

12 Tips for Fostering Teamwork

By Dave Mattson

Although teamwork is frequently the most efficient way to complete a big project, many managers struggle to lead a cohesive team. Managing individual employees along with the broader group dynamic brings confusion to team projects, causing the work and your team management capabilities to suffer. Practicing teamwork builds strong verbal and nonverbal relationships among coworkers. When working together on team projects, you must learn how to communicate clearly and compile the entire group's ideas in order to build trust.

When coworkers work together, honesty becomes a byproduct of the interaction. Effective teams quickly learn to open up and share honest opinions to resolve disagreements. A successful team knows always to tell the truth, no matter how difficult. Putting forth constructive criticism gives coworkers honest, helpful feedback they can utilize to increase their skills. This straightforward communication leads to a solid professional relationship rooted in trust.

Here are 12 tips for fostering teamwork.

1. Hire the right people for roles

Skill gaps cause the entire team to suffer when roles are not properly filled. Evaluate each team member individually to ensure that the role properly suits the employee. If at any time during the interview process you notice a potential employee is more suited for a different position, do not hesitate to suggest switching gears. Making changes early in the hiring process guarantees a potential employee will not end up in the wrong position.

2. Get to know every member of the team

Developing a good relationship with every employee forms a strong bond throughout the entire team. Building individual relationships helps ensure mutual respect between you and every employee. Getting to know team members on an individual basis also cements your position as the group leader and the person to talk to in case of issues.

3. Play to individual strengths

Each member brings different skills to the group. The secret to an effective team is discovering how these individual skills work together in the best way possible. Think of team members' abilities as unique cogs in your team machine. When these cogs are positioned correctly, the machine runs smoothly. But when they grind together, the machine comes to a halt. As a manager, your goal is to build a well-oiled machine that does not break down. Do not be afraid to adjust individual roles as you go along.

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4. Establish ground rules

Create a reporting infrastructure so that team members know their roles and to whom they should report a problem. If the team disagrees on an issue, decide which members get to make the final calls. Establishing ground rules for conflicts prevents arguments from getting out of hand.

5. Agree on a team mission

Start a team project by clearly articulating the team's overall mission. Letting employees see the entire company vision clears up any misunderstandings about their individual roles on the project. Paint the big picture and open up the floor for discussion in case there are any questions.

6. Promote sharing

If a team member is not contributing, ask their opinion on an issue to get them to speak up. Every team member should contribute to the conversation. Although public speaking may not be the employee's strongest skill, the group needs to hear from everyone to avoid resentment over unbalanced contributions.

7. Steer the conversation

Allow everyone to contribute when starting the brainstorming process. No idea is a bad idea when working as a team. Continuing to shoot down ideas leads to hesitation from employees previously eager to share their thoughts. The best teams have an open-door policy on sharing ideas.

However, if you find a team is running down a tangent that does not fit the project, move the conversation along. To keep team members from feeling embarrassed or annoyed, write down each idea so that you have a paper outline for the team to evaluate as a whole.

Related: [3 Ways Teamwork Doesn't Work and How to Avoid These Pitfalls](#)

8. Map goals and timelines

A solid timeline keeps employees on schedule when working on a team project. By mapping out individual goals on a set timeline, individuals can see how they need to progress as the team project moves along. Without a clearly stated plan, responsibilities fall by the wayside and get lost in the shuffle.

9. Use a teamwork contribution section in performance reviews

Go over an employee's contribution to team goals during every performance review. Outline strengths and discuss areas for improvement. Rating performances gives team members a baseline to judge how their skills continue to grow in the long run. Show that the entire company values teamwork, and the employee will value it highly as well.

10. Build the team relationship outside the office

Make it a goal to get together outside of the office periodically to discuss work in a more casual setting. A lunch outing or an afternoon happy hour is a great way to get together and talk about work without infringing on employees' personal time. Plus, creating a comfortable environment for coworkers to get to know each other will lead to a stronger bond among teammates.

11. Ensure clear communication

Whether utilizing direct or indirect communication, confirm that everyone is on the same page and does not have any questions. Check to make sure the team received important emails and that each employee fully understands the intended message. Try to use email and indirect communication only when absolutely necessary, as tone and message frequently become muddled when not directly discussed.

12. Be fair

A manager should never play favorites with employees. While you are only human and individual circumstances may change your views, try to maintain a fair and even reaction to each group member. In special cases, balance the needs of the group with individual workloads and schedules. If workloads are unfairly distributed, resentment builds, and your team members lose respect for your authority.

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