

# Embrace the Power

By E. Lander Medlin

While teaching me to drive a motorcycle, my husband began to notice that I was tentative and hesitant, slow to engage the controls, barely giving the bike any gas. Soon thereafter we pulled up to a stop sign during one of our familiar country road training rides. He turned to me and said emphatically, “You have got to learn to embrace the power!” I just looked at him blankly.

It is important to understand that the forward thrust and momentum of the bike requires positive engagement of the bike’s throttle power. The rider has to embrace the power by coordinating the controls (throttle, clutch, and back brake) simultaneously for sustained, controlled, and constructive forward motion. He said, “If you don’t understand this concept and truly embrace the bike’s engine power, you will remain tentative and hesitant, and you definitely won’t have any fun!” Actually, there is a great deal of synergy in the way a motorcycle’s individual controls are enhanced by a proficient rider to achieve optimum thrust, momentum, and quick-stop capability. Taken individually, there is no forward momentum. Indeed, as the definition of synergy implies, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This is one example of synergy in action.

An example of synergy amongst people

is demonstrated by the baseball teams in this year’s World Series between the Philadelphia Phillies and the New York Yankees. Each individual player must deliver his specific talents and strengths during each game for the team to successfully compete and ultimately win. During



every game in the series, both teams work to seize the momentum and turn it into a winning advantage. For example, the New York Yankees has one team member they call an outstanding, master “closer” – Mariano Rivera is considered the world’s best. This is a pitcher whose sole responsibility and contribution is to enter the game when the odds are completely against them (e.g., in the extreme when the bases are loaded and there are no outs), to close down the opposition’s game-changing rally, and to keep his

team’s momentum. Yet, it isn’t any one person who ultimately wins the game. It’s all of them combined, all the individual players’ talents and strengths combined to create that winning combination and achieve victory. This is synergy in action, hence, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. They have learned to embrace the power of their people.

Although the challenges we face today are real, many, and serious, the people working in our organizations today constitute game-changing “closers”; they are the key to our success. Are we embracing the power of our people, our team, and our organization? To do so we must:

- Celebrate their differences
- Recognize their contributions and value
- Encourage out-of-the-box, creative, and innovative thinking
  - Foster unity, squelch divisiveness
  - Challenge and resolve conflicts with mutual respect
  - Set the tone by your own positive response
  - Keep hope alive
  - Create the organization’s momentum

Most recently I read that “a train traveling 55 mph on a railroad track can crash through a five-foot thick steel-reinforced concrete wall without stopping. That same train, starting from a stationary position, won’t be able to go through an inch-thick block of concrete in front of the driving wheel.” Now that’s embracing the power of momentum. Without momentum we can be stymied by even small obstacles, but with momentum we can face seemingly insurmountable odds. In the face of the tough economic road that lies ahead, we must find ways to seize the momentum, embrace its power, and change the game altogether.


APPA can be a source of help! Especially since our purpose is transformational – to elevate educational facilities professionals into influential leaders who, in turn, create inviting and supportive learning environments, which increase the profession’s credibility. Specifically:

- Invest in your professional development through our educational programs (the Institute, Academy, Toolkit, and APPA 2010 conference in Boston);
- Benchmark with your peers by filling out the FPI survey (open through December 7, 2009; the report is available free to member participants);
- Engage in our rich network of peers (by becoming a member and participating in our educational programs and conference);
- Share your successes and lessons learned with your colleagues (by contributing website content, doing a research project, or writing an article);
- Demonstrating your competency and credibility within your institution and the profession (by gaining your professional certification with an EFP or CEFPP credential, engaging an FMEP site visit team, or applying for an individual or institutional award); and ultimately,
- Building yourself and your organization for the future.

We do this best collaboratively and collectively. The sustained growth and strength of the California Redwoods is a marvelous example of how this works. The root growth of a California Redwood tree is actually very shallow. However, the roots of *all* these redwood trees are *intertwined*, which creates phenomenal strength for all of them in the face of the most severe storms and weather conditions. This is the unique secret of the strength of these magnificent trees. In fact, a redwood tree is unable to stand alone – a lesson that should not be lost on us as we face today’s challenges. APPA is the organization that helps intertwine individual educational facilities professionals to build on our collective strength and gain this synergistic effect. What we

can achieve collectively pales what we can do individually.

By creating this synergistic environment for these things to happen in our own organizations, we can regain our momentum. Michael Eisner, former CEO of Disney, said of his ‘Imagineers,’ “My

inventory goes home at night!” Do you have that same attitude concerning the great value of the people in your organization? Have you embraced the power? 

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