

FORGING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS IN YOUR WORKPLACE COMMUNITY: LEARN HOW NATURE DOES IT

Who would have thought that the symbiotic relationship between *Goby Fish* and *Pistol Shrimp* could be a surprisingly useful point of reference when thinking about building smart partnerships within the context of the workplace community?

Not me – until that is, I looked at these two small marine critters and noticed some definite lessons nature was teaching.

According to Johannes Duerbaum, writer for the *Aquarium Fish International Magazine* (as reported on



FishChannel.com), “The shrimp builds and maintains a burrow that both animals live in, and the fish offers the shrimp protection from predators. When they are outside of the burrow, the fish keeps an eye out for predators and warns the Goby with a flick of the tail if a predator is nearby.” Evidently, once warned, the mostly blind shrimp dashes into the burrow thus being spared the prospect of a dinner-time cocktail cliché.

“Strong workplace community alliances interact on multiple fronts, leveraging the strengths of each partner.”

Let’s review what each offers the other.

The Pistol Shrimp digs the burrow (using its claws to push the sand like a tiny toy bulldozer), transporting all excavated material to the outside. This construction project can only occur if the Goby is on the outside standing guard ready to alert its partner at the first sign of danger (the Goby signals to the shrimp’s antenna in a unique manner).

According to Duerbaum “The Goby’s dorsal or tail fin moves up and down or left to right in different frequencies, allowing the shrimp to withdraw, should danger approach.”

The unlikely partnership occurs inside of the burrow as well as outside. Due to excavation action, the tunnel often collapses trapping the Goby under sand. And yet, the fish doesn’t panic. The shrimp (through smell) comes to the rescue and simply digs out its partner.

In other fascinating studies, the Goby has been observed as collecting algae and transporting it to the entrance of the burrow to its waiting partner. In repeated experiments, the fish could be seen actively feeding the shrimp.

This unusual partnership teaches us valuable lessons when expanding workplace communities:

1. Strategic Alliances Based on Mutual Value

Identify partnerships that satisfy needs for both sides. You don’t need to be in the same department (or geographical location) for a symbiotic relationship to work.

Assess your strengths and weaknesses and look for partners that will benefit from those areas you are strong in as well as shore you up in those areas that are less so. Successful partnerships bring value to both sides.

2. Clear Communication

Like the Goby Fish signaling to the Pistol Shrimp, ensure there is no ambiguity in

messaging. Establish clear communication rules and approaches.

3. Compatibility Matters

The Pistol Shrimp doesn’t choose a Goby Fish that’s too large to fit into its burrow, for the same reason the Goby won’t pair up with a shrimp if it’s too much of a *shrimp*. Keep in mind equitable reporting hierarchies and responsibility in building a partnership. Otherwise, the lack of equity can lead to quick derailment or, at the very least, one feeling subservient to the other.

4. Multiple Areas of Benefit

The Goby not only signals danger but also collects food, while the Pistol Shrimp constructs the burrow and rescues the Goby. Strong workplace community alliances interact on multiple fronts, leveraging the strengths of each partner.

5. Respect Each Other’s Agenda

The Goby and shrimp work together but don’t interfere with each other’s offspring (prime directive of existence). Respect your partner’s core areas and contributions (their prime directive) without overstepping boundaries.

6. Clear Roles and Responsibilities

Alliances are not marriages. Protect your intellectual property (IP) and ensure clarity of focus. Strategic partnerships thrive when each party’s contributions and ownerships areas are clearly defined.

The Goby Fish and Pistol Shrimp show us that workplace communities can be made stronger when strategic partnerships are built on mutual benefit, clear communication, compatibility, multi-faceted interaction, respect for individual agendas, and clear delineation of roles and responsibilities. That, and a little food dropped off at the entrance to your partner’s office, can go a long way.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Victoria Tucker

Victoria is a master builder of organizational communities where collaboration is amplified, knowledge is shared, and leaders are shaped by reimagining how work gets done in an age of global change. 25+ years of experience. 30,000+ professionals. 100+ organizations.

vtucker@zbglobal.com

