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Two's company

Studios are increasingly turning to leadership teams to guide them through today's complex business environment, but are two heads really better than one?

By Stephen Galloway
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Early in their run as presidents of production for Columbia, Doug Belgrad and Matt Tolmach sensed that they weren't reaching their full potential. True, they had great respect for each other. True, they were extremely successful in their jobs. But despite their equal titles, both suspected they were not operating genuinely and effectively as partners.

"Initially, we were much more parallel executives than partners in the running of a department," Belgrad recalls. "We had sort of separate slates, with equal authority. We had separate relationships, and while they began to overlap more and more, we were still not working as a full partnership."

So the duo took action. Calling on **Insigniam Performance Inc.'s Nathan Rosenberg**, a management expert who had frequently worked with the studio, they sat down and discussed what they might do better. To both executives' surprise, Rosenberg told them one pivotal thing: Stop being nice!

"We both suffer from wanting to be nice guys, so your inclination is always to say, 'That's interesting,'" Tolmach notes. "That's not a good partnership. A good partnership is honest and genuine, and sometimes, it means hearing things you just don't want to hear."

Of course, it was great that each would praise the other's ideas, that one would herald the other's good work. But they were approaching their tasks as separate individuals, linked yet not united.

"Nathan said, 'Quite honestly, partnerships typically don't work,'" Belgrad recounts. "'People don't have shared agendas and interest and compensation. If you want to be true partners, you have to think of it as an actual partnership.'"

Over the next few months, with Rosenberg's counsel, Belgrad and Tolmach started doing just that, making moves that would bind them together in their own eyes and others'. They announced that they would take all lunch meetings together. They learned to present decisions as joint conclusions. And they started referring to projects as "our," as opposed to "my" or "his."

The result is an executive combination that surpasses mutual respect and functions as one of the most genuine partnerships in the business...