

the
**PROUTY
PROJECT**

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"C" NOTE QUOTE:

"The creative process is always complex. In the beginning, the threads are tangled and form no discernable pattern. Little by little, textures and materials come together, a framework takes shape in the skillful hands of inspired artists."

● If you know who said this quote, please send an e-mail to kari.baltzer@proutyproject.com or call 952.942.2922 by **Friday, July 29** – one guess per individual. If we have more than one correct answer, we throw those names into a hat and draw the winner of a \$100 gift card.

And last issue's winner is... Ron Kirscht, Donnelly Custom Manufacturing, MN.

Ron knew that Jim Skinner, CEO of McDonalds, said the following:

"The key trait for any CEO today is the ability to balance your epiphanies with your execution. Big ideas and bold strategies are important, but given the times we're in, what matters most are results. There's a saying that 'good ideas are common – what's uncommon are people who will work hard enough to bring them about.'"

Congratulations Ron! Ron says, *"I would like to give it to my son, Corporal. David Kirscht (USMC) presently serving at the Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, N.C., I know he'll appreciate it greatly and put it to good use."*

Artist, Musician, and Scientist

A wise CEO once said that "every strategy session needs an artist, musician, and scientist in the process."

We agree, and will always lace our strategy sessions with DeWitt Jones (artist), Ben Zander (musician), Jack Welch (scientist) – and many, many others to stimulate fresh thinking.

A couple months ago, I invited an "artist, musician, and scientist" to join me in the **creative think tank** for lunch. Enjoy excerpts from our discussion on page 2.

As this newsletter hits your mailboxes, a number of us are representing "team prouty" in an "adventure race" in Colorado. A fascinating race that teams three able-bodied athletes, with two disabled athletes.

If all goes according to schedule, we should complete the 2-day race by 3 p.m. on Monday, June 27.

This race, hosted by Erik Weihenmayer, the first blind man to summit Mt. Everest, leads me to believe that perhaps an **artist, musician, scientist, and big-time mountaineer** should be in every strategy session.

Keep stretching, and have a fabulous 3rd quarter.

P.S. A special thanks to everyone who participated in or donated to our 2011 STRETCH Friendraiser Event at Bearpath Golf & Country Club. Through your generosity, we were able to raise over \$65,000 to support **NO Barriers USA**. **Thank you very much!**



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● STRATEGIC PLANNING

Every Strategy Session Needs an Artist, a Musician, and a Scientist



Interview by
Jeff Prouty

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For the past two decades, the Prouty Project has worked hard to weave in the elements of an artist, musician, and scientist in every piece of work we do.

I thought it might be interesting to put an artist (**Chris Carlson**, actor and CEO, Narrative Pros), musician (**Ben Kyle**, founder of the band, Romantica) and scientist (**Dr. Alex Khoruts**, from the University of Minnesota Medical School) in the *creative think tank* just to “bat around” some ideas.

Enjoy these excerpts from our lively discussion:

Jeff: What do you think artists, musicians, and scientists bring to the business strategy process?

Chris: It begins with the audience – acknowledge what they’re looking for. What do you feel? What story are you telling? Is it the same story as your teammates? Can you articulate the story? It’s up to you to decide whether you want to be a part of the story.

Ben: A different point of view. What I would offer might be a very strange angle. I’m interested in the meaning. What does this mean to you? What does it mean to the world?

Alex: A good scientist is able to ask most fundamental questions underneath obscuring details. If a business is in leadership transition, I would want to explore the passions and visions of the new compared to the old.

Jeff: What process do each of you use to generate creative stuff?

Chris: As an actor, there is enormous creativity with the execution of the character. It’s not art, however, unless it reaches someone else.

Ben: It starts with an inspiration. Be available to it, then run with it, build around it. My lyrics come with chord progressions playing the guitar. It spawns a melody in my head – I hum it. If it’s good enough, I’ll remember it!

Alex: By reading and interacting with others I find pieces that fit my own work.

Jeff: Give us some examples of how you push beyond your comfort zone – stretch, as we like to say?

Chris: In one movie I played in, my character sexually assaults a little girl. My own daughter had just been born. It was important to me that I talk to the little girl actress beforehand. It was a very difficult scene.

Ben: Writers are travelers. New places inspire me. I like to describe with new impressions. You have to take risks to be inspired. I want to be exposed to others I wouldn’t normally be in contact with. Stretch yourself.

Alex: I have some big ideas, but pursuing those involves major risk. I find that I need to sacrifice established research programs that took many years and divert the resources to develop something bigger, but something that might not work out.



Chris Carlson



Ben Kyle



Dr. Alex Khoruts

Jeff: There are 21 FORTUNE 500 companies headquartered in the Twin Cities. What would you share with the 21 CEOs to help them think about creativity, innovation, and strategy?

Chris: I would encourage each CEO to more openly embrace creativity. Openness. Commitment to ideas. Invest in creative livelihood. Leverage the whole person. And reach back to who you truly are as a person.

Ben: I would ask what excites you to be creative, innovative? Dollars? Something else? What is the love? Think about beauty. Discovering something new. What is the exciting result?

Alex: Interact with many people different than yourselves. Keep learning all you can about the world, people, questions in science, advances in technology. Don’t restrict life to suburban isolation and surround yourself only with people similar to you.

Jeff: What role does courage play in your thinking?

Chris: The opposite, failure, has meaning to me. Find the ability to execute in the face of fear. You must make peace with things that don’t go how you want. To foster courage, familiarize yourself with failure. What are the consequences of your fears? How can you use them? What’s the worst case scenario? What’s the learning experience?

Ben: Bottom line is the meaning. There’s not a lot of fulfillment to singing something that’s not true. What gives courage is the end of the story. Believing in the meaning of what you do.

Alex: Small ideas can sustain a scientific program, but are unlikely to make a substantial impact. Going after something big requires major courage. If you’re ahead of everyone else, you’re likely to encounter skepticism and resistance. If not, you’re likely to face stiff competition.

Jeff: Thank you very, very much. Have a wonderful 2011, and thanks for helping us put the stretch in strategy.

● ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

Leading Courageously While Making a Difference



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Article by
Grayce Belvedere Young

Some days, reading the news can be quite disheartening – from economic challenges, to war and civil unrest, to education problems, to unethical businesspeople. In this article, I'd like to share inspiring news about two leaders in our community who are courageously creating opportunities while making a difference. As undergraduates at the University of Minnesota's Carlson School, **Matt Norris** and **Asha Sharma** dreamed about making our community a better place for youths. Here's their story.

In 2008, a survey was conducted in Brooklyn Park that indicated 75% of youths were not involved in after school activities. The youths stated that there were no youth engagement opportunities available for them. Additional conversations ensued with youths to see what they wanted – they requested safe places to go and the need for jobs. Thus the dream for the A-List emerged – a place for teens to get a job, to get help with homework, and to showcase their talents while hanging out in a safe environment.

Matt and Asha met at the U of M and, as they became friends, they shared their respective interests in social entrepreneurship. They began by writing a business plan they presented to community leaders and interest grew. "Our real break came in the spring of 2009, when we won the Ernst & Young 'Your World, Your Vision' contest for college students," Matt states. Winning this competition provided \$10,000 seed money and other funding slowly began to come in. As excitement grew, Matt and Asha knew it would become a reality.



April 29th was the Grand Opening and the community came out in droves! The teens greeted attendees, provided tours, and answered questions of the community and business leaders who attended.

Asha shares, *"Opening day was a day we've anxiously been awaiting for two years and the teens of Brooklyn Park for even longer! While this is only the humble beginning of*

a non-profit organization started by a couple of college kids and teens, the future was seen in the faces and contemplated by the minds of the inaugural 18 teen employees that gathered with us and the hundreds of teens that will enjoy the facility for years to come. The energy was prevalent and the passion, contagious! A kismet evening that was the perfect cap to our start and beginning to our future."

The business plan Matt and Asha wrote is incredibly impressive. The key focus areas center on Entrepreneurship, Education, and Personal Growth. Teens are introduced to entrepreneurship through the front-line employment opportunities (working the snack bar or running the screen printing shop) as well as serving on the advisory board for the A-List. Tutors from local colleges provide homework assistance. And, youths are encouraged to be actively involved in planning events, sharing input with the Board of Directors, and helping to implement the business plan.

The biggest challenge Matt and Asha experienced in implementing their business plan was securing a good location and negotiating the lease. "We thought it would take about a month, but it actually took nine months," Matt commented. And the biggest surprise? Aside from the lease (and the subsequent remodeling of the very cool space), the initial timeline was quite accurate. "It was amazing to see that we stayed on track. It's a testament to planning."

A-List mission – To create a platform for all youth to achieve their dreams in the fields of employment, education, and personal growth by serving as a catalyst between youth, the business community, and post-secondary opportunities.

Since the opening, the enthusiasm of the teen employees to learn and to work has been thrilling to experience. "The A-List is going to help me accomplish having my first responsible job and learning the values of making business successful," Latrina Bowling commented. The teens are taking ownership of the place. They are the ones telling others to not stand on the furniture and to pick up the candy wrappers off the floor.

Tutors are busy helping with homework Monday through Thursday. The college prep program has generated significant interest. Business mentors came in to share work experiences and provide advice on career options. The teens are energetically offering suggestions for evening events – including a talent show (wildly successful with over 150 youths attending), a fashion show, a Taste of A-List cultural food experience, and many more. The reality that this establishment is up and running is due to the passion and courage of two leaders in our community – Matt and Asha – HUGE kudos to you both!

To learn more about the A-List or to get involved, please visit their website, www.thealistryouth.org.

● BOARD DEVELOPMENT

Governance: Board Engagement (Part 3 of a 4-Part Series)



Article by
Mike Felmlee

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In our introduction to this series, we challenged all board members – public, private, and non-profit – to evaluate if they were spending their time on the right things performing them well while performing up to the best of their individual abilities.

In Part 1 of the series, we shared with you a board engagement tool created by David Nadler to evaluate whether your board is properly engaged in the right things. In Part 2, we highlighted a robust board assessment process to help you determine if you're performing the right things well.

In Part 3, we will explore the process of assessing individual board member performance as a means to enhance the overall performance of your board.

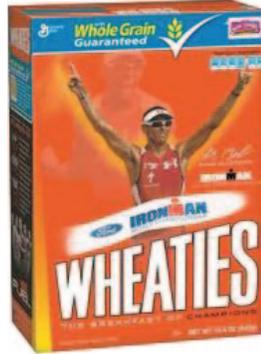
In the public sector, individual board member assessments are common. But, what happens in the private and non-profit sectors where rules addressing such things are less stringent, and where many board members not only volunteer their time and talent but also donate large sums of money to the organizations they serve? Are they subjected to the same level of scrutiny as their public counterparts? In most cases no. In fact, a recent survey by the National Association of Corporate Directors indicated that only 34% conduct annual individual board member assessments. That's only one in three!

And, that begs the question: *"If feedback is the breakfast of Champions, then why do so many boards skip it?"*

Intellectually, we all understand the benefits of performance management. But, let's be honest, our egos are fragile. And, we all know Board Chairs who have had to deal with the fallout of angry board members or lose members because the assessment process was handled poorly. Still, many others neglect this important work because they simply don't understand how to do it properly.

We believe an effective individual board member assessment process is part of a much larger framework to help board members understand how it contributes to enhancing the overall performance of the board and of the organization. Consequently, we recommend the following 8-step approach:

- 1) Educate your board about what a high-performance board looks like and explain that the process to elevate its performance takes time.
- 2) Help board members understand the level of board engagement expected.
- 3) Include the board in creating a formal board assessment tool.
- 4) Engage board members in drafting job descriptions delineating their roles and responsibilities.
- 5) Ground the board in how to give and receive performance feedback.



- 6) Ask board members to prepare a self assessment of their performance.
- 7) Ask the board to provide feedback by individual board members anonymously.
- 8) Share feedback in the form of "best practices" or have the Board Chair meet with individual board members face to face.

And for the really adventurous:

- 9) Consider having individual board members receive the feedback verbally by their colleagues as a way to practice giving and receiving constructive feedback face to face.

Much has been written about what elements to include in an individual board member assessment. We prefer a simple approach. Focus on the following:

- Are they prepared for meetings?
- Are they committed to fostering a "culture of inquiry?"
- Do they speak up and share their creative insights and candid opinions?
- Are they committed to contributing strategic, big picture input?
- Do they avoid meddling in the details?
- Are they committed to making tough decisions?
- Do they support having the board and their individual performance assessed annually?
- Are they committed to making the board process an engaging, worthwhile, productive endeavor for both the board and management?

Or better yet, simply ask three open-ended questions:

- 1) What should the board member do **more** of...
- 2) What should the board member do **less** of...
- 3) What should the board member **continue** to do...

You'll be amazed at the rich dialogue these simple questions can generate.

Good luck to you and your boards and don't forget to remind them that **feedback** is the "Breakfast of Champions!"

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PLEASE LET US KNOW...

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Bigger Goals • Bolder Strategies • Better Collaboration

THANKS!