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## Healthy comment: it's only work

***The Leisure Review's* new health correspondent wonders about the nature of partnership and what it takes to create one that works. After all, making things happen doesn't just happen.**

How many of us truly work in partnership? I've heard people calling me a partner in this, a partner in that, and a partner in something else, I can't remember. I am often called a partner in my professional world and also in my social world.

There is a difference to the settings in which I play the partner. In my social world I can honestly say I am a partner. I can say this because a partnership in my social world is something that brings me together with people reliant on, and linked to, a common purpose which in many, many cases results in a common objective being achieved.

However, for an increasingly common number of people a partner is seen simply as a funding agent. This is not a partner: this is a funder. A funding relationship is very different to a partnership. Doing something that you might not normally do but because you received funding to do it is not a partnership. That is a funding/provider relationship. Paying for goods and services is simply an exchange that results in the use of resource to achieve an output or outcome that you are no doubt being performance managed or monitored to achieve.

Sometimes the funding partner is after something, something that often only you can help them achieve. More often they will have an agenda that you can help them realise. Sometimes their objective might not be your objective but because they paid you for the privilege you do what they expect. This is not partnership.

Let's talk partnerships

In my social world I have strong relationships with immediate family, extended family, friends and people who I have a common purpose or interest with. Often these partnerships take no effort. I want to be there, they want to be there; I want to do it, they want to do it too. I am really interested in achieving a positive outcome; they are after the same outcome. These relationships will no doubt have developed over time. They will have their own language and acceptable behaviour standards, and will have naturally occurring parameters. There is a synergy, an unwritten code of reliance; an affinity with one another. These parameters, synergies and affinities are unlikely to have ever been discussed but we know they are there. We simply accept that we have something in common.

These partnerships are of no financial consequence to me. I invest time and sometimes my own cash in them. I do this because I want to. Many of my personal partnerships are built on a common interest or need. I give and I take; I probably give a lot more than I take. I change. I organise. I concede. And I challenge. The thing is, all my social partnerships exist because of one common denominator: me. I can choose with whom I spend time and what my social partnerships do for me. I can dip in and out when I like. Ultimately, I am an individual with needs. Once satisfied, I will move on and I will probably re-visit these partnerships as my needs change and develop.

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**“When I work in partnership I want to work with people who want the same thing. Their way of getting there might be a little different to mine but we can at least agree a common path.”**

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In work I am still an individual. In work I am still the common denominator. However, I am influenced by what my role is there to achieve and the reason for my role existing in the first place. Someone somewhere thought they needed a gap to be filled. They developed a person specification and a description of a job. They identified who it is I need to work with, whom I need to influence, inform and challenge. My professional role determines who I am while I am in work. There are boundaries to what I can and cannot do. These are often very clearly defined. There are decisions I can make and there are decisions I need to take advice on before making, and sometimes there is a need for someone to make my decision for me, on my behalf. I understand this and try my best to achieve the outcomes I am employed to deliver. I communicate this to my peers; to my partners; to those I invest in.

But here is what I really want to talk about.

Why do you go to work? Do you go to work to change the landscape in which you work? Do you go to work to make a difference? Do you understand the unique nature of your role and the difference it aims to make each and every day? If this is the case, you and I – we – are the common denominator.

When I work in partnership I want to work with people who want the same thing. Their way of getting there might be a little different to mine but we can at least agree a common path. That will be easy because ultimately we are after the same prize. We are working collectively, in collaboration, co-producing the vision and busily oiling the wheels that will take us there. We develop the way forward together. We know we will make a difference. We have a common purpose. We want to implement and effect change. We want to make those differences happen. Today. Tomorrow. In the future.

Because I am unique and because I am employed in a specific role to deliver certain things, and the fact that I operate within certain parameters, means you need to learn about me. As I do you. You need to understand what it is I am trying to achieve. Ask me. I'll tell you. I will ask you. Ask how we can work in partnership to deliver our common objectives. If we have no common goals or we don't understand what it is we need to achieve we can't work in partnership. Don't simply ask for money. That won't work.

Don't take that personally. After all, it's only work.

***The Leisure Review's* new health correspondent will be making regular contributions under the Healthy Comment heading.**

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