

# Frontline Supervisor

**MIIA**  
Employee  
Assistance  
Program

1.800.451.1834



## This Issue

Synergy: The Path in Concert

TEAM =

*Together Everyone Achieves More*

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## Synergy: The Path in Concert

In our Quality Quotient volume for 2009, we explored Kaizen, an example of continuous quality improvement. We looked at the nature of improvement and then at maximizing personal and professional energy. In this fourth article, we bring it all together to synergize the workplace.

Most people have heard the expression, “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” What does it mean? What does this have to do with synergy? Further, why is the principle of synergy the pinnacle of a successful business protocol? For fans of author Steven Covey, synergy is the sixth of his seven habits of highly effective people.

Synergy involves the **creative interaction and cooperation** of different people to produce new behavior and original solutions that could not have been conceived from the behavior or actions of each individual if taken separately. This dynamic process honors, values and respects differences, and generates excitement among teams and workgroups. The excitement fuels the development of cutting edge innovations in municipal services and practices.

**Differences produce high horsepower.** For synergy to occur, differences are essential in several ways: First, different aptitudes, knowledge bases and experiences are recognized to complement each other.

Second, what each person brings to the table expands the total knowledge base and problem-solving machinery of the group, and third, different perspectives illuminate and enrich each other.

Stephen Covey writes, “Synergy is the highest activity of life; it creates new untapped alternatives; it values and exploits the mental, emotional, and psychological differences between people.” When leaders offer ways to interact that encourage valuing, respecting, and learning from differences, then problem-solving becomes a stimulating challenge. Solutions produced from work groups generate “**third alternatives**,” says Covey, as distinct from the more limited “my way or your way” options that keep organizations from excelling.

Supervisors and managers of “synergy in process” guide employees through a seven step process:

1. Seek to understand how each person sees the problem to solve or goal to accomplish.
2. Try out alternative ideas, inviting thoughts and comments from the group.
3. Clarify the problem or goal based on the first two steps.
4. Brainstorm ideas and options to address and fix the problem, and steps to reach the goal.

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5. Collaborate in creating the best solution, utilizing each person's areas of expertise and knowledge.
6. Evaluate the results together.
7. Refine the solution based on how both persons see the results and their roles in achieving them.

*Do you want a collection of brilliant minds or a brilliant collection of minds?  
--R. Meredith Belbin*

It takes a skilled, experienced supervisor to create a "brilliant collection" of team members and to utilize their different skills and abilities in ways that boost the quality of output, whether it is a product or a service.

H.E. Luccock says, "No one can whistle a symphony. It takes an orchestra to play it." If you imagine a supervisor as an orchestra conductor, then it makes sense that each instrument must play in synchrony and harmony with other instruments to produce the total and energizing output that is vastly more complex and accomplished than each person can produce as a soloist.

In order to generate or maintain high morale and positively highlight individual differences, supervisors can encourage each employee to find one other coworker whom he/she admires and from whom he/she wants to learn. When we admire the workmanship or skills of another person, our own work improves. Excellence in both attitude and aptitude can be contagious when supervisors foster synergy rather than competition. When supervisors recognize the ways in which each member of the team contributes to the whole—anything from dedication to enthusiasm, to accuracy in bringing a new technology to the workplace—and encourages the other team members to tap their colleagues, a positive synergy buoys everyone, even through hard times.

**S**teer, support, and synergize

**Y**our

**N**etwork

**E**veryone

**R**ealizes

**G**reat

**Y**ield

