



CHAPTER FOURTEEN HOW TO FOSTER CHAMPIONS

By Robert Porter Lynch

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Courage enlarges, cowardice diminishes resources. In dangerous straits, the fears of the timid aggravate the dangers that imperil the brave. Bouvee (1820-1904)

Cooperation beyond the walls is, in many companies, considered an unnatural act; therefore alliances, partnering, and collaborative interactions with other companies are often perceived as “foreign entities.”

So many of our organizations are based more on competition than cooperation; cooperation and teamwork are often less appreciated than the hard-nosed individualist who battles, destroys, and takes no prisoners in a self-centered quest for personal aggrandizement in the guise of doing what's best for their organization.

Becoming a Leader of the Future

Being a true champion of your life puts you in a unique breed of people who are at the same time: entrepreneurs, risk takers, visionaries, and results-oriented managers. (See **Error! Reference source not found.**) Champions naturally gravitate to becoming leaders because they love engaging others in the energizing process of building a new world that works -- making a difference and finding meaning and purpose.

Champions exist in a perpetual state of enlightened dissatisfaction, always looking for a new idea that will improve upon the current state of affairs.

Characteristics of Champions

Champions are probably the most influential factor in creating synergistic relationships that achieve mighty purposes. Without an accomplished champion, the chance of successfully sustaining, nurturing, and transforming an collaborative relationship is virtually nil. The unique characteristics of alliance champions, were described by a survey we conducted of several hundred alliance champions and their associates

- Visionary
- Energetic, Confident Optimist with “Can Do” Attitude
- Results Oriented with Demonstrated Leadership & Track Record of Success
- Passionate or Charismatic Crusader with powerful belief systems
- Credibility & Knowledge in the field of endeavor
- Tenacious, Perseverant
- Focuses the team on initiating things for the Greater Good,
- Team Player, Creates buy-in
- Sees adversity as opportunity, Loves Challenge -- will climb mountains, but gets bored with administrative management duties
- Entrepreneurial, Risk Taker
- Demanding works “on the edge”
- Innovative and Creative

Figure 1

Typically, Champions have a long history of pursuing new ideas, attempting breakthroughs, and challenging the accepted.

Alliances are essentially start-up companies and must be led by champions who are at the same time entrepreneurs, risk takers, visionaries, and results-oriented managers. Unless an energetic, visionary leader is in place, the parent corporation's immunal rejection response will kick out the alliance before it's had a chance to become established.

Champions exist in a perpetual state of enlightened dissatisfaction, always looking for a new idea that will improve upon the current state of affairs. Typically, they have a long history of pursuing new ideas, attempting breakthroughs, and challenging the accepted.

Champions cannot command because their authority is not positional. Their authority comes from their vision, their energy, and their ability to touch the hearts of those who believe their vision is the reality the organization must achieve for more than its future survival, that vision contains the organization's *thrival*.

To be effective the champion needs a track record of success. Yet down deep, most champions are idealists; therefore they often tend to become overly optimistic. Thus it is not ironic that the hallmark of real champions is not how many successes they have had, and they will have had many, but rather how they have dealt with failure. Failures should be the learning experiences that temper their idealism sufficiently to make them effective. Often the best champions will have at their side a seasoned realist or skeptic to provide balance and practicality to their idealistic vision.

Not surprisingly, many champions are entrepreneurial at heart, which enables them to excel with broken tools and inadequate resources, under adverse conditions, and with minimal organizational support.

Their extraordinary results come from a blended potion of vision, persistence, ability to learn from mistakes, a willingness to take risks and possibly fail, and an abiding commitment to the greater good of all.

Breakthroughs are the way of life for champions, whose challenge of the status quo is often regarded as unreasonable, are interested in creating new pathways, and love to discover that which others have overlooked. Gary Horning, an alliance champion at NCR advocates: "the champion must be very reasonable, recognize the realities of the future, and see issues and solutions from diverse perspectives." Yet more conservative managers often will be blind to the verities of the champion's vision and new operating schema, thereby branding the alliance champion as unrealistic, or worse.

When operating the truest sense, champions are the passionate pioneers, the discoverers, the learners, the ones who will never accept mediocrity and are even willing to destroy what they've built in order to build something greater.

Champions are omni-directional, in that they know the necessity of navigating the halls of power, and at the same time are willing to jump the chain of command or network the bowels of the organization. Although champions think of organizations as networks, not hierarchies, they also somewhat grudgingly, but patiently acknowledge the realities of the corporate ladder, without giving it their blessing.

What is often perceived as their neglect of protocol causes champions to be slightly off-center from corporate norms and to have offended traditional corporate sensibilities more than a few times in the pursuit of a worthy cause.

Typically an alliance champion is not initially anointed from above. Instead he or she seizes the high ground and then asks for support. The motto of the champion is: “’tis better to ask forgiveness after the fact than permission before.” Pat Bryant, an alliance champion at EKA Chemicals states: “I almost never have to ask for forgiveness. It just amazes me that others ever ask for permission.”

Because champions operate on the organizational fringe, they are often isolated and neglected. However, wise corporations with a heavy investment in alliances learn to nurture their champions, and to empower them once they independently emerge. Top managers create more successful alliances when they “recognize” champions rather than when they “select” them.

For example, career rotational cycles of alliance champions need to be carefully planned to diminish any destabilizing impact they might have on the alliance. Honeywell, shifted its champions’ rotational cycles from eighteen months to five years found that trust levels, which had been decreasing, were reestablished and the success rates of Honeywell alliances doubled. Brian Ferrar, champion at Compaq adds: “but there needs to be a sufficient reward for the five year plan,” for without such rewards, the champion can become isolated and deprived of career advancement.

When describing their competencies, champions we have interviewed in focus groups expressed the uniqueness of their function in their organizations. (see Figure 2)

There are seven particular issues that reflect how champions become successful, which the leader of the future must understand in order to manage alliance champions effectively.

1. Building Trust
2. Maintaining Resiliency
3. Working for Co-Creative Change
4. Building Alliance Teams
5. Problem Solving and Ongoing Negotiations
6. Practicing Transformational Leadership
7. Gaining Top Rank Support

Building Trust

Trust is the foundation of all cooperative enterprise; and integrity is the basis of all trust. Alliance managers see integrity as the ability and commitment to honor one’s word, especially during times of adversity and often regardless of personal cost.

For Gerry Dehkes, an alliance champion at Lucent, “Integrity includes setting expectations and consistently meeting them. Doing both is important. Making sure that

Champion Competencies

Effective alliance champions do several things extremely well:

- Build Great Teams that Bring out the Best in everyone
- Articulate a Powerful Vision Embraced by All
- Maintain their own Integrity and Self Discipline
- Relate to and Communicate Well with People
- Build Trust, Keep their Commitments and Treat people Justly and Fairly
- Have Courage of their Convictions
- Take Action, Don’t Wallow in Platitudes and Complaints
- Are Great Partners in Times of Adversity
- Have Heart & Compassion
- Face then Change Reality
- Commit to Win-Win arrangements for both partners

Figure 2

your counterparts will know (and be able to trust) that you will act in a certain way in a given situation. Then meet or beat that expectation consistently. This extends beyond the individual to the rest of the people in the alliance partners organizations. Or better, in an old Minnesota expression; ‘Under-promise. Over-deliver.’ View problems or barriers, especially early on, as opportunities to show your trustworthiness, meeting the expectations you've set with your partners. These have strong impact beyond the decision of the moment. They engender trust that later on you will indeed act that way, thus inviting reciprocal actions.”

Alliance champions are the principals who set the tone for building the trust that forms the foundation for the chemistry and culture of the trans-organizational interaction.

Every experienced alliance leader will comment on how trust is an essential ingredient of cooperation. Without it the venture will crumble, disputes will go unresolved, and passion will wane. Outsiders tend to describe trust as great chemistry, others see it as honesty. But champions tend to know that the trust they create, often internationally across wide cultural chasms, is based more on integrity than any other factor.

When trust collapses, communication is either halted or turns to threats, blaming, and accusations, and at the same time decision making becomes focused on protection and defense, not on innovation and creativity. Forward progress slows to a snail’s pace, or worse, reverses.

The champion who builds trust has a powerful advantage, because when analyzed in detail, that trust is shown to be simultaneously the glue that holds teams together during times of crisis and the grease that smoothes over rough interactions when cultures clash. Brian Ferrar, alliance champion at Compaq recognizes how this bonding impacts the relationship between champions: “An alliance manager and his counterpart at the partner company are often closer than each may be to many of their co-workers because of the trust it takes to form the alliance.” However, this bonding across organizational boundaries can be quite disconcerting to many insiders who see this as a serious breach of loyalty (as we shall see later in this chapter.)

Inevitably, “trust also demands win-win scenarios and reciprocity to each other’s pet projects and investments,” comments Gary Horning, alliance champion from NCR.

How does the alliance champion build this trust? Some lessons from the field exemplify how such trust is created (see figure 3):

TRUST DESTROYERS		TRUST CREATORS	
Act Inconsistently in what they say and do	69%	Maintain Integrity	58%
Seek Personal Gain above Shared Gain	41%	Openly Communicate Vision & Values	51%
Withhold Information	34%	Show Respect as Equal Partners	47%
Lie or Tell Half Truths	33%	Focus on Shared Goals not Personal Agendas	38%
Be Closed Minded	29%	Do the Right Thing Regardless of Personal Risk	36%
Be Disrespectful to Employees	28%	Listen with an Open Mind	33%
Withhold Support	16%	Demonstrate Caring Compassion	22%
Break Promises	14%	Maintain Confidences	15%
Betray Confidences	13%		

Source: Manchester Consulting, 1997 – survey of executives at 215 companies

Figure 3

Building trust starts and is maintained at the highest leadership positions. If leaders do not forge the bond of trust, it is highly unlikely to be found within the middle echelons. Coincidentally, there is a very high correlation between *trust, relationships, and control*. As trust and relationships increase, the needs for command and control diminish, replaced by coordinative interaction. This matters to leaders as they face today's compression of time and increase in speed, which force faster decision making, and today's complex interrelationships which force slower decision-making. Knowing how to manage this dilemma and balance these forces requires adroitness and a deep level of trust.

Is the creation of high trust worth the effort? Successful alliances provide very strong evidence that high trust is the catalyst of very high performance, greater innovation, creativity, synergy, expansion of possibilities, enhanced problem resolution, faster action and implementation, lower litigation costs, and lower transaction costs. These all result in dramatically improved financial performance. Corporations cannot afford to forsake the champion's role in developing trust across organizational boundaries.

Maintaining Resiliency

But how does the champion reconcile the seeming conflict between maintaining trust and integrity and working in a world that is constantly changing and requires frequent repositioning of the alliance and all its attendant relationships? How does the champion maintain integrity when the conditions that originally triggered the birth of the alliance are no longer valid? The answer lies in the champion's tendency to be resilient.

Resiliency is like a spring: the more it is tensioned, the more powerful it becomes. Champions can bounce back into shape because their spring-steel inner core of values and principles is not altered by circumstances. However, this inner core is surrounded by a flexible outer core of practicality which provides them the freedom to shift with changing circumstances, to be influenced by the insight and wisdom of others, and to avoid rigid thinking and obsolete paradigms.

Tenacity and persistence are always associated with successful champions. One champion in our focus groups said it quite well: "You cannot cut out too early; you must follow your instincts. When you get knocked down, you must get back up again. It takes more than ego to get back up – it's beliefs, knowing you are right, it's an intuition that what you are doing is worthwhile. Doing this takes an innate ability to deal with uncertainty and risk."

Champions often see their falterings in life as opportunity. They experience adversity as the door opener for regeneration. They see life as not about *perfection* but about *perfecting* -- losing your spirit and gaining it back again. The losing of spirit becomes the breakdown that creates the opportunity for a breakthrough, the possibility to regain spirit at a higher level. Living in the status quo is to live too safely, without challenge and opportunity to achieve a dream. Therefore the true champion experiences adversity with a quiet smile, as a hidden treasure from which he or she can source new levels of experience, awareness, and energy. Seasoned champions have failed enough times to know that failure is only temporary; they tend not to let their personal identity be strongly influenced by their experience.

One of our focus group champions, when asked to what he attributed his resiliency, stated: "I never take myself too seriously, and find failures are an opportunity to refine

my sense of humor.” Adds Brian Ferrar: “I find humor absolutely necessary – both as an ice breaker and bonding agent, but also as a stress reliever.”

Working for Co-Creative Change

Creativity is the most effective responses to rapid change, and all breakthroughs rely heavily on creativity. However, champions are not independent, isolated creators. Instead, champions bond with their counterparts in the alliance as kindred spirits in co-creation, that is, they are typically co-creative synthesizers, linking new ideas and innovations together, building bridges with other creative individuals whose voices have not previously been heard. Champions typically do not require full credit for an idea to satisfy their egos, because they know that the idea itself is less than 10 percent of the game.

Paradigm shifts come not from incremental thinking but from fundamentally new ideas, typically originating from outside of the mainstream of accepted thought. Carl Gustav Jung foresaw an alliance’s greatest strategic potential when he said: “The greater the contrast, the greater the potential. Great energy only comes from a correspondingly great tension between opposites.”

Alliances create breakthroughs as a result of differentials in thinking. Inherent in the differences between two alliance partners is the champion’s unique opportunity to initiate the creative tension that can generate the essential shift in perception and thinking that underpins all true innovation. Managing this synergy of compatible differences through the process of co-creation is a fundamental attitude and skill of the best champions.

Champions see that the real value in an alliance lies in the diversity of thinking across the boundaries of different organizational cultures, perspectives, and thinking. Fundamentally, champions must honor the dignity of diverse thinking, a point of view that can often evoke strong negative emotions from conservative traditionalists bound to the status quo within the alliance’s parent organization.

Building Alliance Teams

Champions play a vital role in building alliance teams. By their nature, alliances are populated with diverse perspectives. Unless the champion integrates and converges partner’s energies on a focused mission and objective, the alliance will tend to crack, as divergent interests pull in non-synergistic directions.

Unfortunately, experience has shown that just putting highly creative people on a team neither generates breakthroughs nor drives convergence. All too often the creative people are too individualistic to be great team players or too competitive with each other, or their creativity escalates into generating even more creativity with no grounding in reality, or they think their cultures are too different for them to be co-creative with others.

Effective champions pull together diverse alliance teams, developing a very healthy balance, like that of yin and yang, which enables members to experience the synergy of compatible differences, – that very elusive chemistry that characterizes powerfully successful alliances. At many companies, such as Compaq, the alliance “core team” is well defined and a time honored tradition drawing from several types of people:

Champion – The champion fills the critical leadership role that keeps the team focused on the ultimate, long-term objective, and maintains its spiritual center of effort. Champions will never be satisfied unless there is some connection to real

action, and they may not have the patience or discipline to engage in a detailed analysis of all the operational components necessary to make a plan a raging success. Further, the champion must not fall into the trap of “ruling” the teams.

Facilitator-integrator – This person coordinates the group, and brings together the key individuals who will have to buy into the plan. As facilitator this individual keeps people emotionally engaged, making the best use of team resources, maximizing each member’s potential, and monitoring their personal needs and also focusing them on the ultimate objective. As integrator this individual acts as liaison between diverse groups, often translating one corporate culture’s needs into terms understood by the other culture. Facilitator-integrators tend to have excellent listening skills and are highly tuned to the personal needs and sensitivities of team members, thus contributing enormously to the building of a consensus. Often they will search for resources and ideas from outside their team by accessing, leveraging, and building other external networks.

Creative introverts and creative synthesizers – The creative introverts are those inward, reflective thinkers who often seem withdrawn and distant, almost to the extent of being considered antisocial. The creative synthesizers are far more interactive and do most of their creating in teams, bouncing ideas off others, playing a friendly tug of war to see whether an idea is sound enough to fly. The synthesizers will pick up on ideas from very diverse sources, sometimes adapting, sometimes splicing, and sometimes being very original themselves. Both these roles are essential for innovators seeking to break new ground.

Helpful skeptics and analyzers – The skeptics and analyzers are constantly evaluating, judging, and testing to be sure what may seem like harebrained ideas from the creative types and the champions can really be implemented and address the problems at hand. They will confront new ideas with such questions as: Can you show me where this has been done before? Do we have the resources? Who will actually make the sales calls? and so on. They will invariably focus on the details overlooked by most champions. A senior manager with extensive experience who commands respect in the corporate hierarchy is usually most effective in this role of prudent oversight. Do not confuse the helpful skeptic with the critical cynic or contrarian whose negative attitude and unhealthy analysis will destroy the energy of the team and contradict the champion’s positive energy.

Process and task managers – These highly organized and procedurally disciplined individuals turn visions into corporate goals and are necessary to carry out the details of the plan, determining roles, responsibilities, decision-making procedures, functional interactions, contingency plans, measures, and rewards. These individuals direct the manner in which the alliance team’s effort is applied, focusing on objectives, structure, and task completion. Often they have good project management experience.

It typically falls into the champion’s hands to build this team, this mix of players in which no is more or less important. Moreover, too many or too few of one type will defeat the chemistry of the mix. Gerry Dehkes, an alliance champion at Lucent notes: “Each of these roles are critical to a high performance team. Team members may and often do play multiple roles. They also may play different roles at different times and on different teams. Champions must recognize these roles and ensure that each role is filled

by team members.” However, Richard Marrs of BHP cautions: “A problem can occur when the champion has to wear multiple hats, playing the roles of process manager and facilitator along with the champion role, which are often quite different. It can become too much, stretching the champion’s capabilities to perform to the limit.”

The champion must be acutely aware of the shifting nature of the team roles. Dehkes at Lucent observes: “Leadership roles and individual enthusiasm shift depending on where in the alliance process or project lifecycle you are. In the beginning brainstorming phase, the creative, flexible minded person energetically takes the lead. As the need for a clear vision becomes important, the big picture, decisive person moves to the fore. Then the detail-oriented organizer puts the action plan flesh on the vision bones. Finally, the flexible, but task-oriented implementers adapt the plan to reality. Champions recognize this process along with the differing strengths and interests of team members, helping each to make their strongest contribution at the appropriate time. Alliance leaders know how to quickly move their teams through the lifecycle to the high performing stage, and know when to end a team, too.”

This is the type of team that is capable of designing breakthroughs and operating at a high level of performance. However, because high- performance teams are likely to have a higher incidence of breakdowns, than other teams, and because alliance teams are particularly vulnerable with their high level of cross-corporate, cross cultural, and cross functional diversity, the role of the champion becomes increasingly important, and his or her co-creative problem solving and negotiation skills are essential.

Problem Solving and Negotiating

Because the driving forces that underpin alliances are always in the state of flux, all cooperative ventures between companies must be continually repositioned in the strategic environment to retain competitive advantage. This is the work of the alliance champion. Therefore champions must be excellent negotiators.

Gary Horning of NCR is clear that “great champions drive to create plans that reflect win-win scenarios. Champions must put themselves in the place of both their own companies, as well as in the place of their partners. Without a win-win situation that involves reciprocal commitments from both parties, the relationship will fail.” John Mazur of Siemens believes: “Alliance champions should always be on the look-out for the 'win-win' and 'break-through value propositions', because these are the right bait to attract the attention and support of senior management on both sides of the alliance.”

Yet this approach is not shared by less experienced transactional negotiators, as Gerry Dehkes of Lucent comments: “I know some people who think a win-win relationship means ‘we kick their butts twice!’ They are not successful alliance champions however, just challenges for the rest of us.” And Brian Ferrar of Compaq states: “The difficulty regarding win-win negotiations is often because companies are generally not truly ‘equal.’ Some are bureaucratic and their partner entrepreneurial, some rich and some poor. This imbalance can make negotiations quite difficult.”

Champions will seldom engage in win-lose negotiations because they know these efforts may quickly degenerate to lose-lose games. It’s more than likely that they will chose a synergistic style of negotiating (which to the hard-nosed win-lose negotiator may look soft, overly trusting, and prone to giving away too much too fast). Champions, when entering into alliance negotiations don’t see the process as a tug-of-war between “sides”

but rather as an interactive visionary process of designing that future, then reverse engineering the future back to the present. This synergistic negotiation style focuses on co-creation and expansion of possibilities, rather than win-lose bargaining or a win-win solution in which the parties simply accommodate each other's interests.

Champions know that win-lose situations freeze people in their positions, thus freezing both time and thinking. Once time and thinking freezes on both sides, the result is all too often a lose-lose game, which will blow the alliance apart and bring a tragic end to everyone's dream. Gary Horning at NCR observes that "many uninitiated alliance champions are not so 'enlightened', do not care about win-win, do see the tug of war, and, therefore, this becomes a central issue that must be addressed and overcome."

Synergistic, co-creative negotiations enable a rapid building of trust and avoid the unproductive behaviors that come from meaningless conflict.

Nevertheless there will be conflict. Conflict is the inevitable by-product of all change, and any proposition of new ideas will generate some amount of conflict. The objective is to prevent the conflict from degenerating into blind fear and inflexible rigidity. As one champion in our focus groups articulated it: "Without conflict there will probably be no buy-in. I just have to be careful I do not take conflict personally as an attack on myself. Conflict is just a tool to get people talking and debating an issue from one side or another. It promotes the kind of understanding necessary to be successful in this business."

Here again, the power of the champion's vision, credibility, trust, and integrity plays a preeminent role in transforming conflict into a productive commitment to the future.

The champion will not be a great compromiser between the diverse elements, however, unless every other avenue has been explored. A compromise is usually seen as a poor second choice, the forsaking of a dream. Forging a new unity from seemingly diverse values and thinking will be the champion's first choice. This unity becomes a new order of interaction, better than the original, thereby creating a *super-ordinate* culture for the alliance.

Practicing Transformational Leadership

It is quite common to find champions functioning as transformational leaders, attempting to use an alliance as a mechanism to introduce new ideas, new values, and a new culture into their parent organizations. In a survey of several hundred champions, they reported that 85 to 90 percent of all organizational change is driven by a crisis or some outside force, such as a competitive maneuver, a market shift, or government regulation. Champions will often try to shift that proportion, making *vision* a far larger causal factor for change. Gerry Dehkes, when playing the role of champion, states: "The way to cause change and to help an organization reach for a vision is to raise the perception of dissatisfaction with the present and simultaneously lower the perceived "cost" of changing toward the desired vision. People don't jump the fence for greener pastures unless they are unhappy enough with the side of the fence they're on and the fence isn't too high to jump!" Transformational champions are trying to change the order of the future, therefore the process of change itself triggers deep fears and insecurities and consequently resistance in their parent companies. The daring champion, unknowingly, is likely to polarize an organization, often evoking both love and hate, but seldom neglect and apathy.

Gaining Top Rank Support

In this organizational effort, top-rank support is critical. Champions must often confront other top executives strongly, yet diplomatically, when the corporate castle walls seem impenetrable and resistance to new ideas becomes overwhelming. Therefore, to be properly anointed, the champion must have the support of the organization's high priests. Top level sponsorship is often referred to as the "godfather" role.

When the venture has widespread organizational impact, established power structures and political relationships will be disrupted. The presence of the godfather validates the strategic value of the venture and helps shield it from the onslaught of naysaying cynics and those threatened by the alliance's very existence. Brian Ferrar notes that the godfather role requires far more than just support, seeing it as a "protector to provide air cover!" Another champion from our focus groups commented: "We need a godfather to protect us. But often the godfathers get clobbered themselves by the empire builders and fiefdom creators, who we threaten because they perceive the alliance as diminishing their power."

The seemingly innocent activity of getting autonomous business units to work together is fraught with danger. Business unit executives with profit and loss responsibility often see the alliance as a threat to their power and authority, and even a drain on their resources, thereby diminishing their business unit's profitability -- all fodder for political infighting. According to John Mazur at Siemens: "Alliance champions are usually unpopular within their organizations and are challenged by the powerful 'empire builders' who believe they can do it better than the alliance partner, or those who view the alliance partner as the enemy, merely because they are visible." In fact, many alliance champions report it is easier to form an alliance with a competitor than with another division of their own company.

The godfather's support of the champion becomes increasingly evident once an alliance begins operations. In Gary Horning's view at NCR, "one can have an excellent executive relationship, a terrific engineering relationship and even a great marketing cooperative effort, but the rubber hits the road in the local field engagement process. Unfortunately, it is here that the champion, who can be little more than a cheerleader and/or educator, requires the support of the sales VPs and the salespeople to engage with the partner." Without a strong godfather to influence the corporate rewards system, the real benefits of the alliance may be lost. Understanding how champions must use their leverage on the organization's leadership is essential according to Lucent's Gerry Dehkes: "Champions need to understand the difference between targets (people that must change behavior), sponsors (people who can cause targets to change behavior) and advocates (like themselves who have a vision, but little power to change targets directly). Champions, in their advocacy role, must spend their time working the sponsors, not the targets. Finally, sponsors need to care as much about the alliance as the alliance champion!"

The godfather must have access to the other side of the alliance as well. John Mazur adds: "Senior executives also need to make themselves available to their partner's alliance champions, something many don't think about or do."

Paradoxical Qualities

Champions are not superheroes; they suffer the pains of defeat and the quandaries of leadership just like other leaders. Many are torn between two worlds, thus living a paradox:

- Between the patient need to nurture relationships and the impatient, compelling desire for achievement; knowing that personal relationships, trust, and sensitivity to people's personal needs and feelings are essential to building a successful team, but being driven by the desire to see results, to make a difference, to translate ideas into action. One side of the dilemma makes the champion want to lead by consensus, the other by command.
- Between forcing the trauma of disruptive change and enduring the pain of inertial stability. Champions know people are not happy about change, but they can't understand why everyone needs so much coddling and why resistance to a glorious future is so heavy. They see a new future as inevitable, like an unstoppable railroad train barreling down the tracks.
- Between the visionary's denial of reality and the realist's acceptance of reality. This seemingly profane balancing act acknowledges that we must pursue a dream if we are to reach the holy land (because it will mean the renewal of our organization -- a true new beginning), yet we must accept the reality that the dream is very difficult to achieve and quite risky (the organization might fail, individuals might be hurt, the champion might get fired).

Such paradoxes often leave the champion mired in dilemmas, sometimes seemingly paralyzed in procrastination. Ultimately, however, the champion awakens from being a prisoner of paradox, with a passionately bold move toward the real vision.

Achilles' Heels

Champions have several other traits that can create difficulties. In addition to being overoptimistic, the typical champion is overcommitted, unable to say no to another request even if it requires them to sometimes step aside from the pathway of their perceived highest and best destiny. Only after seasoning do champions begin to learn their limits.

Administrative duties and routines are boring, and the details of project management are usually sacrificed by the champion for the larger strategic and visionary tasks. Comments Pat Bryant, champion at EKA chemicals: "I'm no good with the details. It's the idea, the presentation, that's what I'm good at. People often think that I'm going to be a detail person because I have a Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering. However, my Ph.D. for me was only a mountain to climb that made me focus on details to succeed. I hate details; it takes great focus from me to work on details."

If the champion has not already acknowledged these weaknesses, it is wise to be sure the he or she is matched with a good administrative team to balance these weaknesses.

Qualities and Characteristics That Evoke Resistance

The insecure and the egocentric often confuse the champion's passion and enthusiasm egocentric behavior. However, *enthusiasm*, in its most noble definition in ancient Greek, signified the god within; similarly, a champion's missionary zeal is born of the commitment to a greater good. Excellence is never born from a disengaged heart.

In essence, the true champion begins to live the vision he or she beholds. Among those who have never embraced this type of life, becoming a vision is anathema to many and misunderstood by more. It looks like ego-drive, but it is not. The champion's courage is sourced from a commitment to a vision far larger than his or her fears. The champion's willingness to make powerful commitments is based on belief, not evidence, which, to many, looks like the behavior of an unbridled zealot.

The champion's ability to navigate the halls of power makes him or her look like politicians, which the champion is not. Champions often remark that they dislike the lobbying role, but acknowledge how they have to do it if they are to compete for executive air time.

And the champion's frequent disregard for the organizational hierarchy gives credence to the criticism that champions are sacrilegious, which they are not. In fact many alliance champions have referred to the art and architecture of cooperation as a somewhat spiritual experience, fulfilling an inner personal need to do something valuable for their organization, which the champion regards as their own community.

Most people see organizations as they are drawn on organizational charts, as hierarchical structures, with functional silos composed of somewhat isolated departments. Champions, never describe organizations that way. Instead they see organizations as networks, and navigate the networks like a honey bee on a summer's day: in a zigzag pattern. Naturally, this drives the traditional organization man absolutely insane. Champions see the other management team as extensions of themselves, as an integral part of the alliance itself. In this way the borders of the organizations become transparent to the champion.

Champions march to the tune of a different drumbeat – faster, more futuristic.

Their high tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty is higher than most logical linear managers like to handle.

Slightly off-center from corporate norms, champions are often regarded as somewhat eccentric, but not defiantly deviant or rebellious. Because champions are often trying to address problems that are frequently not recognized by others as a problem at all, champions are often unfairly perceived as unreasonable, undisciplined, and unrealistic, as outside the mainstream, agitators, trouble-makers, and professional irritants.

Understand and Support the Unique Role of the Champion

Many champions comment that they are deeply misunderstood and often rejected by members of their own organization. Ironically, often the more successful the champion is with an alliance, the deeper the rejection. To fulfill the commitment to a win-win position for the alliance, (and sometimes to avoid isolation) the champion oftentimes bonds tightly with his or her counterpart in the other organization. States Compaq's Brian Ferrar: "Your partner must see you as his company's advocate – never having any doubt you're helping forward their cause --- this also helps keep the inevitable conflicts from escalation." However such a powerful commitment to the other company's cause often simply serves as evidence to confirm the suspicion that the champion is disloyal.

Not only do champions have a tendency to bond powerfully with the champions of the other partner, they also bond with their mission and with the cooperative venture itself, thus evoking scorn and often rejection from traditional organizationalists. Cautions

NCR's Gary Horning: "A champion cannot succeed in an environment where they are rejected or not supported by the executing members in their own organization. A champion must bond with both the partner and their own company and, they must coordinate compromises with their own organization in order for the better good of the bigger picture relationship." Having a deep understanding of the personalities and roles of the champion can help organizations ensure their champion's success and prevent champions from having to fight needless rearguard battles with their own troops, enabling them to focus their energies and spirit more rightfully on their mission.

Give champions the support and resources they need to be successful. Tolerate them even when they don't play by the rules. Give them clear boundaries, but let them range broadly within these boundaries. Make them catalysts for change. Push them to behold a breakthrough value proposition powerful enough to break the stranglehold of the inertial resistance that stifles most organizations. And always remember: they will ask forgiveness after the fact rather than ask permission before the fact.

When venturing beyond the hallowed walls of the corporate castle, consider --

A true champion without a cause is entrapped energy.

A great cause without a champion is but an elusive dream.

But a great cause with a true champion is the realization of a vision!

About Courage

Courage is not expendable, like a tank of gasoline, rather it's "expandable" like love, trust, and creativity. One never runs out of courage; one can only become "discouraged" when the world around them is filled with negativity and when courage is punished again and again by those who want to diminish those who champion causes.

Because courage bestows its own rewards back to those who manifest it,
and because it inspires other, courage becomes regenerative.