

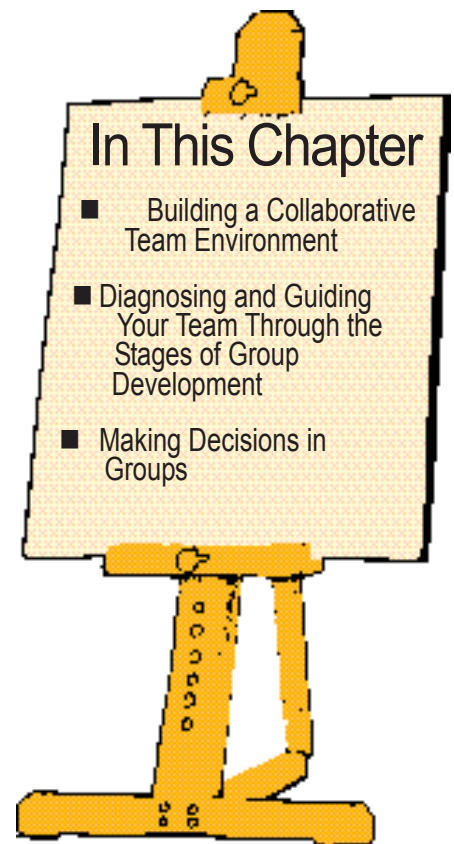
# The Supervisor as Team Builder

**R**emember the old axiom, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts? When people work together effectively as a team, they draw on a full spectrum of ideas and diverse experiences to create innovative solutions—solutions that no one person may have discovered alone. As part of a team, members/volunteers can share and ask each other for job-related help. They can also find support from other members/volunteers to get through difficult times.

Whether you work with crews or with a group of members/volunteers assigned to individual sites, your ability to generate and sustain a sense of affiliation, peer support, and collaboration may be one of the most important things you do—not only for members/volunteers but for yourself. The more your members/volunteers learn to rely on each other and work together to solve

problems, the better their leadership skills become, and the less they depend on you to do things for them. In fact, an essential part of team building is helping your members/volunteers develop their own skills in these areas.

To be an effective team builder, you need to use all the skills we've discussed in earlier chapters—active listening, feedback, conflict resolution, problem solving, and coaching—but instead of applying them one-on-one, you use them with your team. As you might guess, when you're working with more than one individual, skills like problem solving and giving feedback become more complex. You need a greater knowledge of the dynamics behind member/volunteer interaction, and you need a fuller understanding of the leader's role as the group is developing. To help you gain expertise in these areas, we'll introduce the three skills listed above.



# Supervisor's **TOOL KIT**

These tools begin on page **3** 27)



## Building a Team Environment

### Effective Teams and Team Problems

Characteristics of effective teams, team leaders, and members/volunteers with a table of common problems that affect group performance

### A Few Things to Watch for

Factors to consider when observing group dynamics

### A Dozen Tips for Team Building

Pointers for starting to form a cohesive team

### Tips for Working with Diversity

Guidelines for building teams rich in diversity

## Disruptive Group Situations

Scenarios that harm or inhibit teamwork and some suggestions for how to deal with each

## Stages of Group Development

### Stages of Group Development

The “Forming-Storming-Norming-Performing-Adjourning” model of group development

### Facilitation Skills

A summary of four essential skills for leading groups: asking questions, paraphrasing, summarizing, and encouraging

## Making Decisions in Groups

### Facilitating for Consensus

Background on building group consensus and handling disagreement during the process

# A Day in the Life ...

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Jamal and his crew are in their second month of the project cycle, and until about two weeks ago he was pleased with their progress. From the beginning, he set up regular meeting times every day so members could reflect on service learning and discuss issues that arose in the group. Members showed up on time and seemed enthusiastic about his ideas for starting their park restoration project.

Over the course of the last month, though, Jamal has noticed some disturbing changes. For example, a couple of members have started drifting in late. Several people have formed cliques and are productive only when they work with their “buddies.” Members aren’t communicating enough with the whole group so they sometimes duplicate work. At times they neglect tasks because they thought someone else was doing them. Jamal is also troubled by how the cliques are composed: Two are organized along racial lines, and a third includes only members with master’s degrees. The cliques are friendly with each other, but lately Jamal has noticed that they are more competitive.

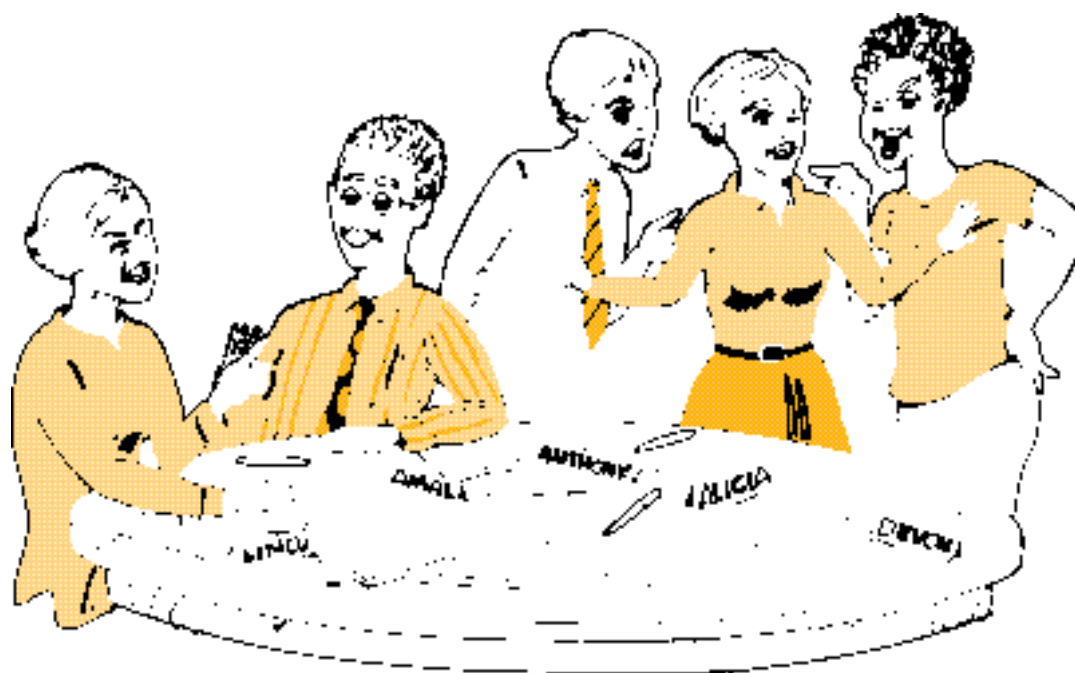
His original idea was to give members as much choice as possible in forming their smaller task teams. Now he’s not so sure that was a good plan.

The last few meetings with the whole crew haven’t gone well. Anthony and Linda don’t like any of Jamal’s suggestions and challenge him in front of the other members. Jamal is particularly concerned about Linda because she puts him and nearly everybody in the group down. Anthony can’t admit when he’s wrong or when somebody else has a better idea. He argues with other members until they agree with him just to get on with the meeting. Alicia tries to make everyone feel good by smoothing over the personality clashes in the group. Her only shortcoming is that she is too talkative and tends to sidetrack the meeting agenda. Everybody enjoys this, but they don’t get their work done. Devon, a clock-watcher who gets visibly agitated when members start running over time on activities, often helps by reminding the group about what they’re supposed to be doing. Gwen is good at “taking the bull by the horns” and coming up with ideas for accomplishing the work. She even researches relevant topics to get the team going (e.g., she brought in several articles about low-cost playground equipment). The trouble is that some of the members “tune out” when Gwen starts in on one of her “plans.” And this is only half the group!

Jamal senses his members really want to do a good job on the park project. They are keeping to their deadlines. The day their uniforms arrived they seemed to forget about their cliques and, after working hard at the park, went around town together to show off their “new look.” Jamal knows they care about each other because of the way they all pitched in to help Linda when she got injured on site last week.

Jamal is thinking about all this because he has to be out of town twice next month, once for a training workshop and later for a conference. He’d feel much better if his team

showed more togetherness. His director suggested assigning members to serve as weekly crew leader on a rotating basis. The crew leader would act as Jamal’s assistant and would be in charge when he had to be away from the project, even for a couple of days. Jamal would like his team to participate in defining this position and creating a model for the director’s approval. He knows that he needs to help them get on the right track before he can fully trust them to assume leadership responsibilities. But how?



# Building a Collaborative Team Environment

## Why You Do It

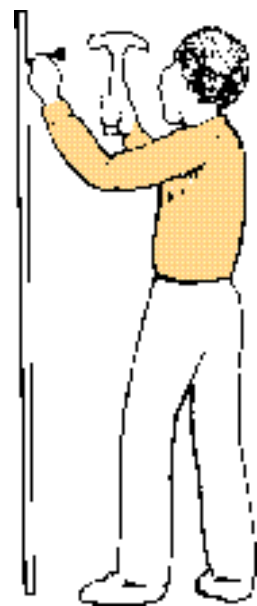
**A**s Jamal has discovered, effective teams don't just happen; they take time and effort to develop. Many factors influence how members/volunteers of a group interact, including personality, cultural, or ethnic background, and professional motivation. By understanding the dynamics of teamwork, you will learn how to create a favorable environment in which group members/volunteers may work well together. The aim of team building is to help a group evolve into a cohesive unit whose members/volunteers not only share and work together toward the same goals but also trust and support one another and respect individual differences.

## How You Do It

An effective team gets things done by identifying and removing obstacles that divert the group's attention and energy away from the task at hand. Hidden agendas, unclear roles, and confusion about how to give one another feedback are just a few of the obstacles that distract members/volunteers and keep them from accomplishing their work. As a team builder, you help members/volunteers improve their ability to get things done by enabling them to confront and deal with issues that hinder their functioning as a group.

For the purposes of this guide, we'll define a team as follows:

**TEAM:** a group of interdependent individuals who share a common goal and work together, often with different roles and functions, to complete the tasks necessary for achieving their goal.



*“The path to greatness is along with others.”*

Baltasar Gracián  
Spanish Priest

## A Team Has Three Basic Elements at All Times:

### Structure

How the team is organized in terms of formal/informal authority and leadership; timing, location, and physical environment in which the team operates.

### Task

Why the team exists; its work, purpose, and output.

### Process

How the team works within the structure to accomplish its tasks.

In group process, team members have three basic needs, and everything they do during team interactions can be linked to one of these needs:

- The need to achieve tasks,
- The need to maintain group cohesion and well-being, and
- The need to express and satisfy individual interests or desires.

Sometimes a team is focused too heavily on achieving the task and may forget to pay attention to relationships among members/volunteers. When this happens, tensions may arise and simple problems may become “heavy.” At other times team members may emphasize maintaining relationships so much that they don’t have time to complete their tasks, and they may find the quality of their work slipping. As a result their motivation may decline, and they may begin to blame one another.

When a team has not developed properly and members/volunteers feel their needs are not being met, they sometimes engage in self-centered behavior to try to draw attention to, or divert attention from, themselves.

You can encourage your members/volunteers to play team roles that will promote a balance between functions of task (getting things done) and maintenance (developing members/volunteers). Task and maintenance roles may be played out by separate members/volunteers or shared by various members/volunteers at different points.

## Task Roles

### Initiator

Proposes tasks, goals, and/or actions; defines group problems and suggests procedures.

### Informer

Offers facts and opinions, expresses feelings.

### Clarifier

Interprets ideas; restates questions and suggestions; defines terms and clarifies issues for the group.

### Reality Tester

Tests ideas against data to see if they will actually work.

### Energizer

Causes the group to move forward; focuses on the quality of the group's decisions and the progress it's making toward its goals.

### Summarizer

Pulls together related ideas; reframes suggestions; offers decisions and pulls together related ideas; reframes suggestions; offers decisions and conclusions for the group to consider.

## Task Roles

directly aid in the accomplishment of the group's tasks and objectives.

## Maintenance Roles

help the group get along and work together.

## Maintenance Roles

### Gate Keeper

Keeps the group on track; watches time; makes sure that members/volunteers participate; invites quiet people to contribute.

### Harmonizer

Reduces tension; tries to resolve disagreements; tries to get group members/volunteers to explore their differences.

### Encourager

Brings members/volunteers into the group's task; helps reluctant or shy members to participate; tries to get the group to see the positive aspects of ideas.

### Consensus Tester

Presses the group to move toward decisions; tries to get total "buy-in" from all members/volunteers of the group on the group's decisions.

### Compromiser

Lets go of ideas when the group is in conflict over a decision; admits errors and begins to search for alternatives for the sake of the group.

Unlike the task and maintenance roles described on the previous pages, the following roles can be detrimental to the group. Members/volunteers will inevitably play these roles from time to time. As a leader your job is to work with them to resolve the causes of the behavior and diminish its effects on the group. [See your tool kit for suggestions.]

## Self-Interest Roles

### Dominator

Asserts authority or superiority to manipulate the group; interrupts others; forces decisions or choices on the group; controls others by use of flattery or other forms of patronizing behavior; monopolizes the group's "air time" and controls who speaks.

### Blocker

Keeps the group from moving forward by being unreasonably stubborn, uncooperative, or disagreeable; has hidden agendas; resists the group's progress toward the completion of its tasks.

### Aggressor

Takes "pot shots" at group members/volunteers, their ideas, and their attempts to work within the group; attacks the ideas and motives of the group; uses humor as a weapon.

### Avoider

Takes the group on "wild goose chases," bringing up issues not related to group tasks and insisting that these issues are relevant.

### Comedian

Uses humor inappropriately to put down group members/volunteers and their ideas; keeps the group from focusing on its task.

## Self-Interest Roles

meet individual objectives, usually at the expense of the group.

## Ask Jamal

*Remember Jamal's problems with some of his members during their team meetings? (see page 33 and 34)*

Which roles (task, maintenance, or self-interest) would you say Linda, Anthony, Alicia, Devon, and Gwen are playing?

## Task-Maintenance Balance

It may be useful for your team to determine which roles are played most often by which people in your group. If your group finds that some task or maintenance roles are not being played, you can help members/volunteers plan ways to fill in the gap. Role analysis also helps members/volunteers understand their value to the group. For example, members/volunteers who regularly summarize discussions may not be aware that they are making a valuable contribution. Here are other ways you can encourage the task-maintenance balance:

- Regularly review the effectiveness of team meetings; plan 5–10 minutes at the end of each meeting to evaluate how things are going.
- Celebrate when the team achieves results.
- Praise individual efforts (in addition to team celebrations).
- Design individual performance goals that emphasize both results and teamwork. Individual goals contribute directly to overall team goals.
- Assign certain team members to monitor task functions (e.g., keeping people informed about deadlines); ask others to monitor maintenance functions (e.g., making sure the “quiet” people in the group have a chance to contribute during meetings).

In addition to balancing task and maintenance roles, there are several other components critical to building a collaborative team environment. These include:

## Common Purpose

Teams that succeed have a shared sense of purpose and clear goals. To establish a common purpose,

- Create a mission statement with your team.
- Allow every team member/volunteer to express his or her commitment to the team's purpose, priorities, and guidelines. Members/volunteers who do not share this commitment should be given an opportunity to express their concerns about the direction in which the team is headed.

- Create mottoes, symbols, awards, songs, T-shirts, or posters that remind team members/volunteers of their common purpose.
- Use this sense of common focus to stay on track and prioritize team tasks.

## Trust

Although trust is crucial to team collaboration, it is often slow to develop and easy to lose. Trust requires the effort of all the team members/volunteers and the leader. To be trusted, you must be willing to trust others. Encourage yourself and your members/volunteers to

- Be honest.
- Follow through on commitments.
- Work to get rid of conflicts of interest. In other words, prevent situations where the good of any individual team member/volunteer is not consistent with that of the team and its other members/volunteers (over-rewarding one member/volunteer, for example, may undermine teamwork).
- Avoid talking about one another.
- Give team members/volunteers the benefit of the doubt. Part of trusting is realizing that people aren't perfect, and that we all make mistakes. In times of doubt, give members/volunteers your support and show them you are sincerely interested in seeing them succeed.

## Clear Roles

Confusion over roles and expectations is a frequent cause of frustration and tension in team settings. Unclear roles can quickly lead to other problems such as distrust and hidden agendas. When people have false assumptions about who is doing what, important tasks can be left unattended. To maintain clear roles on your team,

- Review individual team member/volunteer responsibilities frequently.

## Ask Jamal

How would you characterize the dynamics of Jamal's team so far?

*People don't need to BE the same or THINK the same to be committed to common goals.*

- Clarify responsibilities when you are formulating a plan of action. Every task in your plan should have a team member, or members/volunteers, assigned to it.
- Create a plan so that team members learn about each other's roles and responsibilities. Where feasible, rotate members/volunteers through all roles.
- Figure out ways for members/volunteers to help each other. This takes pressure off you and builds better understanding and flexibility among team members.

## Open Communication

Effective communication is much more than being able to “make conversation.” It means ensuring that important information is constantly being shared and understood by everyone on the team. It also means that members/volunteers must be candid about their own wishes, needs, and concerns. To open and maintain the lines of communication, you and your team members should

- Err on the side of overcommunicating. Better to share too much information, at least in the beginning, than to have members/volunteers trying to work without enough to go on.
- Try to understand all points of view. This means soliciting input from team members and listening actively until you fully understand their intent.
- Try to clear up misunderstandings quickly and accurately. When left unresolved, misunderstandings fester among team members.
- Reinforce and recognize team members' efforts. Sharing information with the group and asking others for their ideas and opinions should be valued activities of the team.

## Diversity

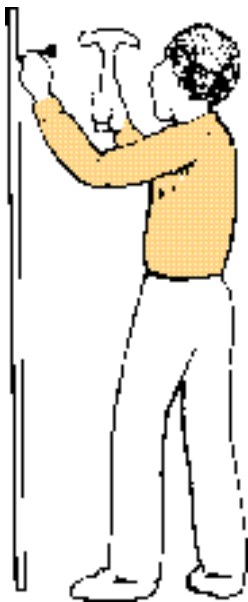
Diversity—a mix of backgrounds in terms of race, gender, culture, age, education, physical ability, and job function—can lead to a rich and rewarding team experience. People don't need to be the same or think the same to be unified. The key to success is to value team diversity and use that diversity to achieve the team's common purpose. Here are some suggestions for you and your members/volunteers:

- Remember that normal people disagree with each other. Fortunately, no two people are exactly alike. It's the diversity among members/volunteers that challenges the status quo and encourages innovation.
- Try to learn as much as possible from others. Learning about the background, ethnic heritage, and job experience of other people can enrich your own skills and knowledge. When members/volunteers express thoughts or opinions that are not shared widely in the group, give them support. This sets a precedent for other members/volunteers who want to contribute ideas they think may be "different."
- Encourage members/volunteers to "mix" their work teams from week to week or task to task. Provide a variety of ways for teams to avoid cliques.
- Evaluate new ideas based on merit rather than on who offered them or how closely they match your own preferences.
- Avoid comments that draw negative attention to a person's unique characteristics. Humor should never be used at the expense of others' identity and self-esteem.
- Don't ignore the differences among team members. Unkindly pointing out individual differences is always inappropriate, but recognizing and celebrating the diversity within the group is never a mistake!

In summary, creating a collaborative team environment requires considerable time and attention, especially early in the life of the group. But the payoff is remarkable!

## Ask Jamal

Name three or four things you think Jamal could do to improve the collaborative environment for his team.



# Diagnosing and Guiding Your Team through the Stages of Group Development

## Why You Do It

**A**s your members/volunteers grow from a collection of individuals into a smoothly operating team, they will go through several predictable stages. Each stage requires its own leadership approach, input, and activities. By learning to recognize what your group needs from you at each stage, you can thoughtfully and purposefully plan how to help them continue growing into a high performance team.

## How You Do It

There are many models for studying group development. One widely accepted concept about group growth is that

Groups must move through several phases of development before they become high-performing teams.

While certain stages may be more pleasant for the group and some less, all are necessary if true teamwork is to be achieved. Some teams get stuck at one stage and never make it to their desired end. Other teams digress in response to changes in membership, mission, or leadership.

On the following pages, we outline the Forming-Storming-Norming-Performing-Adjourning model of group development—one model of many we hope you'll discover as you try to become a more knowledgeable supervisor and team leader.



## Performing

Over time, members/volunteers begin to care more deeply about each other and about the group's purpose and task. They come to recognize and acknowledge individuality, and tasks are accomplished by using the talents, skills, and abilities of each person on the team. One sign that the group has reached the performing stage is that members/volunteers can disagree with the majority opinion of the group without being labeled as bad or disloyal. Leadership style at this stage is characterized by "interdependence." Members/volunteers feel free to develop their skills and learn from the actions and behavior of their peers, and the leader can rely on members/volunteers to perform—consistently.

## Adjourning

The adjourning stage happens when the group has achieved its original purpose or when the time allotted for the group activity has run out. In National Service programs, this is usually at the end of the project year when members/volunteers are nearly finished with their service and will soon be moving on to new employment or to new educational and/or service opportunities. Not surprisingly, high-performing teams have a tough time saying goodbye. Members/volunteers who have learned how to make things happen out of the collective resources and skills of the group must now turn their attention to planning their individual future endeavors. Many feel disoriented and need the group leader's assistance as they begin their transition to life after National Service. More than anything, members/volunteers need opportunities to celebrate their accomplishments and personal growth, to reflect on and share their emotions concerning what the group has meant to them, and to express their hopes and fears about the future.

It is important to note that this group development model is not necessarily linear. A group may form and norm before moving into serious storming. Or a group may go back and forth between storming and norming for some time before they firmly arrive at the performing stage. Use the model as a general guide for understanding what members/volunteers may need from their leader and from each other at given points during the program cycle.

The chart on the following pages summarizes several typical actions a leader may take at each of the four stages.



## Performing

- Make consensus decisions on challenging problems
- Delegate as much as possible
- Jointly set challenging goals
- Look for new opportunities to increase the group's scope, and stretch members'/volunteers' talents
- Appreciate members'/volunteers' contributions
- Develop members/volunteers to their fullest potential through task assignments and feedback
- Help members/volunteers avoid stagnation and burnout
- Question assumptions and traditional ways of behaving
- Develop mechanisms for on-going self-assessment

## Adjourning

- Provide opportunities for members/volunteers to reflect on and assess their achievements and positive personal change and growth
- Provide plenty of opportunities for celebrating success
- Help members/volunteers learn to say goodbye and feel comfortable offering long-distance (or across-town) support after they have said goodbye
- Assist members/volunteers in dealing with any unfinished business
- Help members/volunteers set goals and make timely plans for their post-National Service lives
- Ensure that members/volunteers have access to resources that will help them make the transition

### Added Insights

In many (if not most) cases, your team “begins” when you come together for pre-service orientation or training. You and your members participate in structured activities that focus on role clarification, problem solving, and communication. It is important to integrate this training into daily tasks and continue meeting regularly once your project is in full swing.



# Just do it. (Then be sure to talk about it.)

## Facilitating Team-Building Activities

Sometimes, during the course of team building, you may want to use structured games and other activities to help your group address a particular issue. For example, if group members/volunteers are having trouble giving each other constructive feedback, role playing may give them a better understanding of how to do it. (See the section on team building in the Suggested Reading List, Appendix A, for types of structured activities.) When using structured exercises like role playing (or case studies, etc.), keep in mind that “processing” the activity afterwards can be as important a learning opportunity as the activity itself.

No team-building activity can be successful until it has been “processed” by the group. Team members must have a chance to discuss what happened and what they learned.

## A Few Processing Questions to Get You Started

What are your observations about...?

Where did you have difficulties?

What surprised you?

What worked?

What strategies were used?

What were turning points?

How does what you said relate to...or differ from...?

What would have been a different way of looking at...?

What are some similarities you notice in what people have said?

What were your reactions?

How did you feel about...?



“Courage happens  
when people unite.”

Anonymous

their ethics, values, or interests by joining in the consensus.

**Unanimous**—Everyone agrees that the best possible solution has been reached. You will probably encounter few problems that are worth the time required to achieve unanimity.

Consensus is more common.

## Decision Making— A Final Note on Consensus

When you are choosing which decision-making approach to use in a particular situation, keep in mind that consensus requires considerable effort and time on the part of the leader and the group members/volunteers. It is most appropriate in situations where

- the group has clear authority to make and implement the decision and
- there is a need for total commitment on the part of the entire group.

For example, a crew working on a highly visible and controversial park restoration project may need to reach agreement by consensus on how they will handle hostile remarks from passers-by.

You and your team will need to make consensus decisions and, at least in the beginning, it probably won't be easy.

In your tool kit, the article “Facilitating for Consensus” explains in depth how to facilitate reaching consensus in a group. Use it as a resource and guide when you are preparing to work through an important decision with your members/volunteers.

### REFERENCES

Pages 10–14 adapted from: *Tips for Teens*, by William Belgard, Kimball Fisher, and Steven Rayner, 1995.

Pages 18–20 adapted from: “Developing High Performing Teams,” by Jane Moosbrucker, in *Managing in the Age of Change*, pp. 46–55, New York: NTL/Irwin Professional Publishing, 1995.











# Characteristics of an Effective Team

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CONTINUED 2 OF 4

## Effective Team Leaders

1. Communicate
2. Are open, honest, and fair
3. Make decisions with input from others
4. Act consistently
5. Give the team members the information they need to do their jobs
6. Set goals and emphasize them
7. Keep focused through follow up
8. Listen to feedback and ask questions
9. Show loyalty to the company and to the team members
10. Create an atmosphere of growth
11. Are visible
12. Give praise and recognition
13. Criticize constructively and address problems
14. Develop plans
15. Share their mission and goals
16. Display tolerance and flexibility
17. Demonstrate assertiveness
18. Exhibit a willingness to change
19. Treat team members with respect
20. Make themselves available and accessible
21. Want to take charge
22. Accept ownership for team decisions
23. Set guidelines for how team members are to treat one another
24. Recognize, celebrate, and effectively utilize the uniqueness of each team member

[Adapted from: *Teamwork: We Have Met the Enemy and They Are Us*, by M.M. Starcevich and S.J. Stowell, Bartlesville, OK: The Center for Management and Organization Effectiveness, 1990.]



## Characteristics of an Effective Team

CONTINUED 4 OF 4

### Symptoms of Team Problems

SYMPTOM	DESCRIPTION	RESULT
Backbiting and complaining	Members of the team openly complain about and find fault with one another	Control over team members is lost because members are not clear about standards
Suspecting a “spy”	Members of the team suspect and distrust new members	New members have difficulty breaking into the established team
Two coalitions	The team has two factions, one of which has very little influence or power	The team is not cohesive
Personal stress	Stress shows in the team members in the form of “blowing up” and physical symptoms	Team members feel threatened and become less efficient and more dissatisfied
Combative behavior	Team members resort to yelling and combative behavior, playing the devil’s advocate	Team members express conflict through the use of threats, attacks, and so on
Too much detail	Team members scrutinize every detail and check on all aspects of minor and major decisions	Team members distrust one another and fear being penalized for errors
Too much time	Too much time is spent on decisions on minor issues brought to the leadership	Team members feel a lack of trust directly related to team problem solving
Shifting and changing decisions	Decisions are often changed shortly after being made	Team members are not willing to commit the team to a unified course of action

[Adapted from: *Building Productive Teams* (p. 101), by G.H. Varney, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1989.]







## A Dozen Tips for Team Building

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CONTINUED 3 OF 4

even when all they can see ahead is a seemingly endless series of hurdles.

### Tip 7 Involve the right people in problem solving.

People are most committed to implementing ideas that they participate in developing. Remember this when you decide who should be involved in solving team problems. Does this mean that every problem needs to be solved by the whole team? No. Many can and should be delegated to a subgroup, individual, or team leader.

### Tip 8 Don't use up all your energy on unsolvable problems.

Serious problems should be resolved immediately before they grow into monumental issues requiring extreme measures. Some problems, however, can't be resolved at all, and continual discussion will aggravate them and distract your team from "running the race" the best they can. Some problems are best ignored and will resolve themselves over time. Only a skillful and well-trained team will know the best course of action. A good team leader coaches the team through these issues successfully.

### Tip 9

### Develop the skills and discipline of effective problem solving.

Team problem solving is a skill. The tips in this ready reference will not be much help to your team if you haven't properly diagnosed the problem or if you ignore other elements of effective problem solving. Don't worry if you find, as most teams do, that these methods seem a little awkward at first. As your team matures and you regularly practice using these methods, you will find that they feel more natural. Just keep at it.

### Tip 10 Know your roles, purpose, boundaries, and resources.

Many problems result from a lack of clarity about what you are supposed to do and how much help you will get to do it. Strive to understand your task as a team and as a team member or team leader. Understand your new roles and responsibilities. Team-based organizations have fundamentally different assignments. If you don't understand these roles, get some help from your team leader or project coordinator.

Understanding these things will keep you focused on results and customers, not on activities and busy work. And once that is clear in your mind, get agreements from the











## Disruptive Group Situations

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CONTINUED 3 OF 3

### 14. The reluctant member/volunteer

A group member/volunteer who doesn't want to be there is a problem, especially if the person is open or even hostile about it. Try involving that person in a friendly and supportive way. Most of the behavior resulting from the problem can be dealt with through the ground rules. If the behavior continues, however, you may need to talk with the person outside the group. Usually,

the group itself will take care of the problem as they realize that, if they don't, it may tear the group apart.

### 15. Other issues

Other member issues may crop up, such as an incessant comic, a member/volunteer with a crush on you, etc. These issues are best dealt with outside the group. The person involved often needs special attention or extra time.







### Facilitating Decisions During a Meeting

#### Keeping Focused

When moving a group toward a decision, the first requirement is to keep the group's attention focused on common purposes. There are several ways to do this.

- Start the meeting by sharing or reaffirming common purposes, making sure everyone is clear about them and getting agreement.
- When you see the group drift off target, bring them back to the central purpose. (For example, say, "What we are talking about now is [x] and our purpose here today is [y]; let's make sure [x] is related to [y], or move back to the main topic.")
- Relate key points and summaries to the purpose. (For example, you could say, "We have explored these two aspects of the problem. If we can agree on an approach to dealing with these aspects, we'll achieve one of the purposes here today—[x].")
- Restate the purpose to help group members who are having a prolonged disagreement. (For example, you could say, "Let me interrupt here for a second. We all need to remember that we are here to address {the purpose}, which is affecting all of us.")

How much you call attention to the common purpose will depend on the length of the meeting, how many people are involved, the working style of the group, and the complexity of the purpose.

#### Limiting Discussion

To be an effective facilitator you need a second key characteristic: the ability to gauge when the group has talked about something "just enough." Too much discussion causes the group to lose interest and feel that they are not using their time productively. Too little may result in an unsatisfactory solution—or not enough group commitment to carry out the solution successfully.

Determining when a group has reached the "just enough" point is not an exact science. However, there are some behavioral signs that it's time to push the group toward a decision.

- Points or arguments begin to get repeated, and no new information or ideas are developed. You get the sense that people are trying to convince each other by talking louder or being repetitive.
- Individuals in the group have all had a reasonable opportunity to participate in the discussion. If you have any doubts, ask someone who has been silent if they have anything to add.



## Facilitating for Consensus

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“Do you agree that this is the best solution that we can develop collectively?” Or...

“Based on this discussion and our need to take action, can you agree to this as a practical solution—perhaps one that is not ideal and not exactly what you want, but nonetheless achievable.” Or...

“Remembering that we all have to keep our common purposes in mind, do you agree that this is the best action we can jointly take?”

These steps may help the group achieve consensus, however grudgingly. If you get agreement, acknowledge it, summarize key points, identify actions, record the results, and move on. If you do not get consensus, what happens? If people simply disagree, what can you do?

### Facilitating Disagreement

As a facilitator, you need to manage disagreement openly and positively. Out of disagreement will often emerge creative solutions and agreements that people will carry out with energy. However, this creativity and energy cannot happen if disagreements are pushed under the table or if they get out of hand and dominate the group proceedings. Here are some things you can do to be a positive force in facilitating disagreements:

- Summarize major points of disagreement or key alternatives. Ask if all have been able to contribute their views and query the group to see if all major points have been discussed.
- Go around and ask each person to recommend a decision. If five of eight people agree, ask the three who did not the following questions:

“What would it take to change your mind?”

“Now that we have clearly heard each of our positions, what would it take to get consensus on this problem?”

“What are the areas of disagreement and are they resolvable?”

Whatever questions you use, you may then need to facilitate a discussion to sort out the answer.

- Another approach is to ask group members/volunteers to think about what is keeping them from reaching agreement. Allow some discussion and then ask these participants what can be done. Then test for consensus again.
- At a certain point, you may decide for a vote. If the vote is not clear-cut, you can simply go with the majority or table the issue and agree not to decide.



