



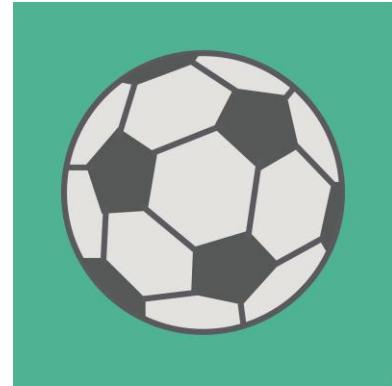
Your Passport to Professionalism: Module 6

Teamwork

Step 1—Learn

Introduction

"I was a volunteer soccer coach for the local grammar school when one of the kids came down with Leukemia. I wanted to do a fund drive to help her parents with medical expenses so I set up a crowd funding site on the internet, but it was not getting any attention or donations. Then I re-discovered the power of teamwork. I invited the whole soccer team and their parents to a meeting after one of the practices and asked that they help me map out a strategy for fundraising. We raised \$6,000 in one month and are still going strong. What a difference a working team makes!"



What Makes an Effective Team?

We have all been on some kind of team before, whether working on a group project, an athletic team, a musical group, an internship, etc. Not all of those experiences have been positive. Sometimes teams are energizing and successful, and sometimes they flounder and fail.

Your workplace operates like a team – each person has assignments and duties to complete, unique skills or abilities, and different attitudes. And you all work together to reach a goal.

Complementary Skills

Work teams have members with diverse resources, expertise, and ideas. As a staff team member you are a little different than everyone else. You have unique experiences, points of view, knowledge, and opinions to contribute. In fact, the more that a workgroup can bring out divergent points of view without creating fights, the better they perform. In a well-functioning workplace, creativity, innovation, and different viewpoints are expected and valued, and team members are encouraged to use their individual strengths.

"Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence wins championships." --Michael Jordan

Common Purpose & Performance Goals

Work teams have the best chance to be effective if they have clear expectations around goals, accountability, and outcomes. You need to understand the goals, be held accountable for doing your part, and celebrate when you reach the goals. Everyone should be supportive of everyone involved in the project.

"Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision - the ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results." --Andrew Carnegie

There is no “I” in T-E-A-M

It's not about you.

Your job is to make the boss look good.

Your job is to make sure the work group meets their goals.

Your job is to contribute whatever you can to bring success to the organization.

This is the mindset that you want from others in a group. You want everyone to take ownership and make everything work well.

TYPES OF NORMS

Prescriptive - tell us what to do

Proscriptive - tell us what not to do

Mores - great moral significance

Folkways - lesser moral significance

Laws - codified, institutionalized by governing body, consequences of violation are also institutionalized

Roles - a bundle of norms governing a “position” in society

Group norms

A strong team knows what is “normal” for the group. Teams need to know what is expected, and what is not appropriate. Successful team norms include:

- **Everyone communicates**...a lot. You need to know what's going on in the office, such as programs, policies, and new procedures. And you need to be sure people around you know what you are working on. What information do you need to report?

- **Everyone participates**, not just the extroverts or vocal members. If you are an introvert, then write down your message and email your ideas to your boss, or meet with her individually.
- **Everyone executes**. Each member knows their tasks, responsibilities, and deadlines. If you leave a task half done, tell your boss when you will return to finish it. Some groups are adamant about deadlines, some not so much. Ask your boss about it.
- **Everyone listens**. People ask clarifying questions. They give and receive thoughtful feedback. Instead of announcing your critique of something, start with a question. For example. Rather than saying: "I disagree with our policy of answering the phone before 3 rings," It would be better to ask, "why is it important to answer the phone by the third ring rather than letting people leave messages?"
- **Everyone chips in**. When there is a large project, volunteer to help out, especially for the boring or dirty job nobody else wants. Offer to stay late or report in early when needed. It motivates others and you are appreciated by them.

Team members must review their procedures and what role each person plays in the group.

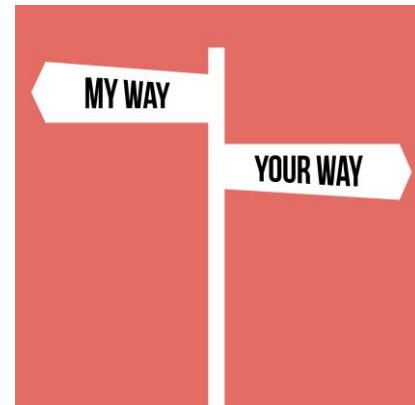
"The leaders who work most effectively, it seems to me, never say 'I.' And that's not because they have trained themselves not to say 'I.' They don't think 'I.' They think 'we'; they think 'team.' They understand their job to be to make the team function. They accept responsibility and don't sidestep it, but 'we' gets the credit.... This is what creates trust, what enables you to get the task done." --Peter Drucker

Common Approach: Dealing with Conflict

Conflict is inevitable. People eventually disagree with each other. They hold different values, attitudes, personalities, status, and needs. Disputes can spark creativity and innovation. They can also set fire to the team. It is important to know ahead of time what procedures and processes there are to resolve destructive conflict in a quick and open way.

For example, if you are finding that you clash with another person on the job about a procedure, ask your boss to establish rules of discussion such as:

1. The presenter has 3 minutes to present their suggestion uninterrupted.
2. The group asks questions to clarify whatever they don't understand.
3. Support, disagreement, or piggy-backing with the suggestion is given 3 minutes.
4. Consensus is sought by the group.



5. No personal criticisms about the presenter are allowed, only response to the presentation content, which means everyone is treated with respect and equality.
6. If consensus is reached and you disagree with the result, you will go along with the consensus without complaint.

And it's helpful if someone moderates the discussion to be sure there's no criticism, just sharing thoughts and ideas. Sometimes the boss should not moderate. It might go better with an outsider.

"You will find men who want to be carried on the shoulders of others, who think that the world owes them a living. They don't seem to see that we must all lift together and pull together." --Henry Ford

Mutual Accountability

Most work teams have group projects. Ask who will be leading meetings, assigning tasks, recording decisions, assessing progress, holding team members accountable, and providing direction for the team. Sometimes these roles are held by the boss, sometimes by other paid staff, but sometimes they need to be selected through volunteering. When you know the team roles it's easier to make high quality decisions and carry them out.

Typical Team Decision-Making Problems

Have you experienced any of these decision-making problems?

Kill. One member of the group makes a suggestion and the group—either one or more of the powerful members of the group or the group as a whole—immediately rejects it. (“That’s impossible.” “That won’t work.” “We already tried that before.”) This is called *kill* because it’s unlikely that an idea that is received so negatively is ever considered again.

Self-Authorized Decisions. A team member suggests a course of action and immediately puts it into play on the assumption that, since no one disagreed, the group has given its approval. Even if others agree with the decision, they may still resent the person taking it upon him or herself to make it.

Handshake. A suggestion made by one person is supported by others who agree to proceed. The group of members acts on the decision before determining whether the proposal is acceptable to the whole. This minority decision-making can lead to a lack of support by the team as a whole.

Simple Majority. Voting is a common method of determining majority support. The team may make the mistake of assuming that, because a majority supported the decision, the dissenting minority will support it. While it’s possible they may, especially with strong team norms, it’s also

possible they may resent the decision. When asked to support it, they offer only token support. They may even work to sabotage the decision.

Unanimity. Everyone completely agrees with the decision that's being made and intends to support it. In most cases genuine unanimity is impossible to obtain, inefficient, and unnecessary.

Consensus. When consensus is reached, all members have contributed something to the decision or at least feel they've had a fair chance to influence it. Those few members who don't prefer the majority decision at least understand it and are fully prepared to support it.

Of course, the ideal is to reach consensus, but not every decision is suited for consensus.

Sometimes a small decision is left up to the discretion of the person whose job it is: what color the napkins should be, how much money to spend on fliers, who will introduce the speaker, who answers the phone first, who takes out the recycling, etc. But there may also be times when it's in the best interest of the team for the leader or a small group to make a decision, the final aspect of mutual accountability is the notion of who gets credit for the work?

"It is amazing how much people can get done if they do not worry about who gets the credit." --Sandra Swinney

What can you do about problem decisions?

So, what can you do as a student employee or intern if you experience one of the above problems with decision making?

1. Do nothing. But you might be risking team failure and then everyone pays a price, not just you.

2. Ask questions. Remember, asking questions is an effective way to help others stop and clarify their ideas. Here's how it might go:

Kill. Your question: "Although you may have tried it before, I'm wondering if we might consider it again under different circumstances? Can you help me understand why it didn't work before?"

Self-Authorized Decisions. Your question: "I noticed that nobody outright disagreed to move forward with your idea, but I wonder if we might ask others about it? I just want to be sure everyone is onboard and nobody is silently resisting. I've seen that happen before."

Handshake. Your question: "This seems like a good decision. I'd love to hear from the other group members to see if they are also enthusiastic about this decision."

Simple Majority. Your question: “This seems like a very close vote. A lot of people don’t like the decision. Can we brainstorm other ways to find a more acceptable decision?”

Unanimity. Your question: “Since everyone seems to be on board, what can I do to help implement the proposal? What tasks can others do?”

Consensus. Your question: “This seems to be a good decision. Anything else we need to consider?”

Team Roles

No discussion of teams would be complete without a quick look at work team roles.

Your team at the Workplace

You have just reviewed some basic dynamics of teams. Some of these dynamics will apply to your work setting, some will not. But it’s important that you review what a good and bad team looks like, and particularly what role you have at work.

- **Student worker: paid by the hour.** Many students are hired to do clerical and repetitive tasks as a work-study employee. Often, this role requires that you learn the policies and execute your job well. Just remember, the simple tasks you do are important to your boss, or they wouldn’t have hired you. If you can demonstrate commitment and initiative, you will likely be given more complex and interesting tasks as time goes on. And you can use the boss as a reference in the future. Ask any campus employer and they will tell you that they have hired high and low performers. Take ownership of your simple job, be a team player, and it will pay off down the road.
- **Paid Student Intern: in charge of projects or programs.** These jobs involve more independence and self-motivation often found in roles such as orientation leaders, elected officers, publication writers, activities planners, residential advisors, tutors, etc. Off-campus paid interns do important work for the employer. You are “in charge” of getting the job done with less direction and daily supervision. Bosses expect you to use the skills and dynamics discussed above in order to make your program a success.
- **Volunteer: no pay, but rewarding work.** It’s not uncommon that you do manual labor such as site clean-up, or restoration. Often it’s work with children, disadvantaged individuals, or people who need personal support. Sometimes it’s involvement in a club or social group. Always apply what you learned about being a good team player in these situations. Volunteer activities are a great way to gain experience and prove to future employers that you have the skills and commitment to succeed in other jobs.
- **Volunteer Leader:** volunteer long enough using your best skills and you will likely be asked or voted to be the team leader. If you pay attention to team development, communication and strong effort you will get the chance to learn what leadership is like. Volunteer leadership is often the best place to practice and develop your skills that prepare you for the future.

- **Permanent paid staff person.** This is likely the place you eventually end up. You will need steady income at some point. Be sure to pay attention to the team, contribute well, be aware of your roles and keep communication open.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed. It is the only thing that ever has." --Margaret Mead