

## Leadership Barometer 140 Challenge “Samers”

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



I often hear a phrase coming from the lips of hiring managers that makes me cringe. "We want to hire someone who will fit into our group." They expend a lot of effort in screening candidates with personality tests, multiple interviews, even role-plays in order to determine that the new hire will be similar in thinking to the existing team. I think this practice is a huge mistake.

### Diversity is Better

It is often the maverick or even outcast among a group of people who comes up with ingenious solutions to problems or creates entirely new streams of income. When we seek to have everyone "fit in" we lose the potential for diversity of thought that is a major part of the creative process.

In my leadership team, we had a mixture of line managers from a variety of backgrounds, ethnicity, and gender. These were in a constant state of flux because all were growing and moving in their careers, creating slots for others.

Often, it was the minority representation that brought the group up short when we were off base. They would help us realize that we should not trust our gut perspectives. They would point out when we slipped into a dangerous “group think” or “monoculture” mentality.

### Example From Nature

In “The Contrarian’s Guide to Leadership,” Steven Sample described it this way:

“A highly homogeneous organization is as susceptible to disease and infestations as a large biological monoculture. Every farmer knows that when he and his neighbors plant tens of thousands of contiguous acres in a particular variety of wheat year after year,

that variety will soon become vulnerable to new diseases or new strains of insects. Ecosystems that are biologically diverse are much tougher and more resilient in the long run than monocultures, and so it is with organizations that contain a wide variety of people working toward a common goal.”

It was important to have a variety of people on the team and critical to listen when they pointed out our naiveté. It kept us growing and searching for a greater appreciation of diversity. Although no group ever fully understands the issue, at least if we embrace diversity, we can be a little less blind.

Obviously, it is a good idea to avoid putting a person on the team who is a total misfit, is disruptive, or always brings up a contrary point of view creating dissent. Instead, try to foster a mixture of ideas and points of view by following the actions:

### **Ways to Avoid the Problem**

1. If you use personality tests to screen candidates, seek to place people with different style patterns.
2. During interviews, try to determine the level of independent thinking while also determining the candidate’s propensity for working well in teams.
3. When asking about prior experiences and background, put a high value on skills that will add new dimensions to the existing team rather than map closely with existing team skills.
4. Do not look for clones in terms of demographic and ethnic characteristics. Always seek to increase the variety of the team where possible.
5. Seek to make strategic moves of people from one team to another that will add diversity of thought to both groups.
6. Continually reinforce the idea that we can gain our greatest strength from diversity.

### **Conclusion**

Building a strong team means not going the comfortable route where we hire and place people just like us. That is a formula for mediocrity. Having diversity of thought is a major advantage for any organization.

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of: *The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals*, *Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online*, and *Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind*. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations.

