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McDermott is an expert on leadership, team performance, organization development, and culture change. She is the co-author of the award-winning *World Class Teams* and the author of the best-selling *Caught in the Middle: How to Survive and Thrive in Today's Management Squeeze*. A former member of the ASTD National Board of Directors, she is a Torch Award Winner and has received ASTD “Excellence in Practice” citations for an innovative business development training program and for groundbreaking consulting work with global teams.

Q HOW DID YOU INITIALLY BECOME INTERESTED IN LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

My father played for Woody Hayes at Dennison University, and he expected me to be a boy. He wanted an All-American, but I came out a girl, so he wasn't going to get one! But he instilled those values in me from the very beginning. I think I was elected class president when I was in elementary school, then head cheerleader and student council president—that sort of thing. So I've just always gravitated toward being a leader.

My first job was at Ohio Bell Telephone Company for six years, initially as a line manager. And then I moved into what was then called the personnel department (its name then changed to the human resource development department). Some male colleagues were going to Bowling Green State University and were attending a weekend Master of Organizational Development program that had been started by Glenn Varney. I decided to sign up for the program.

I often say that in the late 1970s, I “OD'd” on OD because at the same time, a company called University Associates (now Pfeiffer & Company) gave a series of workshops that I also attended and learned OD skills such as how to do team facilitation and strategic planning. I was able to apply the skills back on the job because I had transitioned to being an internal OD consultant. So Ohio Bell was my learning laboratory.



Q | WHAT DO YOU FIND REWARDING ABOUT YOUR WORK AS A PROFESSIONAL SPEAKER AND EXECUTIVE COACH?

In all of my work, I like to focus not on what's wrong, but on helping clients define the results that they want. What I like better is consulting with and coaching teams. And while the executive coaching is rewarding, I find myself evolving one-on-one coaching into a team assignment. People don't operate in isolation; they operate as some part of a system, whether it's a team, a company, or a family. I definitely take an organization development view of everything I do.

Q | DO YOU HAVE ANY MEMORABLE ANECDOTES FROM YOUR WORK WITH TEAM BUILDING?

I was asked to go to South Korea to do some team building exercises. The country manager for Pfizer-Korea was trying to get his country's organization to be more collaborative, which was not a part of their culture.

Each of the teams was tasked with doing a skit about the power of collaboration. It didn't matter if it was in Korean because we had translators. They did the skits, and we had dinner. And then spontaneously, we were all up and being moved around the perimeter of this huge room. They started singing a Korean song. The country manager, who was from the United Kingdom, asked the HR manager what the song was.

Apparently it was a very famous Korean love song. But the words were entirely appropriate for what they had been through together during those two days. They had their arms around each other and were swaying. It was unbelievable. It puts tingles up my spine just thinking about it. That experience really shows the power that this work can have on individuals as well as organizations.

Q | WHAT IS ONE CHANGE YOU HOPE TO SEE IN THE ORGANIZATIONAL AND TEAM DEVELOPMENT FIELD WITHIN THE NEXT DECADE?

The kind of change I would like to continue to see is when you are working with a team of people, and each person, regardless of what her title is, assumes responsibility to share leadership on that team. But it can get messy. If you want to be a leader, and I want to be a leader, and we don't have the title, potentially you and I will get in sandbox scrapes. But if we learn how to manage through those, I think the end result is better.

Q | ARE YOU WORKING ON ANY NEW BOOKS OR SPECIAL PROJECTS?

I'm now working on an ASTD *Infoline* on peer coaching. I picked that topic for a couple of reasons: I'm involved in this women presidents' organization, and the whole concept of how that works is peer advisory. We're sort of like each other's board of directors. The main thrust of the *Infoline* will be identifying the critical skills for peer coaching—how to initiate coaching a peer and how you act when you're on the receiving end of peer coaching. I'm pretty excited about it.

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