



## Great Groups

### 99-Word Story

Andy is a wonderful musician, educator, and storyteller. He teaches in schools, calls at square dances, leads choral groups, and plays a mean accordion. What Andy doesn't realize is that he's an expert at fostering teamwork. He has the ability to lead without being in charge – even though he's the “director.”

One comment while leading a choir of novice singers summarizes his philosophy. He said, “Here's how you harmonize. Listen to the person next to you and sing something a little different.” One objective but each contributes uniquely.

Whether musicians, teams, families, or communities, great ones harmonize.

### Discussion Questions

- What are some strategies your team uses to stay in harmony?
- What other examples can you give where a simple “rule” keeps everyone “in tune”?
- Who is someone that uses the opposite leadership philosophy from Andy and what was the result?
- How important is it for you that a person is able to lead without being in charge?

### Interpretation

#### Team Success

What's nice about the story of Andy is that it demonstrates how anyone can be a leader. Simply by doing something different than the person next to you, you can help to lead a group. Without title, position, or pay, anyone can take the lead, shape the group, and start a new direction.

Of course, this assumes that everyone has agreed on the basic purpose of the group. If someone acts too strangely, they can pull the group off course. I once was a member of a team that was preparing a major presentation. There were five of us and we had spent considerable time researching,

### NOTES

Read this story aloud or make copies for your group or team members.

You can build upon the theme of this 99-Word Story by using some of the following questions for your own reflection or to spark a discussion within your team or organization.

There are many ways to understand this story as the discussion questions suggest. If you or your group would like to compare or contrast your interpretation with an outside viewpoint, consider this analysis.

analyzing, and organizing our information. A day before the big event, one person threatened to quit. I don't remember why. There must have been a disagreement about how to do something and this fellow was in the minority. In fact, no one agreed with him. When he announced his intention to leave, it felt like the group was being blackmailed. If he had followed through, the whole presentation would have foundered.

Fortunately, one person put her foot down. With firm resolution she said, "No, you cannot leave. You are a part of this group. We need you for our success. You made the same commitment to the group and our project that we all made. You must fulfill your commitment."

Neither before nor since have I heard someone make such an honest appeal with that much conviction. It worked and the group prevailed.

Most people are probably familiar with Tuckman's stages of group formation – it has been around for more than 50 years. He proposed that all groups go through predictable steps of development: Forming, when the group begins and people get to know one another; Storming, when their work is fraught with disagreement; Norming, when they establish acceptable behaviors; and Performing, when they finally become productive.

Personally, I have several problems with Tuckman's model. In some instances, I have seen people use it as an excuse. At the slightest disagreement, they will announce that the group is in the Storming stage. It's as if we don't have to do anything about it. Just hang in there and we'll eventually get to the next stage.

I have also heard a supervisor say to a team, "Has your group started Storming yet? No? Well, just wait!" It was as if the team had been a group of adolescents with acne.

Lastly, of all the formal and informal teams of which I've been a member, I have never noticed these distinct stages of development. Each group was constantly forming and reforming as people got to know each other more deeply by working together. There may have been disagreements but they never rose to the level of a sustained storm. The norms may have been formalized but followed very loosely. And the degree of performance always varied from one meeting to the next.

I am not sure why this has been my experience. But, when I think about the groups that have been successful, there

**For More Information:**

For another alternative to Tuckman's model, see the Firefly News Flash for February 2012.

was an agreement about the team's purpose, there was an expectation that each person would contribute from their strengths, and there was respect for individuals and their ideas so that differences could be resolved quickly. In short, they harmonized.

**Reprinted from *99's on the 9<sup>th</sup>***

A newsletter of 99-Word Stories  
available on the 9<sup>th</sup> of every month.  
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