Juanita was feverishly capturing all this on the flip chart.

"And 'frequent'?" asked Keith.

"I think frequent means that whenever anyone feels the need to revisit something

the team has discussed, or is working on, they should feel free to speak up. They could ask questions, or simply revisit the key points to be sure everyone is still on the same wavelength."

"Got it," said Sue. "'Frequent' doesn't mean saying the same thing over and over. It means keeping everyone current all the time. Everyone on the team always knows everything all the time." She paused. "Wow. That would make a monumental difference."

She looked out the window a moment, then turned and said "'Frequent'...I know everything; 'effective'...I understand everything. Cool!"

There was that moment of silence again!

We were all thinking about what this would mean to our team's performance.

And we were excited. And Juanita was glad she could stop writing.

"But we need a way to allow anyone on the team to safely speak up when they think communication should be either more frequent, or more effective. Otherwise there's no way to know that it needs to be more frequent or effective." Sue made this very astute observation slowly as she obviously thought it out.

Suddenly she stood up and went over to the bowl of jelly beans sitting on the coffee table in my office. "I know," she exclaimed. "Purple jelly beans!"

"Jelly beans?" I questioned.

"Not really jelly beans, obviously. We need another stone this time. Purple I think. That way, when anyone feels the need to improve team communication, they can just pull out the purple stone and everyone knows what it means. It's another Cornerstone," she exclaimed triumphantly.

And that's exactly what we did. Mike went and got some purple marbles from the gift shop and we had our third Cornerstone.

As this new principle was shared throughout the resort with all our staff, team effectiveness went up another notch, and the team meetings began to feel much more like walking on elegant pathways. They got us effectively from here to there, but with joy. Many stones, one waterfall.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Later that morning, just before lunch actually, I made my way over to the conference venue. This is one of the jewels on our property. It sits above the ocean with a spectacular, large, round patio accessible from several doors leading out from the conference meeting area. It means we can serve their meals outside if the organizers wish, or they can use it simply as a place to chat during their breaks. The dental surgeons' early morning meet and greet had in fact been set up there.

There were no conferences scheduled this week, so we'd used the space to lay out outdoor lunch buffets for our guests, and I'd arranged to briefly meet Dr. Knox there. She was the surgeon who was their chief organizer, and had stayed on after the conference for some vacation. I wanted to see if she had been satisfied with how we had looked after her colleagues, and try to get her agreement to use us again next year. I spied her over near the desserts.

"Working backwards, Doctor?" I asked. She laughed. "No. It's just that some of my colleagues have also stayed on, and we're lunching together. I've learned that, even though they hand out toothbrushes at Halloween, they always go heavy on the desserts when they're away; I thought I'd try to snag one of these liquid chocolate balls before my greedy friends get here." She smiled.

"How was everything at the conference?" I asked.

"Excellent," she replied enthusiastically. "The meet and greet was the best ever and the food your group laid out was outstanding."

"I'm pleased," I responded. "I met a couple of your 'speakers' that morning...Mr. and Mrs. Montague?"

"Montague? Doesn't ring a bell. Dr. Monstanding was here, an expert on implants, who spoke one afternoon. But I don't recall anyone named Montague."

"Hmmm. You'd know, I'm sure. They were, uh, attired in a rather unique way,"

I added.

"Oh, them," she laughed. "They were great! We have your Sue to thank for them. They were terrific!"

"I'm glad you were pleased," I responded, now even more puzzled than ever.

"I certainly was, and thanks for the great service. We'll be back again next year!" she said enthusiastically, turning once again to the chocolate balls.

"Excellent," I thought to myself, and then: "Where's Sue?" and set off to find her.

She was deep in discussion with Rachel, her number two.

"Hi, Bill. I was just strategizing with Rachel how we can best tackle the '3 and 3' mandate you gave us."

"Great. Anything I can do to help?" I asked.

"Not yet. We'll let you know."

"OK. I just met with Dr. Knox, and she was thrilled with everything."

Sue looked over at Rachel and said, "That's good to hear. Rachel was pretty much the one responsible for it all."

"Well done, Rachel. Nice job," I said. Rachel was beaming.

"Sue, who are the Montagues? Dr. Knox said you had 'arranged it all.' I met them earlier, and they were engaging and funny, but hardly what I think of when I think of authors and motivational speakers."

Sue laughed. "Had you fooled, did they? They're actors!"

"When Dr. Knox told me about the meet and greet to kick off the conference, I suggested she hire the Montagues. They come as 'participants,' but in reality simply mill around during the first event. That way people who don't know anyone else can gravitate to them and be entertained. They circulate, adding a light touch and helping to break the ice. They're so tongue in cheek, they're almost convincing."

"Yeah...almost," I thought. I was convinced.

"That's a great idea, Sue. No wonder Dr. Knox was pleased."

"Yep. They did a great job. People were entertained, and it set a friendly tone for the conference. Did you get a Polaroid picture?"

"I did, such as it was," I answered.

Sue chuckled. "Marissa has yet to take a picture that has anyone's head in it!"

With that, she and Rachel made their way back to Sue's office, and I thought, again, about how capable my staff were.

Over the next couple of weeks the "3 and 3" activity continued to build. The team was made up of about 20 staff members from each key area, plus of course Mike, Sue, and Keith. They'd had some preliminary meetings, were using the Cornerstones, and seemed now to be well underway addressing each of the areas they'd identified as places to improve.

It seemed like we were off to a strong start, and I had high hopes for success.

The next morning those hopes seemed in tatters. I had passed by the meeting room the team had commandeered for themselves. The walls were covered with flip chart paper neatly organized into categories, but the argument that was in progress was anything but organized. There was bedlam!

"Go in and help? Or let them work it out?" I asked myself. I decided on the latter, but made a mental note to find out what had sparked the dissension.

Later that day I came across Rachel in heated debate with Rick from Finance. They were definitely not collegial. From my perspective it looked a lot like they'd soon need an referee. By evening, I was sure something wasn't right. It was something to do with the mandate I'd given them, because any time I passed two or three who I knew were working together on it, there seemed a coldness between them. Somehow the team was falling apart.

The next morning as I approached my office door I was met by three very upset people: Mike looked ready to burst, Keith was as angry as I'd ever seen him, and Sue was calm but pale and obviously had something to say.

"Come in, and let's talk," I said, opening the door.

They came in, sat down around the meeting table and essentially glowered at one another. I don't know if I've ever actually seen glowering before, but there was no question that's what I was seeing now.

"All right. What's the problem?" I asked.

Keith and Mike both started to speak at once. Loudly.

"Whoa! You guys sound ready to take no prisoners! Mike, you first."

Keith glowered some more. Sue just sat there with her lips so tightly compressed together they were white.

"It's simple, Bill. I'm the leader of this project you gave us, and Keith and Sue won't accept that, so everything is going off the rails!"

"That's not true!" interjected Keith.

"What?" I asked. "The leadership, or the rails?"

"Huh? Oh, yeah, everything is off the rails, but we're not challenging Mike's leadership."

"Yes you are!" stormed Mike.

"No we're not!" shouted Keith.

"Right. Keith, keep your voice down. Your points aren't more forceful just because they're said loudly."

"Sorry," he muttered.

"So, Keith, what's the issue in your mind?"

"Bill, we have to find a 3% increase in profit. 3%," he repeated loudly. "That means my Finance team has to be involved with everything. This is a Finance initiative. Finance needs to be on top of whatever gets decided and done. Finance needs to track everything. Finance needs to control everything. If Finance doesn't bless every decision, how are we going to know if we hit the 3%?"

"Finance must be in control!" he said firmly, and with a lot of conviction.

He then paused to breathe.

"Sue?" I asked, turning to her.

"Who, Keith, do you think brings in the money you guys count? Us. The people who are responsible for guests."

She was calm and quiet, but it was easy to see she was seething internally.

"We impact every area of the resort. No guests, no revenue. Period. And we need 3% here too! So if we're going to change something, I want not only veto power, but a say in everything before we decide anything. It's not all about Finance," she concluded emphatically.

Keith opened his mouth to say something, but I motioned him to wait and turned to Mike.

"Mike?"

"See what I mean? They both want to lead! And that's not the half of it! Keith and Sue are more senior than most people on the team, so they get heard. Too much," he added. More glowering. "Everyone on the team is saying the same thing," Mike continued. "Operations people feel waste should be the focus, so they should be in charge. The waterfront gang say that if guests aren't happy with what we provide down there then they'll go elsewhere. Even the kitchen staff feels they should run things. They feel if people don't eat well they'll all leave."

"Bill, it's chaos," said Sue more calmly.

"Yeah," echoed Keith, who'd calmed down a bit, now that his viewpoint had been expressed.

"It is, Bill." Mike was looking dejected. I suspected he felt this was ultimately his fault somehow as the leader. "So, Bill, what do we do? Who's right? And we'd better get this under control soon," he added, "because this friction is spreading."

Keith added, "There's no right answer. Everyone believes their job is important here, and maybe even the most important. In some ways they're right."

I had no answer. Further, I saw all their viewpoints. There seemed no simple or obvious answer, or even a complex one.

"Alright." I said thoughtfully. "I see the problem. Thanks for coming to me. I don't appreciate all the animosity between you guys, but I get it. Let's do this. Mike, bring the team together quickly, and tell them you three explained the issue to me this morning, and that I'm working on it.

"Sue, would you and Keith please chip in as Mike explains it so everyone realizes we all have a problem here. I want the rest of the people to quickly realize we'll solve this, and I don't want silos or divisive behavior to spread."

They both said they could do that.

"Good. Then, Mike, tell them I've put the project on hold for a couple of days. This is to give everyone a cooling-off period, and me time to find a solution. Alright?"

"OK. Good," said Mike.

The three of them made their way out the door, Sue bringing up the rear. Turning back she smiled faintly at me and said, "Good luck!"

Yeah. Right.

CHAPTER TWELVE

After they'd left, I was really discouraged. I could clearly see the problem, but not the solution. Leadership wasn't really the issue, and the goal was clear. Not only clear, but there was almost too much unanimous focus on it! And this wasn't a communication issue either; everyone was exceptionally clear on what the others thought!

There was obviously more to this teamwork thing than I'd realized. But what was missing? If I couldn't figure that out we were in trouble; I'd never get this place to the level of profitability required.

As I looked up pensively from where I'd been doodling on my pad, I saw a flash of orange through the trees. Bright orange. The next moment Granite came into view from behind some foliage. Today he had on a strikingly orange bandana around his neck, and he was headed my way, or at least into the lodge where my office was.

The next moment, I looked up to see his smiling, rugged face in the doorway. Working so long in the sun down here had turned his face, arms, and hands a deep rich brown.

"Hi Bill. Can I come in?"

"Sure Granite. How are you?"

"I'm well, thanks. Making headway on the waterfall. You haven't been by in a while."

"True. Sorry about that, I'll get by in the next day or so."

"How about now?" he asked.

"Now? I sort of have my hands full now, Granite. I've got to figure something out, and quickly, I think. How about later?"

"I think I know what's bothering you. It's hard to eat in the staff dining area and not hear the rumblings. They've been getting worse over the last few days, and then yesterday it really blew up with a couple of your senior folks."

"I know. They were in to see me this morning."

"I saw them leave," Granite said. "I think I can help. Let's go for a walk."

Any help was welcome, and Granite was a sharp guy.

"Right," I said. "Let's go."

On the way to his construction site I summarized the situation as I saw it. He listened carefully as we walked.

By the time I was done we were looking at the waterfall in progress.

"Still a lot to do," I said. "I thought you'd have a lot more of the stones up by now."

"A lot's been done, Bill. Here, let me show you. The cornerstone's in place, and the beginnings of the wall. Over there you see where I've sorted the stones. But this area is new."

He pointed out the large, irregularly-shaped rock pool. "This is where the water will be caught as it falls down the face of the waterfall. Then look here." He pointed out the piping that would bring the water from the pool up to the top. "Then over here." Beside the pool was another set of pipes. "These will go out to the pump and back to force the water up to the top. Water is heavy, as you know, so the pump is critical.

"If you look over here, you'll see the intake grates that will filter the water before it goes to the pump. Then of course there's all the stone and mortar that will make up the waterfall itself. That's what everyone will see, but all these other components will still be here.

"And one other thing," he added. "This resort is beautiful at night, so I've laid conduit for spotlights we can hide around the waterfall to bring it to life at night as well as in the day."

"Amazing," I said. And it was. He was doing a masterful job.

"So, Bill. Which is the most important component?"

"Uh...," I mumbled. "Um...." I was thinking. "Hard to say. I think they're all important. Maybe the lighting is less important from a practical point of view, but certainly not from an aesthetic viewpoint. Each part is important. They each play a role."

"True," he said. "A role in what?"

"Well, the waterfall," I answered.

"Exactly. The waterfall is the objective, just like your '3 and 3' they're all talking about. But each of these other components plays a vital, yet subordinate role. I think that's what you need...to show both the importance and yet the place of each supporting component."

That made sense. And gave me a starting point. Actually a very good starting point.

"Thanks, Granite," I said forcefully. "Thanks for the insight, and thanks for taking the initiative to come and share that insight."

"You're welcome," he said. "I hope it helps."

"Oh it definitely helps!" I said with enthusiasm.

I pulled out my cell phone as I walked away from Granite and his metaphor for my problem, and dialed Ruth as I looked for a quiet spot to sit in the shade. Overlooking the dazzling ocean, of course. That spectacular water could be seen from everywhere!

"Hi, Bill," she answered immediately.

"Hi, Ruth," I responded.

"I'm fine, thanks, before you ask; and he's not here, also before you ask. But," she continued, "if you call his cell right now you may get him before he boards his flight for Europe in a few minutes."

"Thanks," I said quickly, hanging up and dialing Frank's cell immediately.

"Hello?" he answered.

"Hi Frank, it's Bill. Ruth said I might catch you for a moment."

"She's right. I have a couple of minutes, but it has to be fast."

"OK. I need to know about teams within teams, or components of teams, or many interconnected parts of one team that don't seem connected at first glance," I said breathlessly.

"You mean 'subgroups,'" he responded immediately. "Most teams, especially large ones, must have subgroups to get things done and cover off differing points of view."

"Exactly," I exclaimed. "Subgroups! How do they work?"

"You only need to remember two things about subgroups," he said. "One, they function like mini-teams. Every rule that applies to the larger team must apply to them; for example, they each need their own leader.

"Secondly, they must be subordinate to the larger team. No subgroup can dominate the larger team of which it's a part, or hijack the larger mission. This is often hard when a team is working with a financial component, because everything can look like a financial goal. But it's not. They're a subgroup only. An important subgroup, but still a subgroup.

"OK?" he asked.

"More than OK!" I exclaimed. "Thanks. Have a good flight."

"You're welcome. Say hi to Bridget and the kids for me."

He hung up, and I now had something to work with.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Clearly what had been wrong was trying to get everyone to work only as one big team. I needed subgroups within that team, each with its own purpose and function – like Granite’s waterfall components – but each also part of a larger, more important whole.

The larger whole couldn’t succeed without the components, but the components, the subgroups, couldn’t overshadow the whole.

“OK. Clear,” I thought. “But do I form subgroups around functions (like all Finance together), or around tasks?” As I thought about it, and the waterfall, it was clear that subgroups had to be around aspects of the larger team mission. That mission needed each aspect to be completed for it to succeed. So, around tasks.

As I pulled over a pad of paper to start capturing my thoughts, and remembering Keith and Sue, I thought I should begin with each subgroup having at least one Finance person, and one Guest Relations person. I looked up and thought, “Good start. What’s next?”

“I think I need a framework of some sort,” I concluded. Either I would have to create it and just give it to them, or I could do it with them, letting them be in the room to better understand my thinking, and also contribute.

That was an easy decision.

Five minutes later I’d sent off an email to Mike, Sue, and Keith asking for (yet another!) early meeting the next morning, and had ordered some hot cinnamon rolls and coffee for us...I’ve found those rolls work wonders at keeping things from getting too serious too soon!

The next morning my colleagues filed in, somewhat apprehensively. I motioned them over to the warm cinnamon rolls and suggested we start there. That helped to thaw the tension, and while they ate I elaborated.

“OK gang. Two things. First, several points,” I turned to the flip chart and summarized as I went.

“Number 1 – the goal is unchanged: 3% improvement in guest satisfaction and 3% decrease in cost, with Mike as the leader ultimately responsible for delivering that outcome.

“Number 2 – we need subgroups.”

“What’s a subgroup?” interrupted Keith.

“Good question. Key question, actually. A subgroup is a smaller team within the larger team. It’s made up of some people from the larger team, but not everybody...and,” I said, thinking out loud, “it addresses a smaller portion of the problem being tackled by the larger team.”

“Can we bring new people onto the sub-team?” asked Mike.

“Nope. If you do, they automatically become part of the larger team. I’ll explain why in a moment.”

“OK,” he said.

Picking up where I’d left off, I went on. “Each subgroup will tackle a part of the larger goal. That is, they are not, under any circumstances, to be only functional. For example, we won’t have a ‘Finance’ sub-team. We might have a...” I thought for a moment...“...‘pricing’ sub-team that has a Finance focus, but which would include others from those areas affected, like Guest Services.”

“Oh, I see,” said Sue, my quick study. “So they’d have their own Unanimous Focus on a Common Goal or Unanimous Focus on a Common Sub-goal, in this case,” she said smiling.

“Exactly,” I said. “Number 3 – the larger team should decide on all the major tasks or issues to be addressed, and then set up a subgroup to handle each one.”

I was figuring out how to explain this as we went along, and doing quite well I thought. Maybe it was the cinnamon rolls.

"So let me see if I get this right?" asked Keith. "The larger team decides on the smaller projects and puts together smaller teams – 'subgroups' – to deal with those. Correct?"

"That's it," I said. "But there's more."

Keith, sensing this might take a while, went and grabbed another cinnamon roll – the one with the most icing, I noticed. My kind of guy.

"There are rules for all subgroups. Only two actually. Firstly, every subgroup is in fact a team, so all the Cornerstones apply. Each subgroup needs a leader, unanimous focus on a common goal (set by the larger team), and effective and frequent communication. It's the job of the leader of the larger team to make sure that happens."

"That makes really good sense," said Mike.

"Good. The second rule is the important one: each subgroup is subordinate to the larger team."

"What exactly does that mean?" asked Keith, trying to wipe extra icing off his now very sticky fingers.

"It means that any subgroup cannot drive the larger agenda, or hijack the direction or leadership of the larger team, or command use of resources at the expense of the needs of the larger whole. They are subordinate to the larger team. In effect, each subgroup team leader 'reports' to the overall team leader."

"Hmmm," said Keith, obviously digesting what this meant, as well as those two rolls.

Sue spoke up. "I like it. It's very clear. Let's test it and see if it resolves the problems we've been having. Clearly we'll need to build up the necessary subgroups later, but just as an example to see if it sorts out the friction we've been having, how's this?"

"Keith," she continued, "you could lead a subgroup that focuses on measuring the financial impact of our larger goal, and evaluating the potential impact of the decisions the other subgroups make. That way you can be sure it all comes

together, and, if you see a problem, flag it for all of us on the larger team. The appropriate subgroup would then have to go back and readdress it. Do I have it right, Bill?"

I thought for a moment, bearing in mind I was also just figuring this out. Her understanding meshed with my vision for how this would work, so I said, "That's it."

"Good," she said. "And similarly, I could lead a subgroup either measuring guest service, or, what I think what would be better, analyzing areas where we get lower scores and then bringing those results to the larger team for action or next steps. Yes," she went on without waiting for a response, "I like it. I think it'll work."

Back to my flip chart.

"Two rules," I reiterated.

"Rule 1. Every subgroup is a team.

"Rule 2. Every subgroup is subordinate to the larger team of which it is a part."

Mike jumped in. "I think I now see why new people either have to join the larger team, or not be brought in at all."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because the subgroup isn't a new team, with potentially new members. It's a subset of the existing team, still working on that larger common goal, and as such is just focusing on a piece of that goal as a subgroup. Clever."

"Yep," I responded, "you got it." It was also becoming much clearer in my own mind as they wrestled to understand it for themselves. Very helpful!

"So what do you guys think? Will this address the problems we've been having?"

"I believe it will," said Sue. "Obviously we need to build the right subgroups, and the right number of them. But if that's done properly, it should help a lot."

She looked thoughtfully at me and added, "And I think it will do something else.

It will give everyone on the larger team much more opportunity to contribute. The way it is now, it's almost too unwieldy, and those of us who are more senior naturally tend to lead the discussions more than I think is necessary."

"You're absolutely right," chimed in Keith immediately. "I know some of my own people have been feeling that they can't contribute as much as they'd like, and this will certainly fix that."

"Let's start!" said Mike. Obviously this took a huge load off of him, since I'm sure he'd been feeling increasingly guilty that the problems were all his fault somehow, rather than because we simply didn't have this new understanding in place.

"OK. Two things before we get started," I said. "Clearly we need a fourth Cornerstone so we don't forget this is an important team principle all on its own. How about using some of those seashells in the gift shop?"

"Not good," said Sue. "They'll break. How about some of those polished gems in the kids section they use to glue onto pictures?"

"Great," I confirmed. "Mike, could you please meet with the rest of your team and take them through what we just talked about, and introduce them to our new Cornerstone?"

"Sure thing," he confirmed, "and I'll set up the new subgroups. Maybe the three of us can meet later today and come up with a first look at the necessary subgroups and their leaders?" He looked inquiringly at Keith and Sue.

"Yep, sure," responded Sue.

"Happy to," said Keith with conviction.

"Good. Great suggestion, Mike," I said. I then added, "And there's one more thing we need to do. You do remember I said two things before we get started?"

"Oh, of course," replied Sue with undue emphasis.

"OK. Follow me."

I then led them out to where Granite was hard at work on the waterfall. I had

really come to understand how subgroups operated within the context of the larger whole, and their importance, by having Granite explain some of the less obvious aspects of his creation to me earlier.

“Granite,” I said, turning to him, “would you mind sharing with my colleagues here what you shared with me about the many components of the waterfall?”

“Sure,” he replied, and he then did a masterful job of taking them through the same understanding he gave me. I could see that by the time he was finished, the concept of subgroups had taken on an even clearer meaning for each of them.

“Thanks, Granite.” Turning to the group I added, “It really helps sometimes to have a tangible picture of intangible ‘teamwork,’ doesn’t it?”

“It certainly does,” responded Sue thoughtfully.

As they walked away and I headed back to my office, I felt a sense of relief not only that we seemed to have resolved the problem, but that also my own team seemed to be coming back together...“from the abyss, so to speak,” I thought.

And indeed that was the case. “3 and 3” got back in gear, I saw a number of smaller teams standing listening to Granite over the next couple of days, and I had hopes for great things to come from it.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Friday night, at the end of a very full week, Bridget and I decided to take the kids and go down to our "Sunset Drive-In." Once a month, we bring in a local deejay who plays some of the great old tunes, while we serve burgers, fries, and shakes on the beach. The beachfront is themed up like a '50s-era Diner and Drive-In, and the guests love it. Later, we bring in the classic old movies and play them on our huge outdoor screen.

Tonight, he was playing some of the early *Nylons* stuff, and I knew later would be doing some *Simon and Garfunkel*. The movies were *The Shaggy Dog*, which the kids would love, then *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, after the younger kids were asleep, which I would love.

It was a great evening. Our kids are 8 and 6, and they never seem to tire of chasing the waves up onto the beach, especially at sunset. Jack loves trying to splash his older sister, Natalie, when she gets too close to the waves, but so far she's too fast for him. I don't think that will last for much longer.

As we were walking back at the end of the evening, Mike came over and walked with us for a bit.

"Hi, Mike. How are you this evening?" asked Bridget.

"Fine, thanks. It's been quite a couple of weeks," he added. Then fell silent.

"Something on your mind, Mike?" I asked.

"Yeah. I think so. Can we talk tomorrow morning?"

Tomorrow was Saturday, but with living on property I'm never really off duty. "Sure," I replied. "How about you come by the office at 10:30? By then the kids and Bridget will be off to tennis, and I can slip away."

Bridget taught tennis at the resort, and tomorrow morning was KT – Kid's Tennis

– for any of the kids on property.

“Great. Thanks,” he said, and moved on off to his own cabana.

“What was that about?” asked Bridget.

“I don’t know,” I replied. “We’ve been working on that big project I told you about, and that Mike is leading. Maybe he’s run into another snag.”

“Hmmm,” she responded.

“Oh well,” I thought. “I’ll find out tomorrow.”

The next morning Mike came by right on time, and I suggested we sit outside in the shade. The view of the ocean – kind of rough today because of a fairly stiff breeze – is always mesmerizing for me. Any excuse to get out of the office into the warm Caribbean air.

“What’s up?” I asked.

“Problems,” he replied bluntly. “We had no trouble setting up the subgroups, with their individual leaders, and everybody bought in with no issues. Then we started to get to work.”

“Did you follow each Cornerstone in setting up the teams?” I asked.

“For sure. Everyone was positive about them and jumped all over that. The problems came later. First, Ron from Finance started coming to the team meetings late, then just started making excuses and not coming at all. He was on the team looking at what we give away to guests as complimentary, and obviously we need input from Finance on that.

“Then the team Karen is leading on how to improve the speed of our room service started falling apart. You know how we’ve always felt we should get the meals to the cabanas faster, so they’re hotter? Well her team is on that.”

“Why did it fall apart?” I asked.

“Well, some people felt they had better things to do with their time, and others, truth be told, I think wanted to be on some of the more ‘glamorous’ teams.

"And lastly," he drew a breath, "I think some of the people on the team are 'just there'. They're not giving it their all, or their best. When you have a few people who just unplug, it's sort of catching. It brings down the energy of everyone else.

"It's just not healthy or productive," he concluded, looking down at the ground, obviously discouraged.

"Ok. Let's order some Cokes and a big plate of French fries...it'll help us think," I added. Our fries are just truly the absolute best, anywhere. The kitchen cuts them thin, fried crispy brown and then lightly seasons them with a spicy salt. They're almost enough, all by themselves, to convince guests to stay an extra week.

While we waited, I got up and picked up a few napkins from the bar nearby, and Mike gave me several other similar examples where the subgroups weren't performing as enthusiastically as he felt they should.

Once the cold Cokes and hot fries arrived (no problem keeping things hot this close to the kitchen!), I'd had a chance to think through the problem.

"You eat," I said, "and let me doodle."

I pulled over a couple of napkins and jotted down some words. "Enthusiasm" was the first. "I think some of your team members lack enthusiasm," I said. "They started strong, but now that you're into the thick of it the enthusiasm is waning. It's hard slogging, less dramatic. And some of the people are just not fully engaged. Does that summarize it?"

"It does," he said. "It does exactly. And now that I think about it, the enthusiasm which was so strong at the beginning is absolutely wearing off for some people. They started well but are now wanting to get on to something new and more exciting. It'll be exciting when we're done," he added enthusiastically, "but right now there's some serious hard work to get through."

I put a box around "enthusiasm" and then took another napkin. "Consistency," I wrote on it.

"If someone is going to be on a team they need consistency. They must recognize

that it's not acceptable to 'drift' in and out, either practically, like Ron for example, or emotionally, like the people on Karen's team. You could say they need to be there in body and mind. And be there all the time, every time."

"Consistency," added Mike, "must also refer to their contributions. Anyone on a team needs to give it their all, all the time." He spoke with conviction, and I knew why. He had taken leadership of this project and the team very much to heart. He was giving it his all, wrestling with colleagues when necessary, and with problems as they came up. I boxed "consistency." He was right to expect a similar level of consistent effort from everyone else.

I paused. "Good word," I thought as I took another napkin, and then wrote the word "effort."

"I think 'effort' is also key," I emphasized. "Each team member must both recognize the need for effort, and be prepared to give their full effort." I put a box around that word as well.

As I laid the napkins out in front of us, we both paused in thought. Clearly we were on the same wavelength as we also both reached for the fries at the same time. We laughed and I deferred to him. Moments later, as we both savored the taste, I looked up and asked, "What do you think?"

"Good," he replied. "A good start." He paused. "But somehow we need to reinforce the fact that other team members are relying on one another. When any one person disengages, we all suffer."

"Hmmm. Good point." I pulled over a fourth napkin. "How about this?" I asked, writing "united" on the napkin. "Every team member must be united. United in their commitment to the others on the team, united in their effort to deliver the team's goal, and united in their determination to see that goal realized."

"United is the right word," confirmed Mike. He picked up my pen and put a nice neat box around "united." "Interesting," he went on. "These concepts apply equally well to the larger team as they do to the subgroups. They're what we displayed when Sue, Keith, and I came to you. We were dysfunctional for sure, but we at least wanted to resolve the problem."

"Absolutely you were," I confirmed. "I think these four words, put together, and

understood by everyone, will address this current problem.”

With that I moved aside the French fries, taking one more as I did so, and spread out the four napkins. Enthusiasm. Consistency. Effort. United.

“I think we have the makings of a fifth Cornerstone here,” I mused. We then rearranged the order of the napkins a few times, settling on Consistency, United, Enthusiasm, and Effort.

I then took another napkin and wrote: “Consistent, United, and Enthusiastic Effort.” “That’s it,” I said, passing it across to Mike, and reaching for my Coke.

He studied the phrase for a moment, then reached out, took the napkin, folded it carefully and put it into his pocket.

“Perfect!” he exclaimed.

“I’m good with this as another Cornerstone,” I went on, “and I’m convinced it’s crucial. So crucial in fact that we should explain it up front. Before we ask people to join a team, we need to set this as the expectation, and say, ‘If you’re unwilling to adopt this approach, then don’t agree to be on the team!’ This is a nonnegotiable.”

“When we put the first team together, and then later the subgroups, we missed this. It was an exciting start, and people were keen. Then the subgroups created renewed energy, but we didn’t really make clear what was expected over the longer term, or the level of personal commitment and discipline that would be required. If we had, then the standard would have been clear right from the get-go.”

“So,” I went on, “we need to use these Cornerstones not just as reminders, but also as guides when we’re building teams.”

At that moment I had a bit of a “light bulb” moment, as Francois calls it when he gets a flash of inspiration. There was more power in these Cornerstones than I’d realized when we started with that first black chip of rock.

More thought was required on this. “Later,” I thought to myself.

Turning to Mike, I went on. “Does that make sense?”

"It does, and I'm going to bring everyone together, explain this new Cornerstone, what it means, and what the expectation now is. If anyone wants to bow out, I'm going to say OK, let them, and then we'll find replacements!"

"I doubt anyone will bail," I said. "This will set a standard of expectation. We have good people, and once they know this is the standard for individual performance on the team, they'll recommit, I think."

"I hope so," he said, "because they all can add value."

"We need something to represent this Cornerstone...how about using one of those beads in the craft area?" I added.

Mike thought. "OK. Our pockets are getting awfully full of these 'Cornerstones' and their odd shapes and sizes, but they do help us remember. I'll get them for everybody."

He stood up, smiled, grabbed the last couple of fries, and left. I had had my eyes on those fries.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Monday was the day I set aside once a month to spend an entire morning walking the property, checking in with as many of the staff as I could, greeting guests on the paths, and generally keeping my finger on the pulse of the property.

As I started out, I looped down to the beach to begin my tour. It gave me a few minutes to think before meeting people. My mind went back to my conversation of a few weeks ago with Mike when we'd come up with our newest Cornerstone.

"Not bad," I thought. "I think I solved that problem on my own! No Granite and no Frank!" I wasn't sure I could do it again, but it had certainly begun to look like I was getting a better understanding of teams and what made them tick.

By noon, I had heard about Mrs. Cushing's poodle and what she was sure was sunstroke and did we have anything in the gift shop for poodle sunstroke (no, but shade and cool water on his paws might help); the new Sea-Doos and how popular they were (and did I want to race tonight... "Is the Pope Catholic?" as Bridget is fond of saying); the full plot of tonight's movie from Prof. Abernathy (it was his favorite; he'd seen it seven times); and the need for more fresh fruit weekly (the chef was using much more fruit in his cooking these days as the weather got hotter. Hotter? It was always hot here!). I learned that our new loyalty program was very popular with repeat guests (could Dr. and Mrs. Prather have exactly the same room next year?), and that our out-of-service equipment was now at an all-time low (Francois thought we should review the hourly rates we paid his mechanics).

A normal day.

What wasn't normal was all the great feedback I got from the staff about the impact the "3 and 3" team was having, and the incredible enthusiasm everybody felt for the contribution they could make as a member of that team, and their own subgroup.

Amazing.

We were already seeing improvements in our guest service scores, and I'd been seeing the bottom line steadily improving. We were definitely winning.

On my way back to the office I swung by to see how Granite was doing. The waterfall was taking shape slowly, but nicely, and Granite was, as usual, covered in mortar and stone dust. His purple bandanna was soaked with sweat and he was whistling softly to himself.

"Hi, Granite," I called out. "It's looking great!"

"Hi, Bill. Yep. It's coming along more quickly now that I can spend time laying stone."

We stared at the magnificent structure taking shape.

"It will certainly be a focal point," I commended him.

"I'm glad you're pleased," he replied. "How's your team stuff going?"

"Great," I enthused. "We're close to the end of this current project I think. After that I'm going to move teams and teamwork much deeper into the organization."

"Sounds good," he commented. "Anything you need to add?"

"I don't think so. We're using 'Cornerstones' to help us, based on that first conversation you and I had, and I think I have a way to make them much more a part of what we do with teams. But I haven't quite figured that out yet."

"Nifty," he said.

I was about to say good-bye and turn to leave when he said, "You know, Bill, I was thinking about your teams as I began to build up the stone. One thing which I think has been very much in evidence here is that people are willing to share their resources. I'm not sure that's all that common."

"I notice that there's no real territorial defense going on. People seem willing to jump in and help whenever there's a need. I hear a lot about this in the caf; there's a real willingness to help out one another. I see it here too. Whenever I need a hand moving stone, or with the plumbing or carpentry, your team is

Chapter Fifteen

always willing to pitch in and help. Willingly, and with enthusiasm. It's great, and something you don't want to lose sight of."

"Thanks, Granite, that's very encouraging," I said. "Thanks very much. It's maybe something we take for granted, but I'll take your comments to heart." And with that I did say good-bye and made my way back to my office.

Shared resources. Interesting.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The next day was our weekly staff meeting, complete with snacks as usual. I felt I should provide a healthy alternative periodically, so this time we had an assortment of cut veggies and dip.

The team gathered quickly and were more animated than I'd seen them in some time. They'd certainly gelled more as a team over these past several weeks. It was good to see.

As I moved to the first item on the agenda – wages for casual staff – I was immediately interrupted.

“Uh...Bill? We have something to say.”

It was Keith, looking both excited and nervous at the same time. He kind of looked like Jack did last night when Bridget found him in the kitchen with a half-eaten Oreo in one hand and the other hand reaching into the bag for more.

I looked at Keith.

“Yes?” I said, reaching for a carrot. A leader must model the right behavior, even if carrots don't come close to cinnamon rolls, in my opinion.

“I've been elected by your direct reports, in my official capacity as our CFO, to advise you of our observations, findings, and recommendations.”

He was definitely nervous for some reason...he sounded like my old Political Science professor at university.

“We feel,” he went on, “after working on your ‘3 and 3’ mandate that...well... we could improve profit by 20% and take guest service scores up to 92%,” he finished breathlessly.

They all looked at me.

I looked at them.

"Wow." I said slowly. "Really?"

And then the dam burst and they all began talking at once.

Sue, as expected, ended up with the floor.

"We know it's a big commitment to make to you, and Frank by extension, so Keith is a bit nervous. But after we've seen what's possible with teams, and doing the work on the '3 and 3' mandate, we see that very much more is possible. And we think we now know how to get it," she concluded forcefully.

"Wow!" I repeated.

Juanita jumped in. "We need to build more teams, and engage many more people; but with the Cornerstones as a guide, we think it can be done. And we have a plan!"

With that she passed the floor back to Keith, and we spent the next couple of hours together as they talked me through what they had in mind. I had a number of suggestions, many of which they accepted, some of which they rejected. But when we finally wrapped up, we all felt like it was a real possibility. And all the veggies were gone. Amazing!

"This is exciting!" I said with enthusiasm. "However, it's going to put a lot of strain on everyone once all these teams kick in. Everyone's time will be at a premium, and so will resources."

Pam spoke up. "We discussed that, and realized we'll just have to be willing to share, be flexible, and recognize this is a bigger priority than most other things."

"OK" I replied, thinking of Granite's earlier comments about the willingness to share and work together being one of our strengths.

"Give me a day or so before we kick this into gear. I've been thinking about the power of our Cornerstones, and have some ideas how we can use them far more effectively, which could be very helpful as we embark on this initiative."

They left, chatting among themselves, glad their suggestion was so well received

(as if I would turn that initiative down!), and really motivated to show what they could do and demonstrate what they were convinced was possible.

After they left, I closed my door and stared out the window, thinking. The early morning sun was up, and glistening off the droplets of water coating all the lush foliage from the sprinklers that had just shut off. With the ocean waves rolling gently onto the beach, the view was intoxicating.

After a few minutes, I checked my watch, then reached out and picked up the phone.

"Good morning, Ruth. Any chance I could get a few minutes before he starts his staff meeting?"

"Good morning yourself, Bill. I'll check." She put me on hold for a moment then came back on the line. "He has a few minutes free; give it a moment while he finishes up on another call. How are the kids doing?" she asked. "Enjoying the sun and sand?"

"They love it," I answered. "They never seem to run out of things to pick up on the beach, or of caves to explore. Just yesterday Jack was sure he'd found some pirate markings scratched on one of the rocks, and I think is spending today trying to see if they're part of a larger map. If he finds treasure, I'll be sure to share some with you." I laughed.

"Tell him I'll be waiting for my chest of gold!" she replied "Oh... he's free. I'll put you through. Have a good day."

"You too," I replied.

"Hi, Bill," Frank answered in an unusually cheerful tone.

"You sound cheery today," I answered.

"I just got off the line with Mario, who says the numbers this quarter are looking very good."

Mario was our CFO. Brilliant, charming, and talented beyond belief. We were lucky to have held on to him this long. There was no question he was destined for Head Office, and likely the worldwide CFO job when it next opened up.

"And," continued Frank, "he says your numbers are starting to help. You've moved that P&L from a sore spot to a contributor. Not nearly enough yet, but you're definitely headed in the right direction. Good work."

"Thanks, Frank. That's kind of why I'm calling."

"Oh?"

"We're about to embark on a new initiative that has the potential to really make a positive impact on the bottom line, which is good. But I'm worried that it will draw on so many resources that we'll see unintended consequences in other areas, which may hurt us in ways we're not yet able to identify."

"How is your group at working together?" he asked.

"They're great. And they've agreed up front that this will require a lot of sharing of resources. They're geared up to support one another in whatever ways are required. But I'm still concerned," I concluded.

"You're not worried about them collaborating well, if I understand you. You're worried about the unforeseen. It's a very legitimate concern, if what you're intending has large-scale ramifications on resource utilization. However," he went on, "I think you need to broaden your definition of resources."

"How so?" I asked.

"When people are committed to working hard together, especially on something which excites the imagination, they often believe that the resources they need to share are essentially the 'hard' ones: time, people, capital, and equipment."

"That's exactly what they mean," I confirmed. "It's what they've talked about, and they get it."

"Yes," he continued, "but the really powerful resources everyone must share are the 'soft' ones."

"Soft ones?" I queried.

"Yes. These include ideas, passion, determination to persevere, courage to challenge, and innovation. If the group is equally committed to share these

things, then as the initiative unfolds those who best know the implications of decisions and actions will step in. In this way," he went on, "you have a form of 'safety net' against what you're calling unforeseen consequences. You can have confidence that when they see something looming they'll speak up well in advance."

I thought about this for a moment. I hadn't considered "shared resources" to include both the hard and the soft. But Frank was right; the best chance for success, and the antidote to my concern, lay in each person being as willing to share their thinking as they were to share their time.

"OK, Frank. That's extremely helpful. And I think you're right. If I can get that mindset across, to everybody, it will address my worry. Thanks, yet again."

"Hey," he interjected. "Aren't you going to tell me what you have planned?"

"Nope," I said, smiling. "If it works, Mario will tell you the result in the next six months. Bye," I said, hanging up before he could press me further.

He really is a smart guy; his advice was spot on.

I needed now to figure out how to implement it, and also deal with the ideas around Cornerstones that were taking shape in my mind...maybe I could kill two birds with one stone here.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

At the end of the day, I closed up the office a little earlier than usual. I needed to walk and think a bit before I had all the pieces clear in my mind. Somehow I ended up at the site where Granite was just cleaning up after another day of working on what was going to be a truly stunning addition to the resort.

Today his neck scarf looked to have started out a light sky blue, but by now was caked with dust and stained dark from sweat. He was wearing a floppy white tee shirt with a stencil of a Canadian grizzly bear in sunglasses, putting on Sunspray sunscreen. Where he ever got that I can't imagine. We certainly didn't sell them here, but we should...it was terrific.

"It's truly looking great," I remarked. "It's going to be just what I had in mind."

"Yeah, it is coming along well," he said with an uncharacteristic touch of pride. "Still, a lot to do. The higher I go, the longer it takes though. At each level I have to erect scaffolding, and bring up the stones. But it's coming."

We grew silent as we imagined the finished product.

"Neat!" I said with conviction.

"Yeah."

I then began telling him about the major initiative my team wanted to start, and how it could make a big difference provided all went according to plan. As we talked, he gathered up the last of his things for the day, and we slowly made our way to his cabana at the far end of the beach. "A beautiful spot," I thought. One of my favorites.

He listened quietly, then said, "It sounds terrific. Are you concerned in some way?"

"No," I answered thoughtfully and somewhat hesitantly. "Not anymore. I think my last issue was dealt with this morning."

"Uh huh," he said. "You sound unsure and I do have a thought."

"Yes?"

"Many years ago I watched a video about a team that won the America's Cup, which is one of the most sought-after prizes in the world of competitive sailing. The sailboats have a couple dozen crew members. One of the keys to success for the winning yacht was the realization that there was no place for individual egos. They captured this in the phrase, 'The only ego is the ego of the boat.' I never forgot that."

"Now when I'm working on a project – in this case your waterfall – I always keep in mind that the outcome is bigger than me. There's no place for my ego, or of anyone helping me, to get their own way. On the racing yachts if the helmsman, or any one of the crew, put their ego ahead of the boat then the whole will suffer."

"I think it's going to be similar with your next big project."

"In what way?" I asked, intrigued with his observations.

"Well," he went on, "based on what you've told me, there are many situations about to come up where individual egos may try to trump the larger project."

"Possibly," I said hesitantly, "but as you said yourself, everyone around here already works very well together."

"I'd be careful not to confuse working well together with managing one's own ego," he responded. "I may personally want to put a large rock up high on the waterfall, just to show off, so to speak. 'Look how big a rock the stonemason put way up there!' coming from some impressed observer may feed my ego, but it's not right. The stone could look out of place, or put too much weight on one side, or not hold the mortar as well for the long term. I shouldn't put it there... the only ego should be that of the waterfall, or the boat in my earlier example."

"Hmmm," I muttered. More to think about. "And just when I thought I had all the pieces in place." I thought to myself.

We grew silent as we watched the sun sink quickly below the horizon. It's

amazing how fast it goes down here, always leaving behind a glorious sunset of reds, golds, and touches of lingering blue. Soon it would be gone completely and the shimmering golden water would turn to liquid silver until the sun rose again tomorrow. Magical.

Turning to Granite, I said, "Ego, huh?"

"Yep."

"OK. If we recognize that as a potential problem, what we're really saying is that at the root of ego is people losing sight of what the real focus should be, and the need to not let individual agendas get in the way. Does that make sense?"

"I hadn't thought of it like that," he replied, "but yes, I think that's the essence."

I thought for a moment, then went on.

"If we think further down that path it leads to a more profound conclusion." I paused to choose the words that would capture my still slightly fuzzy thinking..." Here's what I'm beginning to understand...we need everyone to intentionally manage their ego!" I said triumphantly.

"Intentionally manage?" he asked.

"Yeah. For example, people who commit to work on a team may need to periodically suppress their ego, perhaps when another idea is being put forward, or perhaps when the team has chosen to go in a direction different from the one they would have chosen."

"Got it," he replied quickly. "And," he added, "the suppression must be temporary, because otherwise they'll never speak up or share what they're thinking. Everyone must be willing to operate this way all the time if the entire team is to consistently function at its optimum level."

"And," I then quickly added, "this mindset needs to be ongoing. It can't be something done once and then not again. It's a crucial ongoing team behavior, not a 'one and done.'" I drew a breath.

"Periodic...and temporary...suppression...of the ego," he said, putting the words together carefully.

“Periodic and temporary suppression of the ego,” I repeated. “It’s essential!”

We looked at each other at the same moment, recognizing we’d just put the all the pieces together, then turned to the darkening sky, still smiling.

This piece about the ego was good, really really good. Somehow it also seemed to fit with my earlier conversation with Frank – sort of the flip side to sharing soft resources. Share, but don’t dominate.

And it just felt right – it was the missing piece I’d been unconsciously trying to figure out.

“This has been great, Granite. Thanks. Very, very helpful. The only ego is the ego of the resort! I’m off,” I said. “Have a good night.”

“It’s been fun,” he replied.

And with that, he headed in, and I turned towards my own cottage, deep in thought.

The next morning I decided to quickly get through the regular stuff, and then clear the rest of the day to put together all I’d learned about teams and how they should operate. I felt this was a very important step before releasing my excited staff to “change the world,” as Mike had described this new initiative to me at dinner last night.

Lots of emails later, and one visit from some parents who wanted to know why “little Toddy” couldn’t climb up the three-story decorative rock wall in our front lobby. Apparently he’d started his effort to “summit the wall” before Corinne, our concierge, saw him, realized the danger, and asked him to climb down. It took some persuading, I was told.

Fortunately, he had made it back to base camp safely, but his parents seemed to think her request in some way would damage his “adventurous spirit for taking control of the world around him.” He was five years old, and given that two days ago he was rescued from trying to climb into our mammoth aquarium (“to teach the fishes to swim faster”), I didn’t feel it was little Toddy who needed issues of “taking control” addressed.

With that, and the day's check signings behind me, I sat back and took stock. I needed to have Operations bring me a few things, and I needed my team to set aside tomorrow morning to meet with me. And they'd want food. I made the necessary calls, grabbed a pad of squared paper (it seems easier for me to think clearly when I can line my thoughts up as neatly vertically as horizontally) and a couple of pens, and headed out.

Ten minutes later I was down at the beach.

"Hi, Jim. How are you today?" I asked.

"Great, Mr. B. A little sad though, truth be told, that I still can't match your times on the Sea-Doo course. You were on fire the other evening! But I will, eventually," he said confidently.

"Dream on." I laughed.

"I'm going to take one of our Cats out for a short sail. I'll be back in an hour or so."

"OK, Mr. B. You don't normally do this kind of stuff in the middle of the day, though. Everything OK?" he asked kindly.

"Yep. Just fine," I replied. "I'm going to take the rest of the day to think through a bunch of stuff, and thought it'd be good to go out on the water for a bit to clear my mind and shift perspective."

"Sounds cool. You sure you don't want one of the Sea-Doos?" he asked. "Not that you need the practice," he added with a smile.

"No thanks. I think it'd be kind of hard to think about anything besides controlling the machine if I were to take one of those. The catamaran is fine, and will give me time to sort through my thoughts."

"Great! Let me help you get it into the water."

And with that I took off for a leisurely sail, and the opportunity for some uninterrupted thinking time. By the time I was back, I had most of what I felt needed to be done clear in my mind.

"Thanks, Jim," I said as we pulled the Cat back on shore. "Have a great rest of the day."

"You too, Mr. B.," he called out as I made my way to one of the small, secluded round tables overlooking the bay. The shade had just spilled into that area from the lush trees overhead, and with the warm breeze blowing onshore, it was truly idyllic.

I ordered a bucket of ice, three Cokes, a burger, and fries (of course) from Petrov when he circled by with menus, then pulled out my pad and pens, and went to work.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

There was no question in my mind that if we were to have any hope at all of successfully pulling off this project, it could only be done if the whole resort were involved and, as my own staff had pointed out, we used the power of teamwork.

That led inevitably to the Cornerstones. They were the key to success.

I reached into my pocket and pulled out the ones we'd collected over the past months, and were using to frequently remind ourselves of the various things we'd learned. Granite's chip of black rock now had the rough edges worn off, and was smooth to the touch. It certainly had helped a lot at the beginning of our journey.

I held the polished gem, thinking how close we'd come to going off the rails before we'd figured out subgroups.

As I laid each stone out on the table, I thought back to the lesson that we'd had to wrestle through before we'd come to realize the power of each principle. And now I had a sixth for Shared Resources – meaning both hard and soft – and a seventh, around ego.

Yes, they were definitely key, but I was convinced they could be used much more powerfully than we had to date. That was what I was thinking through earlier on the Cat as I sailed around the bay.

"OK," I thought to myself. "First things first."

"We need these Cornerstones to be more durable, uniform, and readily available if every staff member on property is going to use them repeatedly."

I picked up my phone and asked Lynn back at the office to please check and see if Operations had left anything on my desk in the last hour or so. I held on until she came back and said, "Yes, they have."

“Great,” I replied. “Would you mind sending someone down here with them for me?” I then told her where I was, said thanks, mentioned as an afterthought that Petrov was bringing me lunch in case she could catch him in the kitchen, and moved to the next item on my mental checklist.

“We have seven Cornerstones now,” I thought, and then wrote them down on my pad, reordering them slightly from the way in which we’d discovered them, and adding colors. It looked like this:

The Seven Cornerstones of Teamwork

Black – Leadership

Green – Unanimous Focus on a Common Goal

Light Blue – Clearly Defined Roles for Subgroups

Yellow – Shared Resources

Purple – Effective and Frequent Communication

Dark Blue – Consistent, United, and Enthusiastic Effort

Red – Periodic and Temporary Suppression of the Ego

There they were! Our guide to success...

Now to add the pieces I’d figured out on my sail...the guidelines for use. It took shape like this:

The Five Laws of Cornerstones

1. Every team member needs to bring their Cornerstones to every team meeting.
2. The Seven Cornerstones should be used when people first meet to set up the team.
3. During team meetings, Cornerstones should be used at least once – a “Stones Check” – in the middle of the meeting. The team leader is responsible for this.

4. Cornerstones should be used at the end of the meeting by the team leader, who should call for a “Stones Check” and ask the following question:

“When we next meet together, what’s the one area which we should try to improve upon?”

5. Anyone can call for a “Stones Check” whenever they wish, if they feel it will improve team performance.

That was it. Pretty succinct, I thought, and clear, I hoped.

While walking home the previous night, I had come up with the idea of using Cornerstones to regularly improve performance, realizing how powerful that would be. However, it was only now, while trying to capture the idea in writing, that the phrase “Stones Check” had come to mind, and on the catamaran that these guidelines had crystallized.

“Not bad,” I thought to myself. “And this without something to munch on!” Which reminded me...I looked up, and just at that moment Petrov appeared with lunch. Perfect timing.

“Here you go, Mr. B.,” he said.

“Thanks Petrov. It looks delicious – and hot!”

“Yep. We’ve got that problem nailed,” he said proudly. “Oh, and I was asked to bring you this as well.”

He handed me the package someone from Operations had left on my desk.

“Great. Thanks for the extra effort, Petrov. I appreciate it.”

“No problem, Mr. B. Enjoy your lunch.”

With that he left and I started on the French fries, poured a Coke over lots of ice, and opened the package.

While I was working on the burger with one hand, I sorted through the material I’d asked for with the other.

I'd remembered that whenever we had a large event, like a wedding or holiday celebration, the Operations people filled the room with flowers in large vases, and that they typically used many small glass stones at the bottom of the vases to hold the flowers in place. In fact, the flowers in my own office were done like this, and I'd used some of those light green glass stones earlier for our Unanimous Focus on a Common Goal Cornerstone.

I thought I'd recalled seeing these stones in several colors. When I'd called Operations earlier this morning I'd asked about that, and what colors they had. We in fact did have several different colors, and I'd used those when making up my list a few minutes ago.

As I felt the glass stones, they seemed perfect! They were smooth to the touch, and just heavy enough to be substantial without being too weighty. Even though they were transparent, they were not at all fragile. They felt good to handle, were colorful, just the right size, and I was told that we had hundreds of them.

Perfect. They were now our new Cornerstones.

I then looked at the other item they'd included.

I had noticed that in our gift shop we packaged our seashells in a nice, durable, lightweight mesh bag, with an easy-to-use drawstring. The bag was only about three inches long, and an inch-and-a-half or so wide. I had thought it would be ideal for holding our new Cornerstones.

I knew for certain that we had thousands of them, since taking home a bag of seashells was a very popular memento. We sold the bags with shells in them, or, for a dollar, the kids could buy an empty bag and fill it themselves from shells they collected on their own. We sold hundreds of empty bags every week – all with the Sunspray logo, of course!

Putting down what was left of the burger, I selected seven of the colorful glass stones and put them in one of the bags, pulling the drawstring tight.

As I hefted it in my hand, I knew Cornerstones had come to life, and come of age!

Setting it down, I finished off the burger, poured another Coke, and started

thinking through the next steps I had in mind.

By the time the fries were done, the third Coke consumed, and the remaining ice melted, I was also done and ready for my meeting with the team tomorrow. I was excited about what I'd worked out, and now impatient for the project to get started.

"We're off and running," I said out loud as I packed up my notes, and pocketed our very first official bag of Cornerstones.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The next morning the gang all filed in, clearly full of both nervous excitement about what was about to begin, and also curiosity about what I'd been up to.

"Help yourself," I said as they came in, pointing to the full spread of goodies I'd had the Hospitality group lay out for this morning's meeting.

"Cookies, brownies, and milk?" exclaimed Juanita. "At this time of the morning?"

Juanita was clearly the most health-conscious one on my team, so her outburst was not unexpected.

"Never too early," said Mike, already picking up his second warm brownie. Jack and his love of Oreos had nothing on Mike!

"Now Juanita, while I do personally agree with Mike, you will notice I had a large selection of our Ultimate Fruit and Nut Snack Mix made up especially for you, right behind the Cap'n Crunch cereal," I said smiling. She rolled her eyes and went hunting for her munchies of choice.

After everyone had made up a plate, bowl, glass, or cup of their favorites – fruit, cereal, chocolate, coffee, Coke, or whatever (we really did have a wide variety of preferences among us) – they settled down expectantly.

"Let me begin by saying how pleased I am that you all came to me with this idea for what I'm now calling the Super Project without any prompting from me to do so. That level of initiative and commitment is rare. Thank you."

They all murmured words that were probably things like "You're welcome," though it was hard to tell with most of them still eating.

"As I thought about what this could mean," I continued, "I realized that to pull this off we had to formalize what we'd learned about teams over recent months. More than that, we had to be absolutely sure we had all the team principles

nailed. So I thought through where we were and asked myself if anything was missing. I concluded we were almost there, but not quite."

I then took them through what I'd learned about the expanded meaning of "Shared Resources," and then "Periodic and Temporary Suppression of the Ego."

"What do you think?" I asked.

Clearly they were all thinking through what I'd had much more time to consider. That was OK.

Sue was the first to speak up.

"I think, Bill, that this is brilliant. You're absolutely right, and without the addition of ego, and the expanded understanding around sharing resources, we could have easily fallen – unwittingly, but still fallen – into a hidden trap or missed some key opportunities."

There was a little more discussion around the room, but more for clarity than anything else.

"We've got it, Bill," summarized Keith. "And we're with you."

"Good," I said. "OK. Based on that, here's where we now are."

I then handed everyone a mesh bag of Cornerstones similar to the one I'd made for myself yesterday. "I made these up last night," I went on, "from material we have in inventory. I think they're great, and they can replace what we've been carrying around in our pockets."

While they opened their own bags and admired the stones inside, I passed out a sheet of paper with a copy of the seven Cornerstones and their colors, which I'd made yesterday.

"This is a summary of what each one means, and which is which, by color," I explained.

"Cool," exclaimed Mike.

"I like it." This from Francois, who is always an early adopter.

Pam said enthusiastically, "Great idea, Bill. And they're cool."

Juanita jumped in. "These are great. Just what we need."

"Absolutely," confirmed Keith.

"Bill, these are perfect," said Sue. "I need the same thing for everyone in my area. Now."

"You've read my mind, Sue. There's enough in inventory for a bag of Cornerstones for every staff member on property. But, there's more to come. Let me go on," I continued.

They started to put their stones back in their bags and look up at me.

"Hold on. Don't put them away yet. Here's my next idea. I'm going to ask a question, and I want everyone to individually select the one Cornerstone that you feel best answers the question. No prior discussion with anyone else!"

"Once you have your answer, hold the appropriate Cornerstone in your closed hand. That way we'll all know when everyone's made their decision, but we can't see what those decisions are."

The group looked at me with playful expressions. Everyone loves participating in things, and my group was certainly no exception. They were enjoying the process.

"Right. Here's the question: 'What's the one thing the team in this room is best at when working together?'"

There was a pause as everyone thought, then a rustle as they all selected a Cornerstone.

"We'll go around the circle," I then said. "When it's your turn, explain which stone you selected, and then why. You start, Sue," I said as she was sitting on my right.

"I picked the dark blue stone," she said. "Consistent, United, and Enthusiastic Effort – because I think we are all committed to do whatever it takes to make this resort world class in terms of both service and profit."

All around the room heads nodded.

"Francois?"

"I picked the yellow stone," he said. "We share resources really well." He paused. "Although with your expanded definition I may need to rethink that. We could probably still use some work on the soft side of this," he added thoughtfully.

"Mike?" I said, turning to him.

"No question," he said quickly. "The green stone. Unanimous Focus on a Common Goal. We all want the same thing – profit and great guest experiences."

"Keith?"

"I picked the same stone as Mike, for the same reason," he said holding it up. "The goal is what drives us."

I turned to Juanita. "What about you?" I asked. "Well," she said, "I agree with everyone else, and really wanted to pick more than one Cornerstone. But on reflection, I ended up with the black one. Leadership. I really think you provide great leadership, without which many of these other things wouldn't happen, so I felt that it had to be the black one."

"Thanks," I said, turning to my left. "Pam?"

"Well, it was hard to pick, but I ended up with the light blue one, Clearly Defined Roles for Subgroups. I picked that one because I think we all know exactly what we're each responsible for, we deliver on those responsibilities while still helping others when necessary, and we don't have much in the way of politics here."

"Neat," I said. I went on. "I picked the red stone. Periodic and Temporary Suppression of the Ego, because I really think we work well together, we listen to one another, and we don't generally put our own egos first. And because it's my newest learning," I said smiling, "and I'm only just realizing its importance."

The group was silent after this, each thinking through what had just happened.

"Wow. That was cool," said Sue.

"How so?" I asked.

"Well." She paused. "Because everyone's viewpoint was different, we got to hear those viewpoints, and there was no right answer. It just allowed all of us to hear what others thought without passing judgment."

"Yeah," jumped in Mike. "Everyone got a say, and it wasn't influenced by someone else because we had to select our Cornerstone before anyone said anything."

"And it was fast," said Keith. "I liked that. Quick, impactful, and clear."

"It was clear," interjected Pam, "because we had a standard. This sheet Bill handed out that defined each Cornerstone gave us common language and great clarity. We weren't all just making up words to try and summarize what we felt."

"It was a simple, safe way to get everyone's point of view heard quickly," summarized Sue. "Very cool."

I was thrilled with how well this had worked!

"Exactly," I said. "This is what I think we should call a "Stones Check." Everyone on every team simply follows the process we just went through."

"Now that's definitely slick, and powerful," said Mike.

There were murmurs of excited agreement from everybody.

"Ok. I'm glad you like it, but there's more. Let's do another Stones Check, but with a different question."

"All right," they said, almost in unison as they held the seven stones in their hands and looked at me expectantly.

"Here it is." I went on. "What's the one area of teamwork we need, as a team, to most improve if we're going to be successful with this Super Project?"

Obviously this was a much harder question, because I could see everyone unconsciously playing with their glass Cornerstones while they thought. Keith, the Finance guy, naturally had them all neatly lined up in a row; Juanita was shaking

them in her hand like loose change; and Francois was trying, unsuccessfully, to stack a couple. In another moment they all settled on a stone and submitted a loosely closed fist.

"All right," I said. "Let's start with you first, Pam."

"Hmmm. Tough question," she said. "I finally settled on the green stone: 'Unanimous Focus on a Common Goal.' I think for this to succeed we need to really stay focused. I'm afraid that the day-to-day pressures of running the resort will pull us off strategy. That's a big risk I think."

"What about you?" I asked Juanita.

"I chose the black one, 'Leadership.' Leadership at many levels. First, you. You need to keep this as a priority, and I think we will have to make sure we follow the learnings we've had around Cornerstones."

"Then leadership from each of us as we work with our own teams. And I agree with Pam. We're really going to have to keep our eyes on this goal so it doesn't get lost with all the other things we have to do, and crises that occur."

"Then after that, leadership of the subgroups that will be formed. We're going to have to help coach them, and make sure they really understand the Cornerstones," she concluded.

"Great points, Juanita. I have some thoughts in that area that we'll come back to.

"Keith?"

And with that we continued around the room. Everyone had a salient point to make, and it was easy for us to follow one another's comments because we were all using the language of Cornerstones.

When we'd finished, I paused a moment then said, somewhat in awe at how impactful it had been, "That was useful!"

"It certainly was," echoed Sue. "I think this process is killer! If we did this often enough we'd stay on track, and I think continue to get better and better!" She was excited by the questions and the process, and had no sooner paused to draw a breath than everyone else jumped in.

I gave them a chance to think out loud about what they'd just experienced, and then intervened. "I'm thrilled this worked so well, and that you all like it. Let's take a short break; I'll order up some hot coffee and more ice. Juanita, you can have a couple more brownies," I said teasingly, "and then I'll walk you all through my next steps."

We broke up for twenty minutes or so, and the gang seemed truly energized by what we'd done so far. "A good start," I thought. "A very good start."

When they'd reassembled, with refilled glasses or mugs, and replenished bowls of chips, cookies, nuts, or candy – again depending on personal preference (light on the fruit and nuts, I noticed!) I then handed out the other list I'd made.

"OK, gang," I began. "Here's the next step."

Francois interrupted. "Just before you move on, Bill, I had an idea over break. What would you think of making up small laminated cards, about the size and shape of a credit card, with a picture of each stone, in color? Then beside the stone we write what it represents. We could then hang that card from the bag's drawstring. That way we'd always have what each stone means right there, which would help not only us, but also all our other teams."

"Outstanding idea," I responded. "Great! We'll do just that."

Everyone nodded their agreement. What a super idea!

"OK, before I was so rudely interrupted by Francois' brilliance," I went on, "let's take a look at these five principles. I think they'll effectively codify how we, and all our teams, should use the Cornerstones." I picked up the sheet of paper I had just handed out and on which I'd copied my "The Five Laws of Cornerstones" from yesterday.

"Take a look at these. This will, I think, guarantee that each team stays on track, and that the Cornerstones remain top of mind."

They all studied my list.

The Five Laws of Cornerstones

1. Every team member needs to bring their Cornerstones to every team meeting.
2. The Seven Cornerstones should be used when people first meet to set up the team.
3. During team meetings, Cornerstones should be used at least once – a “Stones Check” – in the middle of the meeting. The team leader is responsible for this.
4. Cornerstones should be used at the end of the meeting by the team leader, who should call for a “Stones Check” and ask the following question:
“When we next meet together, what’s the one area which we should try to improve upon?”
5. Anyone can call for a “Stones Check” whenever they wish, if they feel it will improve team performance.

“Some things stand out to me,” I went on. “Law Number One is pretty straightforward. Then, I’m convinced Law Number Two will bring real value and help a lot right from the beginning.”

Keith jumped in. “I see what you mean! We need to begin with Cornerstones, on every team. For example, for us on the Super Project: you’re the leader, we all get the goal, we should set up sub-teams we each lead...”

Mike interrupted. “Keith’s right! If we’d done this at the beginning of ‘3 and 3’ it would have been a huge help.”

“That’s it,” I said. “Use Cornerstones to design each team before it gets going. And remember, each subgroup is also a team.”

I looked around the room. Obviously they all saw the power of this Law.

“Law Number Three is obvious, now that you know what a ‘Stones Check’ is. It’s there to help that team solve problems in the moment, and stay on track.”

“Law Number Four is there so the teams are sure to focus on improvement. We want them to constantly get better, and this will do that.”

Francois again spoke up. "Very neat, Bill. Use them to get it right at the beginning with Law Number Two, to stay on track with Law Number Three, and then to improve with Law Number Four. That's very clever," he said punctuating his understanding with a large bite of chocolate cookie.

"Yep. Cool, huh? And then Law Number Five is to give everyone the freedom to use a mechanism that's safe to stay connected, or flag it when they feel the team is no longer performing to optimum."

"This is excellent, Bill," said Pam.

"I agree," Sue volunteered. "But for it to work we'll have to do two things: be examples, seen to be using the Cornerstones frequently, and secondly be explicit about encouraging others to call a Stones Check if they want to."

"Good point, Sue," said Mike. "We need to take personal ownership to ensure that these Five Laws become part of our leadership DNA here at the resort."

"Which means, Bill," said Keith, "that you have to lead us in exactly the same way you want us to lead our own teams, and so on with us, and each of our leaders right down to the front lines."

"You're right," I said, "and I will."

There was another of those thoughtful moments as we all digested what we'd just come to realize. These moments were becoming more frequent. "Either we're definitely getting more thoughtful and hence better," I thought, "or we've all just learned to sleep with our eyes open."

"OK, team. There's one more thing that I believe is important."

Everyone did a mental head-shake, refocused on me, and tuned in again.

"Keith, since HR reports to you, I'd like you to get Simon, your Training guy, to organize training for every staff member as part of the Super Project launch."

"You got it," he responded. "We'll call it 'Cornerstones Training for Teams,'" he said as much to himself as to the rest of us, as he started to make a note to himself.

"Nope," I interjected.

"Nope?" he queried.

"No. I think you should call it 'Powering Team Performance.' The Cornerstones are only a tool. An important tool to be sure, but the real focus should be on the performance of the team. The training needs to show how to make those teams really powerful, and the role of the Cornerstones in that objective."

"OK. Good point," he acknowledged, writing down the title and some notes.

"What do you think we should include in the training?" I asked the group.

Sue spoke up immediately. "They all need their own bag of stones, and to understand the Five Laws, that's for sure."

"Agreed," said Francois. "And we need to be sure they spend enough time on the meaning of each Cornerstone, so that they truly understand the thinking behind the words. That's where the real powering of each team's performance will come from."

"I found the Stones Check activities you just took us through to be very helpful," said Pam. "I think we should include some practice like that."

Keith was writing furiously.

"Let's make it engaging and fun," said Sue. "Not death by PowerPoint."

"I fully agree," I said. "Keith?" He looked up. "Connect with Eagle's Flight and get their help to make the training both experiential, and such that our staff really get engaged in what this can mean for us."

"Got it," he said and went back to his notes.

"Anything else?" I asked.

"Only the obvious," said Keith looking up again. "This training has to happen fast since we feel we'll have to engage everyone in the Super Project if we're to succeed."

"You're absolutely right," I confirmed.

I thought for a moment. "We could speed it up, and send a strong message about our commitment to team performance and the use of this tool, if we all make ourselves available to Simon to help with the training. We could also enlist all those on our high-potential list. What do the rest of you think of that?"

"I'm in. It's a great idea," said Mike.

"Me too," said Sue. "I like it."

"Let's do it," said Juanita.

In a few moments we'd all agreed that this was the right thing, and best thing, to do. Simon's training team had just gotten a lot bigger.

And we had, almost by accident, just had the kickoff meeting to our Super Project.

Wow!

CHAPTER TWENTY

The next six months passed quickly, probably because we were so unbelievably busy. We had all the regular resort issues to deal with, plus the added work on the Super Project, but it was exciting!

As the months passed the resort got busier and busier. Our surveys showed many more repeat visitors, and a very significant increase in business from referrals and word of mouth. Clearly, the Guest Services improvements coming from the Super Project were having a marked effect, both in attendance and profitability.

Plus, I had all the regular challenges: the power had gone out in the kitchens for three days soon after we started the project, so we organized barbecues on the beach for every meal during that time. It was an unanticipated hit and was so popular we incorporated a weekly "Eat On The Beach Today" event from then on. It was a lot of extra work, but the guests loved it so much that I almost felt I should write a note of thanks to the local power company that took so long to replace the transformer. But only almost.

A podiatry convention came, and with them Mr. and Mrs. Montague. I was glad to see them again and hear about Mrs. Montague's new book: "The View From The Corner Office Is Better If The Windows Are Clean" and about her husband's latest motivational speech: "The long-term effects on carpet fibers when a home has a gerbil instead of a cat."

Granite continued to work at the waterfall, and it was already a talking point with the guests, even though it was not yet finished. He had joked with me the other night that he should be paying me for all the free advertising he was getting. Apparently, so many guests had commissioned work back on the mainland that he'd be busy until he chose to retire, if that unlikely event ever occurred.

We had a near disaster when a couple of teenagers took one of the sailboats too far from shore and got caught up in the current. Fortunately, their absence was noticed early enough that the rescue team could take out the parasail boat and

spot them from the air. Safety is crucial here every minute of every day. We can never be too vigilant.

Mrs. Culver had returned, and Bridget and the kids had her up to the cottage for dinner one night after her art class. She has lived a fascinating life and we were all up very late listening to her stories. Hard to get up the next morning.

The Super Project had gotten under way as soon as the staff training had been completed, which we did in record time. All of us trained and, as we did, the Cornerstone principles became more personal for each of us. In addition, using the high-potential group of emerging leaders was an unforeseen turbo boost. They got it quickly, taught with enthusiasm, and then went on to lead many of the subgroups. That helped immensely.

My own team and I quickly realized we couldn't just add Super Project team issues to our regular weekly meetings on resort issues, so we started having a second weekly meeting just on the project. Then so much was under way that we had to add a second weekly meeting, this one primarily to meet with and support subgroup leaders.

I had kept my word and modeled the use of the Cornerstones consistently, and as laid out in the Five Laws. They were a great tool. They kept us aligned, allowed us to narrow our focus when problems emerged (which happened frequently, as was only to be expected), and allowed us to improve constantly, as a direct result of always asking what we needed to do to get better.

Across the resort, all the teams were having the same experience. On anything of this magnitude, with so many interconnecting parts, departments, and priorities, there are bound to be tensions, radically differing viewpoints, and competing priorities. The Cornerstones didn't solve those issues for us, but they definitely gave the teams a tool to clearly identify what to solve.

And so the months passed. Busy, challenging, exhausting at times, frayed nerves at times, yet always, from every single staff member, that Unanimous Focus on a Common Goal. And we were seeing consistent progress. The reports I'd been sending in to Mario were better every month than the month before. We were winning!

Now, six months after that momentous breakfast meeting when I had handed out those first bags of Cornerstones, we were taking stock. It was year-end, and I had to send in the final numbers for the resort to Mario and Frank later this week.

I made my way along the now very familiar path to my office, pausing as I always did before going inside, to look for a moment at the ocean. It was quite calm today; only gentle ripples lapped up on the beach. I noticed how busy it was. That was good. "And they're all using Sunspray products," I thought as I pulled myself away from the magnificent view and headed inside. That was also good!

Keith was waiting for me with a report in one hand, two glasses of champagne balanced in the other, and a big smile on his face!

"Alright!!"

Much later that day I picked up the phone. "Hi, Frank, how are you?"

I'd called his cell at the end of his day in the hopes of getting him live on his way home.

"I'm fine, Bill, thanks. And you?" he asked.

"I'm good, Frank. I'm good."

"I've been watching the steady progress you're making down there. It's truly remarkable! It looks like you'll have a great year. Any surprises? Are you going to end the year as well as it looks like you're trending?"

"Well, Frank, that's what I was calling about," I said. Not wanting him to get the wrong idea, I quickly went on. "I'd love to...um...show you the results for the year in person, and before I send them off to Mario."

Silence. He was thinking.

"If it helps," I continued, "I've asked Ruth to keep this Friday open on your calendar. Today's Monday. You and Helen could fly in late Thursday, spend the weekend with us, then leave Sunday night. We'd love to have you! What do you think?"

More silence. More thinking.

"Helen's away this weekend," he replied thoughtfully, "so I was going to be on my own anyway. Nothing planned. Friday's open, you say?"

"Yes sir."

"OK. I'll come down...It'll be good to get away for a couple of days, and I would like to see what you've been up to," he said playfully.

"That's great! I'll be waiting for you up at the airport. Bridget will be delighted to see you, and I'm sure she will have something special for dinner one of the nights you're here. Safe travels," I said.

"I'm looking forward to it, Bill. Good night."

"Night," I said and hung up.

The next few days were a whirlwind. It was really great that Frank had agreed to come, but he was still, after all, Frank. Everything had to be perfect.

I picked him up on schedule Thursday night around 8 p.m.

After we'd exchanged hellos, and got through the personal stuff (kids, family, sports – I was now seven seconds faster on the Sea-Doos than anyone else on the resort), I moved on to the business agenda.

"As you know Frank, we have a resort full of guests, but with you here, I know as many of the staff as possible will want to see you, and I'm sure you'll want to see them. The only way to do that is to meet at five a.m. That way we catch the night shift before they go off, and the day shift only has to come in a bit earlier. Also at that time there are the fewest guests up and about, so we can have an 'all hands' meeting outside on the beach. Is that OK?"

"Sure." he said. "Which morning were you thinking of?"

"Well, tomorrow actually, because the weekends get very busy much earlier in the day."

"OK, no problem. I'll get to bed early tonight; you come get me at 4:30 tomorrow

morning, and then we can spend the rest of the time I'm here catching up – with the family, with the resort...and with my sleep," he said with a smile.

The next morning under stars that literally filled the sky with silver sparkles of beauty I made my way to the VIP cabana and knocked on Frank's door. He answered immediately, looking fresh, alert and with a twinkle in his eye. I think he was enjoying this visit more than he was letting on.

As we walked I said to Frank, "I have a couple of surprises for you. And here's the first."

We rounded the corner which brought us to the heart of the resort. All the cabanas were quite far away so guests had maximum privacy, but the paths all intersected in this area. Usually it was gently lit all night, but earlier tonight I had the lights turned off.

There ahead of us was a dark knot of people, standing next to a massive, towering, irregularly-shaped shadow. Further down towards the beach you could see hundreds of people standing around talking softly. Hospitality had provided coffee and hot chocolate for everyone, and I'd insisted on cinnamon rolls – it seemed appropriate. They were contentedly waiting for us, but first this.

As we approached the group I made introductions.

"Frank, this is my team, and they are the ones who have been delivering the results Mario's been getting. They are truly a remarkable, committed, and talented bunch." I then introduced them in turn and Frank had a few kind words to say to each.

"You'll see much more of them while you're here," I added. "We have a full Executive Briefing set up with you and this team for later this morning."

"I look forward to that," he said sincerely, "learning more about each of your areas, and the things you've accomplished here together." I could see he'd already made a big impression on them. His commitment to the worth of every individual is transparent.

I then motioned Granite forward. He'd been standing quietly off to the side. "And this is Granite, Frank. He's been with us now almost since I got here."

“Hi, Granite. And what do you do here?”

“Hi, Frank. Nice to meet you. Perhaps instead of explaining I could show you what I’ve been doing?” he asked.

“Absolutely.” Frank looked expectantly at me, then at Granite.

Granite then turned, bent down, and threw a switch inside a box hidden in the foliage. Immediately lights sprang up all around us. Not harsh spotlights, but carefully placed lights at the base of trees, high in other trees, and hidden in crevices throughout what was now seen to be a huge stone waterfall.

The water started to surge over the top, tumbling powerfully down into softly lit pools, and as we all looked at the beautiful creation, we noticed several other smaller waterfalls cascading from various outcroppings off to the sides of the main waterfall. Granite had integrated the natural trees of the area, brought in some others, added an abundance of foliage, and so cleverly placed all the rock that it seemed almost as if this lush tropical waterfall had been here since the island was formed centuries ago. It was unbelievable.

We all stood and stared in awe at the beauty, tranquility, and uniqueness of what had been built. I hadn’t had much time these last few weeks to follow his progress, so was as overwhelmed as everyone else. I suddenly realized that everyone down on the beach had started clapping. It must look amazing from there.

Frank turned to Granite and said simply, “It takes my breath away.”

“Thank you, Frank. I’m glad you approve.”

I turned and smiled at Granite. He smiled back. He’d said it would be ready for today, and that it was!

“I wanted to start here, Frank,” I said, “because the building of this waterfall has been a metaphor for all we’ve learned about teams over this last year.”

“As it’s grown so have we; and as we’ve grown to learn about teams, and how to optimize them, the results have followed.” I turned to look again at the rich, bright water flowing freely into the pools below. “It has become synonymous in

our minds with what it takes to do great things together.”

We stared for a few moments longer and then I asked my team to head down to the beach to let the staff know Frank and I were on our way. After they left, I held back for a few minutes alone with Frank before we joined the others.

He looked inquiringly at me.

“Remember I said I had a couple of surprises?”

He nodded and looked questioningly at me as I handed over a slim white envelope. He moved nearer to one of the lights illuminating the waterfall and opened it up.

“It’s an Executive Summary of this year’s results.” I said. He looked at it for a few moments, then up at me.

“For real?”

“Yes sir. For real. Frank, we’ve hit 21% profit on the year and 96% on our guest satisfaction scores.”

“Unbelievable!” he said. “Mario had said the numbers could be good, but not this good. This is fantastic!”

I don’t think I’ve ever heard that word come out of his mouth before. It sounded good...he should say it more often.

“I’m glad you’re pleased, Frank. You’ll shortly have a chance to speak to the whole team. This result is literally as a result of the efforts of every single one of them down there on the beach. Every individual has played a part. And I introduced you to my own team a few minutes ago; without them this would never have occurred, either in concept or execution. You need to know that. Later today we’ll walk you through the how, but for now, the what and who will have to do.”

He looked at me quietly. “I had confidence in you, Bill. And you’ve exceeded even my expectations.” With that he smiled and gave me a big bear hug.

Wow.

We made our way down to the beach and the whole team. I personally introduced Frank to as many people as we could easily reach, then showed him the temporary stage we'd built on the sand and gave him the microphone.

As only Frank can do, he thanked people for what they had accomplished, and talked about the things they had demonstrated. He spoke about the impact just one person can make, and how that impact multiplied when individuals fully gave of themselves to their team. He honestly had them in tears as they recognized how much he truly appreciated their efforts and their personal contributions.

When he was done I stepped up and took the mic. "Frank, we'd all like you to accept a small memento of your visit here, and a reminder, from all of us, of the power of what you've just been talking about, and we've experienced firsthand."

Sue reached up and handed me a small beautifully wrapped box, which I then handed to Frank.

He opened it carefully. Inside were seven brightly colored glass stones nestled on white cotton, and a small, black custom-made leather bag. On the bag hung a laminated plastic tag. And on the tag was shown... "The Seven Cornerstones of Teamwork."

TO THE READER

If you'd like to go through the same course Bill and his colleagues taught to everyone on the resort – Powering Team Performance – or would like to acquire your own bag of Cornerstones, you may do so by contacting Eagle's Flight at:

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