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## "Quotes"

*"There is no failure. Only feedback."*  
~Robert Allen

*"Priority is a function of context."*  
~Stephen Covey

*"I'm an 'all hands on deck' type guy. All of the guys who can play in my opinion should play."*  
~Dennis Green

*"People are not perfect.... Very often the relationships that are strongest are those where people have worked through big crises, but they've had to work through them."*  
~Patricia Hewitt

*"Now they're starting to understand why we're doing things, not just, 'What's my assignment?' So I think it will start coming along faster."*  
~Vic Koenning

*"Not only do I get to build relationships with people that I like but I get to help them reach their...goals. What a great combination."*  
~John LeBlanc

*"We're looking at the long run, and the long run is that this team is going to be better in the future."*  
~Trina Patterson

*"It's not about personal achievements or personal wins; it's about winning as a team."*  
~Mark Prior

*"All relationships of people to each other rest, as a*

Dear Friend,

## What Should We Cover?

Last week I attended a board meeting and reconnected with a fellow board member, whom I'd not seen in quite some time. After we caught up on life as well as the economy and its impact on businesses generally, the conversation turned to projects we have in our portfolios. We chatted enthusiastically about how we're each supporting clients currently -- she in banking and I in management consulting and professional development. And, it was then that she spoke words that were like music to my ears! Not only is she an avid reader of **EA Insights** (*good...good*), but she also keeps issues for future reference and often shares articles with colleagues. (*Now, you know why I was overjoyed!*)

So, I jumped at the opportunity.

*"Do YOU have a topic you'd like for us to cover? Is there an issue that would be helpful for you right now?"*

Indeed, there was something on her mind. As we talked some more (that is, until the meeting began), we got to the heart of her challenge. So, keep reading for some recommendations about working with, and through, others who may not report to you.

However, this conversation also sparked an idea. There may be others of you with questions or topics that you'd like to have us cover in an upcoming issue of **EA Insights**. Well, here's your chance! Scroll down to the end of this edition, and let us know what's on your mind. You may see your issue in an upcoming edition.

All the best,

*June*

June Melvin Mickens  
Executive Advantage, LLC

## Getting Work Done...Without Doing It All Yourself

June Melvin Mickens  
Executive Advantage, LLC

We thank a long-time **EA Insights** reader for raising the issue presented in this month's newsletter. If you have a question or topic you'd like for us to cover in an upcoming **EA Insights** issue, please use the [links](#) at the end of this edition to share it with us.

**Issue:** *I work in a setting in which I don't have direct reports. Instead, there's an administrative team that's responsible for supporting me to meet client needs and accomplish results. My problem is two-fold -- addressing 1) skill gaps and 2) eroding work ethic to provide timely, thorough customer support. This type of challenge takes a different form when people report to someone else; I have no direct authority over them, even though I have to rely on them. The result is that, too often, I end up, or want to, do the work myself so that I know it's done...on time and at an appropriate quality level. What can I do?*

**Recommendations:** This is a great question. As many organizations move to a team, matrix, or interdisciplinary format, the challenge of working across lines...with, and through, others becomes more prevalent. So, how do you cope? Let me share a huge **DON'T** and several **DO'S** that might help.

**DON'T fall into the habit of doing someone else's work.** Let me distinguish between pitching in in a crunch, or pulling extra weight in an "all hands on deck" situation, and routinely taking on tasks because the "responsible" person isn't being responsible. Big difference!!!

If a team is formed thoughtfully, each member is selected because of the skills, experience, and/or perspective she brings to the table. Each has a job to do and, quite frankly, each should be capable, empowered, and ready to do it.

Accordingly, outside of the occasional crisis, red flags should go up whenever you find yourself, or others, handling functions that rightly belong to someone else. Such a situation begs the question, "Why is this happening?" And, that question leads to the **DO'S** on the list.

**DO forge a partnership with the leaders of each unit represented on the team.** Relationships are essential in the team environment and, when you lead a team with



people from different reporting structures, having an open line of communication with their supervisors becomes critical. Now, this relationship isn't developed so that you can run to the supervisor with every groan and gripe. On the contrary, it's formed so that you have a partner -- one who can help you understand why this unit's representative has been chosen to support your team, what skills and unique qualities he brings, how best to work with him, etc. This is information that comes best from the person to whom your team member reports -- his supervisor.

The relationship with that supervisor also sets the stage for the two of you to continue to communicate throughout the team's lifespan about successes, areas for growth, and similar matters related to the assigned team member. Such insights can be useful for carrying out fully informed performance reviews, for the ongoing grooming of the team members, for decision-making around team functioning or personnel changes, etc.

**DO build a relationship with each team member.** People tend to respond better, work harder, produce more when they know that the folks with whom they labor actually know and care about them. So, if you haven't already done so, pause to get to know the people on the team...and let them get to know you. Go beyond just relating to each other as the person who gives, and the person who receives, assignments. Build a genuine connection and sense of team so that members are working as much for the pride of the team, as they are to shine individually or to meet client needs.

**DO help team members understand each assignment and why it's necessary.** Sometimes performance lags because people have no clue why they've been asked to perform a function. Sometimes performance lags because people are confused about what it is...exactly...they are supposed to do. The first scenario encourages folks to check their brains at the door and just do what they're told, without being able to see the big picture of how a function benefits the client, without being able to lend creativity, or without being able to identify problems that could avoid headaches in the long run. People are equally in the dark in the second scenario. This time, though, they're left filling in the blanks themselves (and often doing so incorrectly) because guidance is missing. In either instance, performance and results suffer. But, the source of the issue may not be the team member.

The take-away here is that it's important not to assume that people understand an assignment. So, when a new assignment is given, take a few moments with team members individually (which also facilitates relationship-building), and provide a little background. Help each person to connect the dots between her work and the broader outcomes. Also, write out and/or explicitly explain the new assignment. Be open to questions, and explain patiently. A little time investment at the front end of an assignment can avoid re-work or confusion nearer to your deadline.

**DO take competing priorities and skill levels into account when distributing assignments and setting timelines.** Speaking of timelines, please create them realistically. Okay, you may want something done tomorrow because it should be able to be done in a day. But, is tomorrow a hard and fast deadline and, if so, why? Have you considered the competing priorities for the other members of the team? Can this set of team members generate a quality product in your timeframe, or would another day or two, yield better results...and without ulcers all around?

Many times, performance or timelines suffer because the person making the assignment doesn't see the whole picture. You may have passed along only one assignment, but that team member may receive only one assignment from multiple sources...each deemed *urgent* by its assignor. This is where relationships can help. I don't mean that relationship bumps your assignment to the top of the list (although that might happen). Rather, with relationship comes the ability to engage in candid conversation about the real nature of the deadline, about coordinating with other assignors to reset competing priorities and best serve the organization as a whole, or about potentially adding support either to complete dueling (and truly urgent) deadlines or to assist a struggling team member.

**DO give constructive feedback periodically so that growth (or appropriate staffing decisions) can be made.** We've all done it. One assignment ends, and you're immediately moving on to the next project on the to-do list. We're busy, busy, busy!!!

Typical, I know, but bad business. Why? You see, when we fail to circle back with team members, we deprive them, and ourselves, of the opportunity to reflect together on what went well and where improvement is needed. Essentially, we create insanity...doing the same thing over and over but expecting different results. It's no wonder that frustration ensues. So, touch base for a debrief...as a team and/or with members individually. Share, but also listen. Then, adjust as necessary and as possible. The goal is for each member of the team to perform his role well...so you don't have to!

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## What Should We Cover?



Do you have questions or topics that you'd like to have us cover in an upcoming issue of EA Insights?

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## About Executive Advantage

At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

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*matter of course, upon the precondition that they know something about each other."*  
~Georg Simmel

*"We also have to ask if we focusing on the most important priorities."*  
~Fred Thompson

*"I hope that you express what's on your mind."*  
~John Tinker

*"In his current assignment, [he] has led the team that has helped [us] gain back market share.... He's built strong relationships with dealers and employees in creating marketing initiatives, all of which should prove especially useful as we focus on additional key markets where we need to improve... performance."*  
~Rick Wagoner

*"It doesn't become an assignment anymore. It becomes a passion. All of a sudden, they get connected...."*  
~Robert Williams

*"When [he] takes on a volunteer assignment..., he does so with energy and gusto rivaled by few, dedicating his time and energy completely."*  
~Howard Wolf

*"As we come together as a team and try to iron out some of the things we were deficient in..., I think we are going to continue to improve and continue to be successful."*  
~Kerry Zavagnin