

A Compelling Vision For Collaboration

An article titled "Steps to Smoother Collaboration" offers hope and promise to all of us engaged in the exciting, challenging, and arduous efforts to foster collaboration.

In my experience, the key factor in successful collaboration is that participants articulate together the compelling reason or vision for the change. The time spent discovering and articulating a compelling vision is essential. At each step of the collaborative process, the vision will validate decisions and inspire collaborators when the process's tediousness or complexity tempts them to give up.

The vision for the collaborative endeavors of Catholic healthcare providers should both reinforce and transcend the rationale other parties might have for collaborating. I have been both haunted and challenged by a presentation I heard several years ago. The speaker noted that certain healthcare providers who had little in common seemed to find it easy to collaborate to enhance profits or solidify their business, whereas other providers who shared similar values and mission seemed unable or unwilling to collaborate to strengthen the healing mission of Jesus and the provision of service to those most in need.

CHANGING THE SCENARIO

Sponsors of Catholic healthcare must assume significant responsibility for changing this scenario and for smoothing the way toward collaboration. How can this be done? There are several ways.

Return to the Original Vision First, I suggest we return to the original motivation or vision that brought us into the healthcare ministry. Sisters in my congregation have reminded me constantly that we did not enter healthcare to meet our own needs or to build monuments to ourselves (be they state-of-the-art hospitals, ambulatory care centers, or clinics). We became involved in the healthcare ministry, going to unknown places with limited human and financial resources, to bring healing to those in need, just as Jesus did. We must continually check our decisions and motivation against this standard.

Describing Success All of us involved in Catholic healthcare should describe success in much broader terms than are ordinarily used. Positive financial results are important, but these alone do not guarantee success. The Gospel tells us how we should measure success in our services and in our collaborative

endeavors: We are truly successful if the poor and marginalized are better served; if the human dignity of our patients, employees, and partners is enhanced; and if we can effect positive systemic change for all, particularly the voiceless and vulnerable.

Recognizing Contributions Another area to which we could bring a unique contribution to collaboration is in our assessment of strength and weakness. St. Paul spoke of the folly of the cross, and perhaps my suggestion will be considered folly too. However, even though some of our potential partners may have more resources, other real "goods" and "values" brought by each partner must be recognized as well. For instance, in one collaborative arrangement, the party that had significantly greater financial resources recognized and valued some important (though not financial) resources brought by the second party. The spirit during the negotiations and since the arrangement was implemented has been one of true equals coming together to create something new. This is not in accord with the "wisdom of the world," but it certainly is in accord with the wisdom of Jesus.

FOCUS ON SUCCESS

I conclude my reflections with a practical suggestion and a request. The practical suggestion is that providers remain focused on the long-term results of collaboration without letting the process become inordinately long. Giving significant time in a concerted way; recording, checking, tracking, and celebrating agreements; and avoiding repetitive discussions and long time lapses during negotiations will help them achieve success.

The request is that there be continued publication of "success stories" describing collaborative endeavors with some longevity. An analysis of what has contributed to these longer-term successes would be invaluable, especially since there are many stories about sincere and costly collaborative endeavors that never got off the ground or that "sunk" as quickly as the Titanic.

As my Spanish-speaking friends say, "*Animo! Adelante!*"—"Take heart; be energized! keep moving!" We have every reason to collaborate so that "all manner of the sick and lame will be healed," and we have the enviable promise that the collaborator par excellence, Jesus, is Emmanuel, God-with-us in every effort. □



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