

Becoming Colleagues:

Women and Men Serving Together in Faith

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Chapter 2

NINE CRITERIA FOR MIXED-GENDER TEAMS

Mixed-gender teams in which all the members say that their work is effective and mutually satisfying are the exception rather than the norm. Some, like Brian and Martha, work hard at working together effectively, only to be dissolved as a team by circumstances beyond their control. Other men and women work together for many years as colleagues, then suddenly run into a barrier to their shared leadership that neither can explain or remove. Yet other mixed-gender teams succeed as long as the team remains intact. As soon as someone in the team leaves and is replaced by a new member, the "magic formula" is lost and success is up for grabs. No one on the team seems able to articulate or replicate the factors that contributed to the original team's success. Similarly, in another scenario described to me, some men and women participate in a successful team for a time, then go on to another team situation that does not work at all. The team members don't know why and seem unable to replicate the positive elements of one team in the next.

All of these situations and more are represented by the teams described in this book. Few and far between are the teams that, over time, remain successful as they grow and change. Contributing to these real-life team problems are the prevailing gender realities. First, women are still underrepresented as team leaders and they often find that their roles in mixed-gender teams are subservient. Second, men must take big risks to advocate for more women in leadership.

We can readily see that our struggles over the past twenty years and more, using resources and wisdom already available, have yielded limited success for mixed-gender teams. Something is missing. What is it? Both individuals and teams I have interviewed over the last four years demonstrate that there are nine criteria to meet if as men and women we are to have an effective and mutually satisfying ministry together. These criteria immediately reveal what we have overlooked. They show us that we have not recognized the difference between our reflective and our active tasks. This is a simple answer, yet at the same time it is a complex one. It's one thing to enumerate the criteria and say that we have to recognize the difference between our reflective and our active tasks. It's another thing to understand that difference and put it into practice.

Nine Criteria for Mixed-Gender Teams

The nine criteria form a template for us to follow in our quest for successful mixed-gender teams. They fall roughly into two categories that are useful in helping us understand the dynamic relationship between reflection and action. The first five are reflective criteria. The last four are active criteria. (See Exhibit 2.1.)

The Reflective Criteria

The reflective criteria include all those things that we do individually to prepare ourselves to be effective team members. They are about our inner work, not about work that we do in the world, among or with other people. The reflective criteria call us to pause and ponder rather than act. They include making the commitment to reflection, learning, believing, greeting, and including each other.

CRITERION ONE: REFLECT.

The first step we can take to prepare ourselves for effective teamwork is to reflect. In the course of this book, we shall discover how effective teams continually reflect about themselves, their teammates, the team as a whole, and their work. We shall catch a glimpse of the deeper awareness they gain from reflecting, an awareness that goes beyond knowing each other by what they do to knowing each other for who they are and what they are like. This kind of knowing requires a willingness to know ourselves better. It also requires acceptance of gender differences and individual differences within genders. It is only achieved by careful listening to ourselves and each other, and it takes time.

Why commit to this extra emotional and mental work? The best teams say that reflecting helps them integrate theology and practice. This is particularly important for mixed-gender teams because they are still forging new ground in church-related (and indeed in all) organizations.

Reflecting is the first criterion. Repeatedly, in both focus groups and private interviews, men and women working in successful mixed-gender teams emphasize that reflection comes first and continues throughout the life cycle of the successful mixed-gender team. Action will accomplish little, they say, until reflection has borne fruit. Of course, it is always possible for a team to begin reflecting. The benefits of reflecting can be realized anytime in the life cycle of the team, once team members learn the discipline and practice of reflecting. The purpose of starting with reflection is to emphasize a critical point: mixed-gender teams have the best chance of success when they include individuals who are able and willing to be reflective before they form the team.

In Chapter Three we will look carefully at what the reflective tasks require of us. We shall also discover why it is so difficult for us to sustain our commitment to reflection.

CRITERION TWO: LEARN.

Accepting gender and individual differences requires first that we understand them. This requires learning, the second criterion.

Five years ago, when I first began to write about this criterion, I said that we needed to learn more about creating a place for women in leadership. I also pointed out the practical educational tasks necessary to help women become leaders. I especially emphasized leadership development skills training (Becker, 1996). Although we still need to pay attention to the demands of creating women leaders, I do not think that is the major focus of our learning challenge now. Women have begun to find a place at the table alongside men, in both business and nonprofit settings. We are present in great enough numbers that men are also beginning to learn from us. Furthermore, we are creating a wide variety of programs that provide major funding to create women leaders for the future.

This does not mean the challenge has been met. Certainly, we should still pay attention

to the opportunities we provide for young women and girls to become leaders. But our learning should be broader because we can now begin to pay attention to how we work together. With this shift in mind, I believe we face two challenges when we consider learning as a criterion for our ability to work together. First, we need to know more about the challenges of leadership in our time. Second, we need to know what it takes to build a team. We shall discuss these learning challenges in Chapters Four through Six.

CRITERION THREE: BELIEVE.

We all want to believe in what we do. It gives our work meaning. This is not just a trite phrase. It is important. When our work has meaning, what we do and how we do it square with our values (the why of our work). The third criterion calls on us to examine what we believe (our values) as a way of enhancing our ability to work in a mixed-gender team. There are two ways we can reflect on our values in relation to our work. First, we can consider our values about what we do. Second, we can consider our values about how we work.

First let's consider what we do. In nonprofit, church-related organizations, our work is service to others. This work is meaningful, but it is also demanding, endless, and perpetually underfunded. We never get it done, and we often cannot see what we have accomplished. Yet in a unique way, our strong belief in the value of what we do, and the urgency of doing it, can be a catalyst to the success of our team. It can help us weather the stresses of working in a mixed-gender team. We shall see how this works in the teams in this study.

Now let's consider how we work. Since our particular concern is the mixed-gender team, an important aspect is that we work in a mixed-gender team. In order to work effectively in our teams, we need first to consider the value of having both men and women leaders. The third criterion, believing, calls on us to examine what we believe about the leadership of men and women and to recognize how our values influence our ability to team with persons of the other gender. Do we believe it is important to have both men and women on the team? Do we believe women can and should be peers with men in leadership? Do we believe women as well as men can be team leaders? Answering these questions will determine the shape and substance of our teams.

In Chapters Seven through Ten we will look more closely at elements of believing. First, in Chapters Seven and Eight we will briefly examine the theological barriers to women as leaders. These are a part of our history, and in some denominations, a part of the present that still prevents women from playing a role as leaders alongside men. Where these beliefs prevail, the possibility of effective mixed-gender teams is limited. In Chapters Nine and Ten we will learn how and why some teams have developed theological statements explaining their belief in mixed-gender leadership. We'll examine the difference between a theology and a work plan for a mixed-gender team. Finally, we will see how a shared mission and a sense of urgency sustain mixed-gender teams.

CRITERION FOUR: NAME.

Working together effectively requires that we know one another. I am not talking about acquaintanceship here but rather the deeper knowing that is a part of truly acknowledging one another. I like to think of this as naming each other in much the same way that Native Americans name people: they give names that describe some trait of the person who has the name. For this reason I call this fourth criterion naming. Naming is the preeminent reflective task. It includes knowing each other deeply, respecting each other as individuals, building trust, understanding our differences as men and women and as

leaders with a variety of styles, seeing and acknowledging each other's skills and strengths, and assigning value to each other.

It's surprising how few teams recognize the importance of naming each other. Women and men have been working with each other for a long time without knowing or truly acknowledging each other in this way. It may seem obvious that we should acknowledge each other, but it isn't apparent as part of our daily routines. Because acknowledging each other is a reflective activity, it is largely hidden from us until we have made the commitment to know ourselves better and to see and hear the other person.

CRITERION FIVE: INCLUDE.

We can't be a team unless we include each other. That's why including is the fifth criterion. Of all the criteria that I classify as reflective, this one requires the deepest inner work.

Including each other is the true challenge of diversity. It goes far beyond accepting the fact of gender or any other kind of diversity, even beyond managing diversity. Including each other requires opening ourselves to each other, allowing ourselves to be changed by each other. We cannot do this unless we get beyond stereotypes and even acknowledge our own individual prejudices about each other. When we have confronted our prejudices we can embrace diversity with the knowledge that everyone is changed by it. The minority persons change as they come into the sphere of the majority, and the majority persons are changed too, by the positive influence of the minority.

Including is closely related to naming for one simple reason. We are more able to acknowledge each other fully when we have overcome the personal prejudices that get in the way. Therefore, in Chapters Eleven through Thirteen we shall discuss naming and including. We will see more clearly the relationship between acknowledging ourselves and acknowledging each other. We will consider the role of prejudice in limiting our ability to acknowledge each other. Finally, we will examine what it means to call someone of the opposite sex a leader and a partner.

The Active Criteria

The active criteria engage us with the world. They call upon us to take specific actions to change our way of working together. They include communicating, working together, influencing, and modeling.

CRITERION SIX: COMMUNICATE.

In so many ways, communicating is central to mixed-gender team success. In my first writing about this criterion five years ago, I focused on language and the imperative for inclusive language. Today, I think the demands of communication for mixed-gender teams go beyond the need for inclusive language to the need for practical communication skills that help men and women understand one another better. Communicating is no simple task. It requires both speaking and listening to each other.

In many respects, the requirements of communication are practical. Every team I interviewed stressed the importance of constant communication, including a willingness to share personal stories, a commitment to working out the many details (including disagreements and misunderstandings) of daily tasks, and a habit of regularly giving each other feedback. Communication, as we shall see, is also at the heart of a cluster of

specific activities that help teams continually learn how to be better as teams.

By stressing the practical, I do not mean to deny that language is important. Without doubt, inclusive language helps the gender awareness that is so important for mixed-gender team success. Language is the embodiment of our thoughts, our ideas, our way of conceptualizing the world. It reflects our attitudes. Women and men in successful mixed-gender teams say we must be sensitive about language if we are serious about shared ministry. Our language about God is a particular aspect of inclusive language that is perhaps most difficult, and therefore merits our most careful analysis. It too influences our language about and attitudes toward each other. Language can help us name the variety of experiences of the divine.

In Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen we will examine how both language and communication influence effective mixed-gender teams.

CRITERION SEVEN: WORK.

The verb work is good shorthand for the preeminent active criterion: working together. Working together should remind us that women and men need to be together in the same work setting. This is nothing more or less than coexistence. Acknowledging each other, listening to each other, building trust—all the reflective tasks we have mentioned as well as the active tasks that we shall discuss next require being together in the same space, working together, day after day.

Working together successfully requires much more than taking political action to ensure that men and women are present in the leadership of the denominations, their agencies, and their congregations. Above all, it requires communication. Working together in the day-to-day also requires clear boundaries within which each member of the team has permission to play his or her role with some measure of independence. At the same time, it demands wisdom from all members of the team about intimacy and how intimacy works appropriately between members of the opposite sex who are not sexual partners.

Taken together, all the small ways in which team members work at the daily tasks of being together add up to one big thing: commitment. The commitment of the team is not a burden when members share both humor and a serious commitment to shared spirituality. In Chapters Sixteen through Eighteen, we shall see how teams manage the hard work of being together in the day-to-day.

CRITERION EIGHT: INFLUENCE.

To be effective partners, we need to know how to use our power positively and well so that we will be able to influence others toward constructive action. Effective mixed-gender teams do this. Because the ability to influence is the outcome of using power, I call the eighth criterion influencing.

This criterion is particularly important for men, almost always requiring a change in their view of power. The story of many failed mixed-gender teams might be different if the person in the position of power, often a man, viewed his role differently. For women, the task is different but just as difficult. We women must stop fearing power and learn to welcome our own unique power as an ally. To do this, we have to overcome our tendency to rule out the use of power on the assumption that it's always abusive. This is a skill we can learn from men, who are not afraid to use power as a leadership tool. Before either gender can accomplish these tasks, both must understand a great deal more about

power. There are many different kinds of power and there is a vast difference between power and the abuse of power.

In Chapters Nineteen through Twenty-One we shall examine how power is held in effective mixed-gender teams and how it is often understood differently inside the team, regardless of what those outside the team observe about the power dynamic.

CRITERION NINE: MODEL.

Women and men in successful mixed-gender teams work hard to model new ways of leading. Thus modeling effective partnership is the final active criterion.

It's not a matter of women adapting to hierarchical models or men learning to be more relational. It's ultimately a matter of finding new ways of leading together that men and women can both appreciate, understand, and use. Once we do this, gender-inclusive leadership will be easier. Openness and flexibility to change, to take a chance on new ways of leadership, are required for our future. "We can't afford to waste the talent of a single person, male or female. As we look at leadership with a new way' in mind, we become more and more gender blind, focusing on the gifts we have at our disposal rather than male, female, black, white, or anything else. Our goal is to create an effective team, not to adopt my way' or your way'" (Becker, 1996, p. 180). This is what modeling is all about.

When I first wrote about these criteria, I defined a tenth criterion about the need for change in systems. "It is not enough for people to change; systems must change as well," I emphasized (Becker, 1996, p. 180). I have chosen not to write about that tenth criterion in this book for several reasons. First and most important, I now believe that the most effective system change comes from teams exerting pressure on systems from within. People, not systems, allow us to experience partnership and collegiality in our workplace. For this reason, I want to keep the focus on teams and what they are doing (and not doing) to bring about change in systems.

Second, coming at the question of change from the system point of view puts the emphasis on the political and organizational issues that many others are writing about. To be sure, we need models for authority that are not patriarchal. We need salaries for women that equal those of men for comparable work. We need policies and practices that will bring women into leadership and free them to do their best work. These tasks are structural. They cannot be achieved by individuals working alone. They start with individuals but require many people working together on the structure of our denominations to be accomplished. Other people are writing about these changes and I defer to them while I keep the focus of this book on working teams.

Finally, I am a skeptic. I do not think much effective change in systems is yet taking place. To be sure, we are beginning to see some of the first signs. At this writing, one Protestant denomination is structuring for more collaborative leadership at the top. Agencies and congregations are also experimenting with more collaborative teaming in administrative circles. But I have seen many more examples of ways in which systems are not nurturing mixed-gender leadership. Martha and Brian's story is but one example of effective teams that are intentionally separated. Others have told me of organizational policies that actually make their teaming more difficult. Furthermore, it is obvious that attitudes and theologies still limit the participation of women in mixed-gender teams in many denominations.

In Chapters Twenty-Two and Twenty-Three, then, the focus will remain on teams,

looking at how they model change. We will discover how individuals change their own behavior to be more successful team members. We will see how teams discover new ways of leading together. We will also examine the intense and somewhat surprising external pressures that tend to break down the new ways of working together that are crafted by successful teams.

The way the nine criteria work in individual lives is complex. But our examination of these criteria will show us that creating and sustaining an effective mixed-gender team requires time, commitment, and hard work. It demands a constant mix of the reflective and active tasks. The temptation to see the nine criteria as linear and short-term is compelling. But it's not so. They cannot be conquered in linear fashion, like so many hurdles in a race. They aren't consecutive, like chapters in a book. They are circular, connected, overlapping. Thus as we hear the stories of mixed-gender teams to highlight one or another of the criteria, we shall also see other criteria at work in the lives of the individuals and the team. We know, in fact, that we encounter and address each one over and over again in our journey to shared leadership.

How the Nine Criteria Work in Real Teams

We can see in Brian and Martha's experience many of the criteria at work. Brian and Martha recognized the importance of reflection and were fortunate to have an extended period of time to get to know one another before becoming a clergy team. They put an emphasis on reflection, spending lavishly of their time in building trust and learning about one another. They both understood the barriers to women in ministry. Brian took responsibility for building a mixed-gender professional team and presenting it, as it were, to the local hierarchy of The United Methodist Church. Both Brian and Martha were ready, willing, and able to be present with one another in the day-to-day, even to the point of resolving a difficult disagreement. They set boundaries to make the daily work possible and understandable to the congregation. Thus they could go on to the more active criteria. Though their story does not include comments on these points, Brian and Martha together helped the congregation develop inclusive rather than exclusive theology and language. In both areas, Brian, as the one with more power in the hierarchy, took responsibility. Brian also asserted his authority as the senior pastor of a large congregation to object to the way Martha was moved. As a result, he and other clergy in his conference expect changes in the itinerant system that will allow for more consultation with a congregation when a pastor is moved. It was a small way of changing systems that sent a big message throughout the denomination.

Brian and Martha were a fairly typical effective mixed-gender team. Yet we cannot assume that all successful teams are like Brian and Martha. There are, in fact, many different ways in which effective teams organize themselves. What is similar about them all is their depth of understanding about what it means to be with each other, and particularly the emphasis they put on communication, the way they use power in the team, and their common commitment to a set of values or a shared purpose. This is just another way of saying that these teams integrate elements of all nine criteria in order to build an effective mixed-gender team. Before we begin to address the nine criteria in detail, here's a quick snapshot of how all the teams in this study integrate the criteria in practice.

Being with Each Other

When we are truly present for another person we are with that person in all ways. Being with each other includes both accepting each other (greeting, including) and working together effectively day-to-day (working, communicating). There are a number of ways

in which effective mixed-gender teams demonstrate this level of presence with each other, both in how they acknowledge each other and in the many things they do to work effectively. The outcome of their radical presence with each other is that they are very creative in putting the team first. Yet at the same time they do not have any sense that they have sacrificed the work that needs to be accomplished in order to nurture the team. The most frequently mentioned ways that effective teams maintain presence with each other include the following:

- Believing in the strength of every member of the team. They are confident in each other's strengths, and they tell each other so. This does not mean, however, that they are all alike. On the contrary, they cite differences among team members in personal style, ways of thinking, and skills as essential to team success.
- Trusting one another. Although they trust one another, at the same time they know that trust can be broken by misunderstanding, missed signals, behaving in ways that other team members (especially team members from another ethnic background or gender) do not understand.
- Achieving and maintaining parity among all members in the team. Everyone counts for everyone else.
- Knowing the benefits for each team member of being a part of the team.
- Continuing some kind of activity that builds the team.
- Talking to each other a lot.
- Including affirmation as a normal part of their idea-action-feedback cycle.
- Stating and honoring contracts and boundaries that team members (and often outsiders as well) understand and honor.
- Avoiding decisions that one or more members cannot support. Yet at the same time, team members remain relatively free to make individual decisions when necessary because they are trusted by others on the team.
- Maintaining accountability to each other. Even when they disagree with each other in private, team members usually support each other publicly; however, there are exceptions to this rule. Some team members agree to speaking their own minds publicly even when they disagree with each other.

We can observe from this list that there are elements of being and doing involved in the level of radical presence that effective team members achieve with one other. The fourth and fifth criteria (naming and including) are reflective. They involve being with one another in all the ways we can acknowledge one another. In this sense they are about individuals in the team. The sixth and seventh criteria (communicating and working) are active. They help team members create their own rules for working together day by day. They have to do with individuals becoming the team.

Using Power in the Team

All teams manage power both inside and outside the team. The uniqueness of effective mixed-gender teams is that they do not focus on power. They focus on the team and manage everything, including power, to the benefit of the team. Some individuals are so focused in this way that they find the word power itself awkward in describing anything their team does. Analysis of the interviews, however, verified that even when they did not think the use or management of power was an element of their team's functioning, it was. Here's how.

- Effective mixed-gender teams are constituted differently in relation to power in the external environment. Some are hierarchically constructed, with a person

who is clearly the senior member; others are very egalitarian and refuse to buy into hierarchical structures. Both types were represented in the sampling of effective teams. Regardless of the way these teams manage power in relation to the external environment, all members share power within the team.

- Individuals in effective mixed-gender teams do not use power to "show who's boss."
- In order to succeed, mixed-gender teams need the commitment and leadership of the person in the team who holds the most power in the external environment.
- Most teams resist pressure from external sources to break down the team structure and find a person who will "take charge."
- How well these teams manage their own power dynamics, both inside and outside the team, is a critical factor in their overall success.
- Shared power within the teams often has a positive influence on the systems around the team.

When mixed-gender teams use power in these ways, they are influencing. They are attending to the eighth criterion. Furthermore, they are influencing appropriately-using power as a positive force for their team's success.

Common Commitment to Values and Purpose

Members of effective mixed-gender teams often cited compatibility, trust, strength of teammates, good communication, clear boundaries, written covenants, and plain old-fashioned hard work as factors contributing to their success as a team. All these elements are dependent on the participation of the team members in a shared working life. They are typical of the things we know to be factors in the success of any team, diverse or not. In addition to these, I found another quite different element at the heart of the success of the teams in this study. It is based not on hard work but rather on shared values or common purpose. This is one element of believing.

These team members talked about a determination to succeed because of the important work they are doing. For them, a successful team is central to achieving their purpose. They are so committed to this purpose that they will resolve or even overlook any number of differences and problems in order to be able to continue that work. One person called it "our passion for the mission of this organization." Accompanying this passion may be a sense of urgency. In such cases, the mission of the organization is so urgent in the minds of the staff that there is no time to waste being ineffective. This perspective does not seem to prevent the team from taking some time to work at making the team effective, however.

Sometimes these team members expressed their commitment in terms of values rather than purpose, saying they "have shared values" to bind them together in their work. In teams that hold values as central, team members demonstrate that their behavior in relation to each other is congruent with the values of the organization. Obviously, these are organizations that encourage in their teams much discussion of the values of the organization and what those values mean for individual employees as well as for constituents.

The binding character of common purpose and values in the organization may be unique to the nonprofit church-related organization. More research is necessary to know. However, it was definitely a unique characteristic that provided motivation for success among most teams in this study.

Verifying the Criteria

In reviewing the common behaviors of effective mixed-gender teams, we can readily see evidence of seven of the criteria at work: reflect, believe, name, include, communicate, work, and influence. What about the other two, learn and model? The learning these teams have done in order to become effective is most evident in their structure. The preeminent learning tasks are learning about leadership and learning about teaming. These teams have set themselves up to be teams according to their best understanding of what teams are like and how they function. It's as simple as that. We shall see this in every story. Second, learning is evident in the ways these team members have individually integrated their knowledge about "what leadership requires" into their own style as leaders. Again, we shall see the evidence in their stories. Modeling is a bit easier to verify. By virtue of the fact that these teams are effective teams, they model what an effective team is and does. Again, the evidence will be in the stories.

Overall, the feedback of the successful mixed-gender teams in this study verified the nature and importance of the nine criteria originally suggested by focus group participants in 1994. In consequence, they affirmed the importance of reflection and even gave deeper meaning to what the reflective criteria are and how they should be addressed. They showed that action, when it is in counterpoint to reflection, is very effective.

This is not to say that the criteria are unaffected by this second study. Much has changed in my thinking about the criteria. "What's involved" in each one seems different and more complex five years after first writing about them. These changes are a function of time, to be sure, but that's not all. They are also, and more important, a function of what I learned from listening to teams.

The stories of the mixed-gender teams are especially significant. Much like Brian and Martha, the teams bring to life the meaning of the ideas they share in this book. They give personal, political, and theological meaning to being with each other day by day in the workplace. They demonstrate why we need to know our history and the history of our denominations. They show the dynamic and circular ways in which reflection and action work together. They prove to us over and over that we can never tick off the tasks like chores in a list but must instead commit to going over and over them, constantly integrating. They also demonstrate that the active criteria are as much personal as political in nature. They show what we can each do alone and what we must do together. Each one also comes back to a common theme that is intangible: the great joy that men and women experience when they are working together effectively.