Book Excerpt from *The Hippo Solution,* CHAPTER 42

METHODS OF CREATING COLLECTIVE AWARENESS

You will have to create your own rhythm that makes sense for your business and culture. Naturally, I cannot tell you exactly what that rhythm should be. What I can do is provide several examples to spark your thinking. Adopt one of these examples or use them as a spark to create your own.

Alan Mulally's Business Process Review

Every Thursday for two hours, Alan's management team would meet to review the business. By "management team," don't think just a handful of people. There were a lot of people in this meeting to be sure that every team knew what was going on.

They would start with a review of the overall plan. Every person knew the plan. It wasn't complicated. In fact, the plan fit on a business card-size piece of paper. During the Thursday meeting, each leader would report on their part of the plan, including a color coding to designate their current status.

When he started this rhythm, it took a while before leaders had the confidence to be vulnerable and share what was really going on. Mulally has told the story of how he clapped when the first red status finally appeared. Mulally says that, "If it's not a shared environment, people are not going to have the confidence to share how it's really going. Then you're just managing a secret— you don't know what's going on."

This level of awareness and information-sharing turned Mulally's organization into a cohesive network of teams that was working toward a common goal: the survival and turnaround of Ford Motor Company, in this case. Teams could see what other teams were doing. Teams would start to offer help to other teams that needed it. It became a true "team of teams."

And it worked. Ford Motor Company turned around.

David Fox has been an executive focused on customer-focused cultures for over twenty years. One day, as he was driving to the office, he received a phone call from a colleague telling him about a system issue. As soon as he arrived, David sprinted into the building, bypassed his office without checking email, grabbing coffee, or chatting with co-workers, and ran up two flights of stairs into the company's war room. Thankfully, he arrived just before the CEO, who looked at David and said, "Where is everybody else?"

You see, when there was an issue, every executive was expected to be in the war room, focused on the issue until it was resolved. The war room was a physical room lined with computers and monitors so that every executive and manager had all of the information necessary to solve the problem quickly. The war room was not just active during an issue—it was active 24/7. The war room constantly provided the information needed for everyone to create a great customer experience. The war room provided collective awareness.

You could employ a similar approach.

By the way, don't miss a key insight from his story.

You see, David's story not only illustrates the use of a war room but reveals an important truth for what actually made the war room effective: the CEO's hyper-focus on a great customer experience. Sure, the war room was a method to achieve the goal but would not have been effective without the clear focus on what was more important than anything else: providing a great customer experience. It was a clear reference point, a distinct destination and articulation about what was ultimately most important for the organization.

If you put two variables of the formula together—a clear reference point and a method of providing collective awareness to achieve it—like David's CEO did, you start to unlock the power of the formula.

Intentional Leadership Rhythms

An executive with a nationally recognized insurance company relayed to me how they conduct weekly CEO meetings with senior leadership, bi-weekly meetings with mid-level leadership, and monthly meetings with everyone. It's a good example of an intentional leadership rhythm to create collective awareness.

1x1 Meetings

Don't forget the power of your 1x1 meetings with direct reports. Leverage them to drill into their heads the need to share information proactively.

Rebecca Hunter, former Chief Human Resources Officer for 40,000+ employees in the State of Tennessee government, says that the reason why people don't share information and work together across teams is usually *not* because people flat-out refuse to share information. While that certainly occurs, more often than not, people don't share information and work together because they just don't think about it.

Hunter emphasizes the importance of one-on-one meetings with her immediate team. During these meetings, she routinely asks the question: "Who else needs to know what you know?" She does this because she's found that people just didn't think about sharing information. They weren't against sharing it, they were just busy and focused on their own work, which is why she continuously ingrained the concept of sharing information and collaborating with other people—inside and outside their team boundary—who "need to know."

Everyone knows about the tremendous success of the Apollo project back in the 1960s and 1970s. What you may not know is how collective awareness played a significant role in its success. As described in his book *Team of Teams*, General McChrystal explains how NASA brought in George Mueller to connect their teams. He built a "teleservices network" to connect engineers and managers from NASA and different contractor organizations. They would simply tune in to the real-time feed.

How can you create a continuous cross-feed across your teams that need to work together? I don't mean just passing information—I mean data plus real human-to-human interaction. Of course, we have tremendous technology platforms to aid in this today, such as Slack, Microsoft Teams, and a myriad of other tools. You could set up a regular Zoom meeting that runs every day at a specified time, perhaps even continuously, depending on your project and domain. Just remember, it's not just data—the key is to facilitate real human-to-human interaction.

Daily Check-In/Check-Out

Software development teams often employ a habit of conducting a daily ten-minute standing meeting. Usually, these are in the mornings so that everyone knows what everyone is doing, what the issues are, and what the plan for the day is.

Daily check-outs at the end of the day can also be helpful, especially if many are working remotely: what happened, what was done, what remains, what is the plan for tomorrow, what's most important? Consider implementing your own daily check-in/check-out, perhaps even with a broader audience.

This type of constant communication is important, even if you don't think you need it.

Heather Gahir, Ph.D., Vice President of Talent Strategy and Organizational Development for Jackson National Life Insurance Company, emphasizes this when she says that "It is important to have intense communication while you are figuring out how to get teams to work together.

You have to keep people in communication with each other. That's where collaboration breaks down: because they don't communicate with each other often enough."

The Scoreboard

Sometimes, collective awareness can be physical in nature. A couple of years ago, I visited a Lifeway Christian Resources distribution center. I remember the big electronic scoreboard on the wall that told every single person in the building what was going on, what the goals were, how much had been accomplished, and what was left to be done. All they had to do was look up. It's not unlike my basketball teams—we could always look up on the wall and know *exactly* where we stood. How could you implement a similar resource, such as a balanced scorecard?

Time Outs

When I coach basketball, we could have the best plan, but the other team doesn't always do their part and let us execute the plan. We get out of our rhythm, get flustered, or lose our focus. That's where time outs come in. It's an opportunity to reset. Sometimes, we just needed to get back to the plan. Sometimes, we needed to adapt the plan. But we often needed to step back and reset.

If you are going 100 percent and never have a "time out," you will not reach your destination, at least not without completely wearing yourself out. Implement "time outs."

These time outs could be retreats, leadership meetings, offsites, weekly debriefs. These are not team-building activities. You may employ some team-building during your "time out," but it's important to re-establish collective awareness: What is our plan, what is most important, what are the current realities and issues, what do we need to change, and how do we move forward?