



## An Interview with Tom Samson

Chief Executive Officer  
Teamwork Dynamics

by Franklin J. Fullerman

### Samson's Vision: An End to Mindless Work

Many, if not most, Americans dislike their jobs. Tom Samson thinks this is a shame and asks us to envision an America where every employee has an opportunity to contribute to something important and experience personal fulfillment. Samson has a big vision. He wants to put an end to the world of mindless work and to replace it with teamwork and processes.

"People really want to come to work and accomplish something useful if they can see how their work and accomplishments tie into the goals of the overall organization," says Samson.

Samson has developed a specific methodology that provides an infrastructure for helping companies create a highly successful culture, a culture where employees do want to come to work. He calls it *Teamwork Dynamics*.

Samson is a teambuilding consultant with a twist. Most teambuilding coaches are human resources people long on vision and short on specifics. Samson, on the other hand, is a line manager by trade and has many years of experience at the CEO level having been a partner with Arthur Young and Heidrick and Struggles.

### "People is what Business is all about."

Every armchair organizational philosopher and every business "coach" says that "empowering people" is the holy grail of corporate success. The difference is that Tom Samson is doing something specific to bring this about.

Samson notes that the most successful CEOs, like GE's Jack Welch, focus up to 70% of their time on people issues. "Far too many executives, either because of pressure to create profits or deal with crisis, fail to focus on people," says Samson. "Executives who have grown up in organizations where they don't focus on people have not developed a personal culture towards focusing on people."

Samson reminds us that organizations have "personalities" and that these personalities can change. Like most organizational theorists, Samson believes that change filters down from the top. He therefore begins his work with CEOs and their direct reports. Prior to agreeing to work with an organization,

Samson gives the CEO a behavioral profile to: (1) understand how to help the CEO and (2) help him decide whether or not to accept the client. Having accomplished much in his own life, Samson appears sincere in his stated desire to help others experience the success he has had and the benefit therein. However, being a realist, Samson knows that he can't help everyone, hence the client behavioral profile.

### Results Accomplished by Teams

While still envisioning freeing the individual from mindless work, Samson notes, "Results are accomplished by teams, not individuals. In the past we've created such intense competition focused on bottom line results at the expense of people." Everyone in an organization, other than the individual performer, is on two teams: a team composed of themselves, their peers and their supervisor, and the team they lead.

Samson asserts that he can help create an organizational culture of success by working with the CEO and the executive team and one or two levels of teams below that. And he can get that new culture started within four months.

Samson has a complex – but not complicated – system for getting results from and empowering teams based upon: 1) collaboration, 2) commitment and 3) accountability. Samson insists his program of corporate cultural transformation is relatively simple with the help of his infrastructure and calls it "Management 101."

### Teambuilding Nuts and Bolts

Samson forms teams in such a manner that every team member understands what their individual and team objectives are. Key to the teambuilding process is his emphasis on forming a collaborative approach to problem solving. Then he institutes a culture of individual commitment to accomplish specific objectives. And finally, he puts in a tracking system to monitor personal and team accountability.

Samson says, "The most important thing of all is to: 1) get people to participate in figuring out how they're going to accomplish a goal, and 2) then break it down into small action steps that they personally can commit to make it happen.

Samson further refines his process by saying that the key to success is developing the processes at the team level that allow team members to: 1) take a goal from a higher level and to convert that goal into sub-goals that they then pass down to their members, and 2) develop specific strategies that individual members of that team will execute.

### Teamwork Dynamics: an Infrastructure for Helping Companies Create a Highly Successful Culture

Samson shared his proprietary teambuilding processes with *The Business Champion*.

1. Define the Team Mission Clearly.
  - a. Who are the customers and what are the deliverable products?
  - b. What are the values that the team is to follow and embrace as they deliver products and services to customers?

- c. Define the distinctive competencies team members must have to effectively deliver products and services to customers?
  - d. Identify the critical team partners.
2. Develop and define specific goals for the team to accomplish within a specified period of time.
  3. Define the team leadership, members, tools and budget.

This requires defining the behavioral characteristics, as well as the skills-sets, of team members. The best way, of course, is to determine member behavioral characteristics prior to forming the team. In reality, however, team leaders and consultants frequently inherit existing and/or dysfunctional teams. Understanding member behavioral characteristics can at least enable a leader to make the best of a difficult situation. Many highly validated behavioral assessments are available for this purpose. Samson uses the DISC profile.

4. Define Team Processes (this becomes the work of the team):
  - a. Develop strategies. How can we accomplish our objectives and what are our options?
  - b. Develop processes that establish a culture of individuals committing to get specific actions accomplished. Turn strategies into actions, plus getting agreement to accomplish specific actions by specific dates via an online tracking system.
  - c. Establish a tracking process that allows the entire team to see and understand the status of fulfilling those commitments.
  - d. Establish processes for the team to utilize to help team members who have encountered barriers to prevent them from accomplishing their commitments.

Note how Samson's process simultaneously promotes accountability and reduces blame. Performance problems, whenever possible, are viewed within a team context.

### Models of Team Success: Sports and the New Military

Samson, who calls himself an "executive coach," points out that his processes are identical to the ones employed by the most successful coaches in professional and college sports. However, the most recent advancements in team technology have come from an unexpected source.

Most organizational consultants equate "the military model" with the old-fashioned "command and control" model and the standard explanation as to why

organizations underachieve or fail. Samson, however, credits the new military with advancing team technology.

"In the last several years the military has taken large organizations that have functioned in a very structured fashion and has created organizations composed of small teams. And they've trained, empowered and resourced those teams in such a way that they are incredibly powerful independent operations." Samson notes the military's recent success in Afghanistan.

Samson foresees corporate America replicating this model which allows corporations to be quick, focused and able to get results. The military did it first because its mission changed, according to Samson. The military realized the power of a small team to go into a situation and have an incredibly magnifying force. The military developed team technology because the world changed after the Cold War and with the rise of terrorism.

### Samson on the Future of "Virtual Teams"

Something of a futurist, Samson envisions more and more corporations shedding their monolithic structures and becoming lean and team-oriented. Samson points out that with the increasing effectiveness of video technology, distance is ceasing to be a barrier to operating business. With a cell phone and a laptop, Samson can create or coach a "virtual team" with members residing all over the globe.

### Teamwork Dynamics' Keys to Success

*The Business Champion* has reviewed many team-building methodologies and finds Samson's *Teamwork Dynamics* second-to-none. *Teamwork Dynamics* is several cuts above most other teambuilding programs for several reasons:

1. Tom Samson has extensive CEO-level experience and personal sincerity. Tom Samson wants his clients to say, "Tom touched us and we grew."
2. *Teamwork Dynamics* is a systematic and comprehensive process.
3. *Teamwork Dynamics* has an Internet-based accountability tracking system which reminds team members of their commitments and enables team members to view the status of their team's progress with the touch of a keystroke.



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For more information visit:

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