

# LESSON IN LIVING

## GROUP WORK

Elma Allen Milano

In factories and offices people work side by side, doing their jobs without disturbing others. Each has his or her work spelled out and is not allowed to cross over into another area of labor without being specifically assigned to do so. It follows the old adage: *“Give me a boy, I’ve got a boy; give me two boys, I’ve got half a boy; give me three boys, I’ve got no boy at all.”* Of course, there are some jobs that require more than one person.

Perhaps the epitome of effective group work is when musicians perform together. All it takes to enthuse a disinterested student is to team with a fine partner. Having a beat to follow and a score to unify can produce exciting results.

Let me share an experience I had during a recession. We had to let all the employees go from our family music business and do the work ourselves. When the time came that we were in a position to rehire, I broke certain jobs down into smaller segments. Because we were open 12 hours a day, I took the office, cashiering, and sheet music jobs and broke them down into four-hour shifts.

Instead of using full-time people for each department, I used half-time employees. Customers were served better and it put payroll dollars to better use. Employees came to work rested, worked their four hours, and left. There were no lunch hours to cope with and each gave us the “cream” of his/her energy instead of their tired, “skim milk” efforts. And, we always had a pool of trained substitutes.

Each department maintained an IDM (Inter-Dept-Memo) book. We used it to post unfinished business and communicate. It was contained in a 3-ring binder and a 3-hole punch was kept handy to insert correspondence, meeting notes, policies, and important data. It improved communication so much that we set one up at the house as well.

In our home, we had one of the first dishwashers in existence until I came to the conclusion that we didn’t spend enough time working together. I then did away with the appliance and instead of one person being assigned to do all the dishes it was broken down into smaller jobs like we did at the store. We all pitched in, singing, laughing and working side-by-side. One did the washing, another wiped and the third put dishes away, cleared the table, wiped the chairs, swept the floors and emptied the trash. Try as I may, I could only break this job down into three components that took an even amount of time. Having five daughters, I created two more “inchy” jobs. Going by the slogan, *“It may be hard by the yard, but it’s a cinch by the inch,”* I had one tackle a tidy project such as magazines, and another shell nuts until we were through. This way we followed our family’s work slogan:

***“We all work ‘til the work is done.”***

*This was written in 2003 when Elma was 83-years-old. Lessons in Living are gleaned from her experiences at Milano Music Center, National Speakers Assn., Mesa City Council, and as a wife and mother. The entire series may be found on [elma@lintonmilano.com](mailto:elma@lintonmilano.com).*