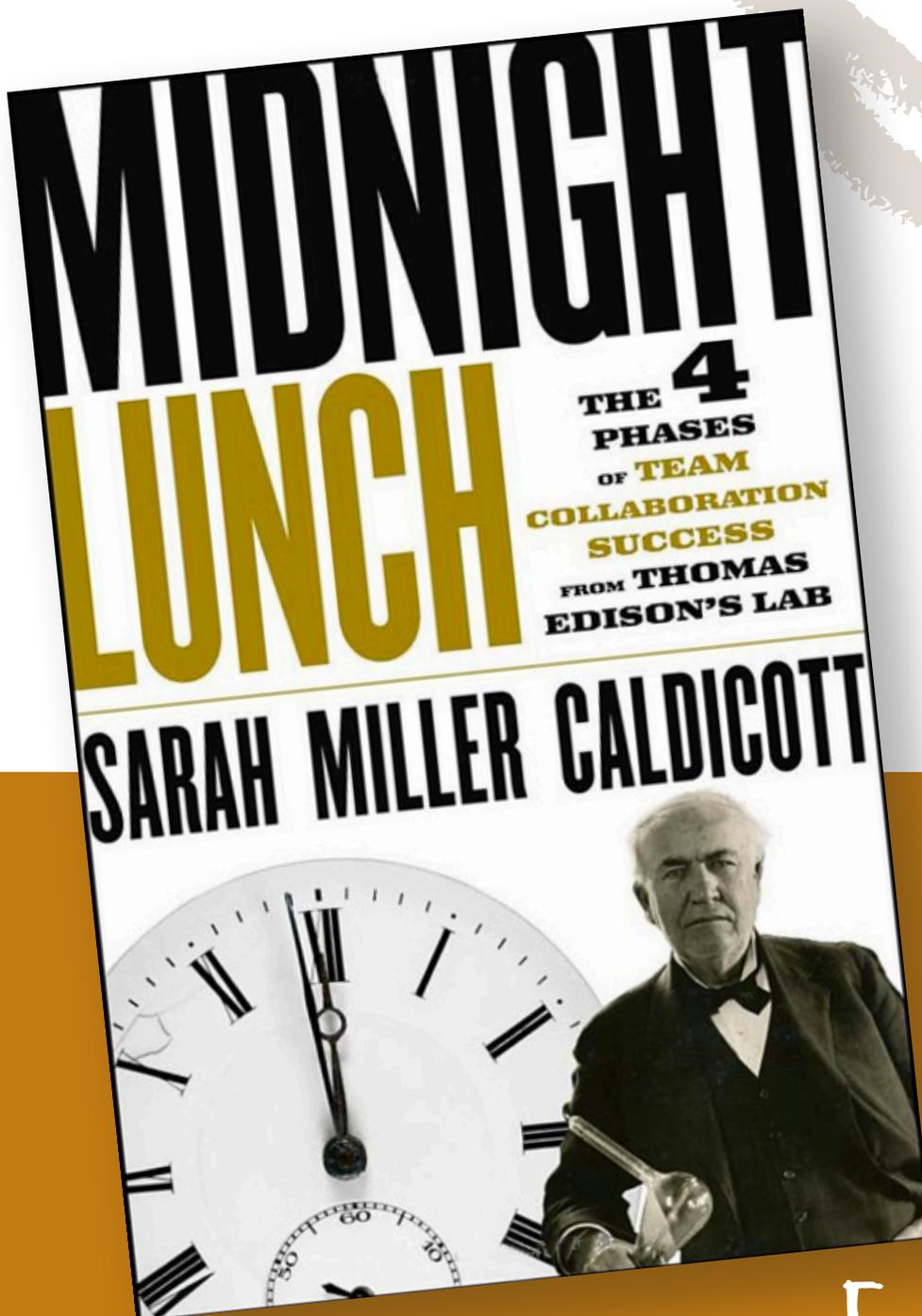


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## Midnight Lunch | Sarah Miller Caldicott

Midnight Lunch: The 4 Phases of Team Collaboration Success from Thomas Edison's Lab  
John Wiley and Sons: Hoboken, NJ, 2013. 284 pages.

According to Sarah Miller Caldicott, great grandniece of Thomas Edison and author of the new book *Midnight Lunch*, Edison viewed true collaboration as a value creation continuum.

### True collaboration embraces:

- A discovery learning mindset versus a pure task orientation
- A belief in anticipating and creating rather than merely reacting and responding
- Presence of inspiration across multiple facets of both individual and team endeavors
- Coherence of purpose
- A dedication to elevating the performance of every team member
- Connections to human and social networks of influence

### WHAT IS A "MIDNIGHT LUNCH?"

We can find the foundations for Edison's collaborative culture stemming from a compelling practice called "midnight lunch." Midnight lunch was the affectionate slang Edison's Menlo Park crew used to refer to the meal Edison ordered in at about 9 PM on nights when workers stayed late at the lab to complete their experiments.

Edison would often finish his workday at 5 PM, head home for dinner with his family, and then return to the lab if he had projects to oversee, or if he wanted to check on how key experiments were progressing. Starting at about 7 PM, all who were still present at the Menlo Park lab would roll up their sleeves, and share insights about the experiments they were undertaking. This meant that employees from any specialty could mingle with others holding completely different backgrounds, and learn from them. Often these casual, unstructured conversations yielded deeply creative outcomes.

After an hour or two, there would be a pause in this heady dialogue. Edison would order in sandwiches and beverages for everyone from a local tavern. Everyone present would kick back, eat, sing songs, tell stories, play music, and generally let their hair down – regardless of title or tenure, there were no limits on participation.

## Midnight Lunch | *Sarah Miller Caldicott (cont'd)*

During midnight lunch, no one was “monitoring” things. No one was dreaming up something to put on a performance appraisal. From apprentices all the way up to Edison himself, during midnight lunch, everyone simply engaged their best thinking in a casual, hands-on environment. In short, *workers became colleagues*.

Do these qualities of true collaboration sound different from the ones valued by your team? Do they draw upon ideas that feel new or seem broader than your current concept of what teamwork embraces?

If one were to find a single notebook entry capturing Edison’s definition of true collaboration, Caldicott believes it would read something like this:

*Applying discovery learning within a context of complexity, inspired by a common goal or a shared purpose.*

True collaboration for Edison operated like an invisible glue that fused learning, insight, purpose, complexity and results together in one continuous effort.

Translating Edison’s decades of groundbreaking practices into language for the 21st Century leader, Caldicott has developed a four-phase model of the collaboration process.

*How do we create the foundation for true collaboration to flourish?*

**1**

### **Phase 1: Capacity**

Select small, diverse teams of two to eight people who will thrive in an environment of discovery learning and collegiality.

*How can our collaboration team reframe the problem at hand, driving the greatest range of creativity and breakthrough solutions?*

**2**

### **Phase 2: Context**

Focus the outlook of the team toward development of new context that broadly frames the problem or challenge under consideration. Use a combination of individual learning plus hands-on activities to drive perspectives for potential solutions.

## Midnight Lunch | Sarah Miller Caldicott (cont'd)

*Can the collaboration team stay the course and continue forward despite disagreements?*

**3**

### Phase 3: Coherence

Maintain collaboration momentum, creating frameworks for progress through inspiration, and inspirational leadership even though disagreements may exist. Newly discover, or re-emphasize, the shared purpose that binds the team together.

*How can our collaboration team leverage internal and external networked resources nimbly and with speed?*

**4**

### Phase 4: Complexity

Equip and reskill teams to implement new ideas or new solutions using internally and externally networked resources, rapidly accessing or managing complex data streams the team must navigate. Leave a footprint that contributes to a broader collective intelligence.

*If we did all the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astound ourselves. — Thomas Edison*

No organization is immune to the shifts set in motion by current global tides. Its ripple effects have shaken the very foundations of how business is being conducted today, continually reshaping our view of how leaders, teams, and customers react. Our core challenge is to acknowledge where and how to embrace true collaboration as the centerpiece of this new ecosystem.

### THOMAS EDISON KNEW THIS IN THE LATE 1800'S.

There are three major forces to be aware of in designing an effective approach to collaboration today:

**1**

**Complexity**

**2**

**Metalogue**

**3**

**Reskilling**

### The Rise in Complexity Due to Massive Generation of Data and Real-Time Synthesis:

The accelerated pace of technological change has erased familiar industry boundaries, opening the way for rapid formation of new markets. A tsunami of data can now be consumed – and generated – by individuals armed with mobile phones and other smart devices.

Although operating in a different technological era, Edison embraced complexity as a fundamental component of collaboration itself. Embracing complexity rather than sidestepping it represents a hallmark of Edison's true collaboration process.

## Midnight Lunch | *Sarah Miller Caldicott (cont'd)*

### **The Rise of *Metalogue* as a Tool for Creating Purpose and Connection:**

Metalogue is a method of inquiry for exploring diverse conversations and the context around those conversations. It is designed to serve as a means of probing and responding to one or two themes of interest to the community engaging in the metalogue.

Feelings of fragmentation yielded by economic and technological shifts have deepened the need for connection and common purpose across large groups of people. Communities, organizations, and governments face an imperative to hear the opinions of diverse constituencies that now can generate influence outside of traditionally recognized channels of decision-making or authority.

Edison's true collaboration process recognizes the central role of collegiality and team discipline as crucial components that lay the groundwork for dialogue – and ultimately, metalogue. He maintained a high level of team coherence even when pressures mounted by grounding his teams with an understanding of how debate and conflict could be constructively harnessed.

### **The Need for *Reskilling* Workers in the Innovation Age:**

The ideal employee in today's innovative age offers a combination of technical or functional expertise plus soft skills, allowing them to communicate effectively with partners inside and outside their workplace. The creation of this nexus between expertise and soft skills is a "reskilling" process.

The broad availability of smart devices places new emphasis on what people can potentially create rather than what they already know. Skills linked to knowledge sharing, such as effective communication, adaptive thinking, and cross-generational leadership, are gaining new prominence in realms where functional expertise formerly dominated.

Edison's four phases of collaboration offer a unique platform for embedding collaboration as a superskill in your organization using discovery learning and hands-on engagement rather than tired classroom-style approaches. Instead of pushing lectures to teach creativity and problem solving, Edison's experiential approach engages the reskilling process by activating creative centers of the brain and thereby developing large neural networks that drive learning more deeply than task-based or fact-based approaches.

The underlying mechanisms of Edison's true collaboration process are a crucial priority for every organization. Organizations that engage true collaboration as a backbone for their innovation, value creation, and team development will remain thriving and nimble in the face of constantly shifting economic and cultural forces.

*Collaboration is not just a nostalgic look into the past or a hoped-for future aspiration – it is a necessary organizational survival skill needed now.*

Edison leaves us a legacy we can return to over and over again as we newly shape a future that embraces the highest and best of our collaborative spirit.

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## Midnight Lunch | *Sarah Miller Caldicott (cont'd)*

### Recommended Resources

1. Author Sarah Miller Caldicott has produced a series of 12 worksheets that your team can use to get the most from its collaboration efforts. **Download** these weekly worksheets here.
2. **Learn about** and use a collaboration tool developed by Auxano in every meeting you lead to encourage pushback, transparency, creativity, support, and in making final decisions.
3. **Watch** this brief 7-minute video as team creativity expert Tom Wujec presents some surprisingly deep research into the “marshmallow problem” – a simple collaboration exercise that involves dry spaghetti, one yard of tape and a marshmallow. Who can build the tallest tower with these ingredients? And why does a surprising group always beat the average?
4. **Watch** this 3-minute video of the first-ever Midnight Lunch™ live collaboration experience in Chicago hosted by author Sarah Miller Caldicott. Innovation experts from across the city applied Edison’s process of midnight lunch to tackle a real-world challenge: How do we make Chicago one of the top 5 most innovative cities in the world?

### Amazon Links

*Hardcover link*

*Kindle link*



## Go Ahead Actions for Vision Clarity

by Bryan Rose

### Vision Clarity Connection

Caldicott's Edisonian definition of collaboration exposes an elusive skill for many church leaders in our information-driven culture: the application of discovery learning by innovation not imitation. Our technologically connected world makes it much easier to copy than create, but ministry effectiveness increases as organizational DNA shapes direction. Consistent innovative thinking requires the stewardship of a healthy process of collaboration.

### How to Go Ahead—Approach Collaboration Within the Force of...

#### ...Complexity. The 12x4 Exercise

Are you making it a practice to sidestep or embrace complexity? As Edison realized, the best solutions are often found in working through the challenges we would rather avoid. Set aside one hour at your next leadership team meeting to foster collaborative effort and practice the 12x4 exercise:

- First, ask each member to spend 12 minutes specifically solutioneering a current growth challenge. Be sure to frame the problem at hand and have them define specific steps to overcome the challenge.
- Next, in sub-teams of 2-4 members each, spend 12 minutes combining the best of each individual solution into one cohesive team approach.
- After each team presents their solution on a flip-chart to the group, spend 12 minutes discussing and challenging each approach. Evaluate the strengths and diversity of each solution.
- Finally, set aside the final 12 minutes of the hour to decide on and commit to the next steps to take.

#### ...Metalogue. CrowdSource Input

Harnessing the collective influence of engaged and involved members has never been easier or more natural than in our social media-saturated culture. Connect people to the mission by involving and listening to them through the channels in which they are already naturally communicating. Here are a few examples that create purpose and connection:

- Anchor sermons with real life stories or examples from the congregation by asking a key question on your personal Facebook page.  
"Share an experience when you were given something you did not deserve."
- Cultivate anticipation and grass-roots inviting by "previewing" service elements or vision announcements through creative Instagram imagery.
- Evaluate potential worship service time changes or the location of a new campus by instantaneous group polls through text message or twitter response during a service.

#### ...Reskilling. Ignore Job Titles

Collaborative processes recognize that an employee's value to your organization extends beyond his or her box on the org chart. Thinking "outside the job title" on whom to involve in collaborative conversations is the core of phase 1, Capacity, in Caldicott's model. Get to know the staff and leadership God has placed around you through the strategic use of personality surveys, Spiritual Gifts inventories, or informal polls of interests or hobbies. During a staff meeting or leadership team time, create an environment where reflection around the results can take place within the group. Next time you interview a potential staff member or key volunteer, assemble a non-traditional interview group (invite an intern, administrative assistant, and/or leader from a different ministry) and lean in to their insight after the meeting.



## More About Bryan Rose

As Lead Navigator for Auxano, Bryan Rose has a strong bias toward merging strategy and creativity within the vision of the local church and has had a diversity of experience in just about every ministry discipline over the last 12 years. Bryan has demonstrated achievement as a strategic thinker with a unique ability to infuse creativity into the visioning process while bringing a group of people to a deep sense of personal ownership and passion.

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Auxano is the only vision clarity consulting group that will guide your team through a God-ward and collaborative process called the Vision Pathway. To learn more, visit [auxano.com](http://auxano.com)

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