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Tips for Improving Team Collaboration

Think about the best team you've ever been a part of. What made that team work? Was it the project? The people? The interpersonal dynamics? Did you enjoy being part of it? Did it bring out the best in you?

Now think about the worst team you've ever been on. What made it different?

Chances are you have been on more teams with dysfunction than teams that operate seamlessly. Collaborative teams make for enhanced productivity and results. When teams really work, they work in the best of ways. But teamwork takes work, and the reality is that teams can fall apart, break down, and experience disruption for myriad reasons.

Some teams operate as a team in name only. This is a group of people who are declared a

team but don't operate with the rhythm of one. Perhaps the team has been dysfunctional for so long that members feel like it's too much work to change.

Weak leadership can also unsettle a team, allowing dominant personalities to derail the plan. Eventually, team members will adapt their behavior accordingly, reacting to the fact that the person at the helm isn't really steering.

Then there's the "lone ranger" team member who disrupts team cadence, heading out on their own because they believe in their own ability more than the team's. This causes a disconnect with other team members feeling a lack of trust and collaboration.

There can also be general disrespect within a team. This occurs when certain team members devalue other members - either in their competency or diversity. This presents itself as "clashing personalities," but the truth is that different personalities can actually strengthen a team, as long as the respect is there.

A team can also break down when reacting to outside influences, such as impossible deadlines, lack of resources, or rumored layoffs. When stress reaches maximum levels, people feel like they have to protect themselves before they protect the team. Eventually, everyone acts individually for self-preservation.

How do you handle situations where your team just isn't coming together? Here are eight tips to improve team collaboration:

1. Evaluate Why It Isn't Working

The issue may be trust, chemistry, competitiveness, or something else, but you can't fix what's wrong if you don't get to the heart of the matter.

Start by surveying team members. Asking is the best way to get direct responses and make people feel that their perceptions and opinions are important.

Next, step back and observe the team in action in a particular setting. As the leader, come to your own conclusion about what is happening. If you are not involved directly in the conflict and are able to take an observer's view, it usually isn't hard to see what the problem is.

2. Observe and Model Best Practices

If the company culture dictates strong teams, take a look at the organization and see who else is doing it well. Talk to other managers about team dynamics, how they get people to collaborate, and the behaviors they encourage. Make sure you return the favor, sharing your own best practices and lessons learned. Don't forget to look outside your company as well. Talk with colleagues and mentors. You'd be surprised at how similar situations can crop up across the most divergent industries.

3. Understand the Norms of a Successful Team in Your Culture

There are probably some ground rules around what constitutes a great team at your company, and you need to identify what those are. If the team is all about working hard and playing hard, yet you have team members who prefer not to play hard with their coworkers, this is going to upset the team dynamic. If one person consistently ducks out on that beer with colleagues at the end of the workday, try to assess why. Missing out on that little piece of team-building actually affects a lot more than you may think. Make sure employees are not so focused on the work that they neglect developing the cultural aspects of the team.

4. Consider How Important a Team Really Is

If it's just for show, rethink why you even need to have a collaborative team. There are

situations in which teams can work loosely and goals are still accomplished - sometimes more effectively than they would be without all the cooks in the kitchen. Not everything has to be team-focused, don't try to force collaboration for the sake of it.

5. Get Out of the Office

Companies participate in offsite team-building activities all the time because they actually work. These situations allow people to experience colleagues as humans instead of simply as coworkers, uncovering life details that aren't revealed during normal workdays. Offsite team-building activities can give team members a different way to connect with each other, potentially building more chemistry and rapport. Experiential learning exercises also have a way of revealing team dynamics that can then be examined and discussed.

6. Zero in on the Detractor

If there is one particular cynic, take that person aside to discover why there is conflict. You can either be very direct here, or you can ask a series of "why" questions to get to the bottom of the situation. The method you use will depend on your employee's personality.

7. Create Accountability Around Team Performance, Not Just Individual Performance

This helps draw out the lone ranger and forces the team to work collaboratively toward common goals. If one person isn't participating, the others won't carry that person, and a change will start to take place in the team dynamic.

8. Check in Consistently

Have a formal check-in periodically, either once a month or once per quarter. If you're repairing a team, check in to make sure things are on track and to gain a better understanding of what's working what needs to be adjusted. If you start the teamwork ball rolling but then neglect the process, any progress you've made will quickly evaporate.

If teams are important for your organization, you need to do what you can to facilitate their effectiveness. Make sure open communication exists. Create opportunities for all voices to be heard. Connect with the shared values that unite the team. Finally, instill in team members the fact that a high-performing team is more powerful than even the best of individual performers.

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Source: Dr. Lisa M. Aldisert, Success.com

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Director of Architect, Engineer & Consultant Programs- Enterprise Software

Regional Sales Manager- (Access/Video/Intrusion)- Texas Region

Channel Sales Leader- SaaS Solutions (*Equity Opportunity) - **COMPLETED**

Regional Sales Manager- Enterprise Software- New England Region

Regional Sales Manager- Access & Video Solutions- Carolinas

Distribution Channel Sales- Network Video Solutions- Metro NYC

Regional Sales Manager- (Access/Video/Intrusion)- MN/WI/MI- **COMPLETED**

Regional Sales Manager- Network Video Solutions- Northern California

Business Development Manager- Network Video Solutions - Northeast

Regional Sales Manager- Network Video Solutions- CO/Rocky Mtn Region

Regional Sales, Critical Infrastructure- Enterprise Software- NY Region

Healthcare Vertical Market Specialist- Connected Building Solutions- CA - **COMPLETED**

A&E Business Development Manager- Southern California

Regional Sales Manager- (Access Control/Network Video) - Northeast- **COMPLETED**

Regional Sales Manager- Enterprise Software/Surveillance- Pacific Northwest

Field Applications Engineer- Enterprise Access Control Software- Pacific Northwest

Major Projects Capture - Integrated/Connected Building Solutions - Chicago Region

Airport Software/Visual Guidance Systems- Business Sales Consultant- Americas- **COMPLETED**

Branch Sales Manager- Commercial Accounts- Chicago

Regional Sales Manager- (Access/Video/Intrusion)- DC/VA/MD Region

Product Manager- Fire & Life Safety

Regional Sales Managers - Electro-Mechanical Access Control/Locking - Multiple Territories

Service Business Consultant- IoT/Connected Building Solutions- Southern California Region

Regional Sales Director- Enterprise Software/Surveillance- Canada- **COMPLETED**

Business Development Executive- Industrial Software Solutions/IoT

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