



Celebrating 25 Years of TeamStrength

By Susan Schilke; December 1, 2017

This year we celebrated 25 years of TeamStrength. When I first heard the program described – a small group of business leaders meet to get input on their most important decisions – I thought it could possibly be the coolest thing in the world. I was right, it is. And our 25th year of the program exemplified this beautifully.

2017 was a record-setting year for TeamStrength. We had more members this year than ever before, we reached over 950 total meetings, the member revenue total was highest ever at over \$2 billion in total sales, and this year marked more merger and acquisition activity than any year in TeamStrength history. Last year, it was a hot topic; in 2017, it was a happening thing. Five members completed some form of M&A transaction this year, and all of these complicated issues were improved from the feedback from their groups.

This year also brought a renewed focus on Mission, Vision and Values at member companies as the TeamStrength Leadership Workshop 2017 focused on the ongoing goal of alignment and engagement of the team. I have been honored to have had the opportunity to work directly with several of TeamStrength members' teams to craft the right words to guide and inspire their company.

Members also presented issues on leadership teams, sales & marketing, incentive compensation, family business dynamics, recruiting, personal productivity, structure for growth and succession planning. As always, there was wisdom, advice and humor in abundance in every meeting! And we wrapped the year by recognizing members who have achieved milestones in the program – with 5, 10, 15 and, for the first time, 25-year members. It's tough to express the deep gratitude I have for members' commitment to TeamStrength and each other. And now a little trip down memory lane...

Twenty-five years ago I had a tough choice in front of me. I had two opportunities for the next step in my career. One was the corporate dream job I had pursued at AAA. I had secured an offer for a position created for me in strategic planning, reporting directly to the CEO. At the same time, I had come across an opportunity to start CEO Forum groups; it was new, risky and unproven (but possibly the coolest thing in the world). I was torn. So I called my mom, and I knew what she would say. First, she's less of a risk-taker than I am by nature and she's my mom – she'd want me to pick a safe and secure path. But she surprised me. She said, "I bet you can get a corporate job like that any time – this CEO thing sounds like a really unique opportunity."

That advice led to the best decision I have ever made. And it only takes billing over deciding to marry my wonderful husband, Richard, because it led directly to that opportunity!

In 1992, I had never had a job or a relationship that lasted longer than 2 years. And here it is 25 years later, and next year Richard and I celebrate 25 years of marriage, having raised three amazing young adults. The two biggest decisions impacting happiness are what we do and who we choose as partners. I am extraordinary grateful for the good fortune (and great advice – thanks Mom!) that led to such fulfilling choices for me.

It was a different world 25 years ago. Cell phones and the internet were not in widespread use. Members came to meetings without a device. Can you imagine? I used to mail agendas and feedback. On paper. With a stamp. I didn't use a laptop for the first five plus years. I look lots of notes. I was young, single and childless. And I had no idea how to help CEOs run their companies. But I had some thoughts on how to help them help each other.

And that is the one constant throughout the 25 years of TeamStrength and why it is the coolest thing in the world. The best CEOs get better through spending time with other great CEOs. When you put a little structure to that, it has tremendous impact. The best CEOs want to challenge themselves and each other to continually improve. Members have been doing that for 25 years and I am lucky enough to be part of that.

For the members' take on TeamStrength, check out the 25th anniversary video compiled by Samantha Schilke...