



How to teach teamwork?

Methods and techniques

Basic idea

- It is not sufficient to put students in groups and ask them to work together—students need to be taught the skills they will need to function successfully in this kind of situation.

Teamwork basics

Two things get accomplished in good teams: the task gets accomplished and the satisfaction of team members is high. In order to achieve both of these ends:

1. Get to know other members of your group and their strengths
2. Set ground rules
3. Use a facilitator
4. Keep lines of communication open
5. Know how to avoid (or solve) common problems

It's all about communication!

- Engage in dialogue
- Build trust
- Be productive
- Listen well
- Observe carefully
- Give feedback constructively

Behaviors to Observe

- Who participates
- Who doesn't
- How do people take turns?
- Who talks to whom?
- Who responds to whom?
- How are interruptions handled?
- Is silence O.K.?
- Is anyone dominating the conversation?
- How are decisions made?
- By consensus?
- By voting?
- By one person?

Try not to...

- Order or command
- Warn or threaten
- Preach or moralize
- Cross examine
- Label, evaluate, or judge
- Tease or make light of
- Respond with sarcasm
- Avoid discussing an issue
- Assume instead of listen
- Forget differences in communication style may be related to gender or cultural differences

Three Concrete Tips

- Use a facilitator/coordinator
- Delegate tasks effectively, using a Work Breakdown Structure (WBS)
- Set some ground rules

Work Breakdown Structure (WBS)

- Way to organize a series of tasks to accomplish a project objective. Consists of:
- Hierarchical diagram of tasks
- Person responsible for executing the task
- Deadline to have the task completed
- Interdependencies with other tasks
- Each task in a WBS should contribute to the goal of delivering the required material on time and done well

Facilitator/Coordinator WHY?

If everyone is responsible, no one is!

The coordinator/facilitator should

- Focus the team toward the task
- Get all team members to participate
- Keep the team to its agreed-upon time frame
- Suggest alternatives
- Help team members confront problems
- Summarize team decisions

Setting Ground Rules

- Goals and expectations
- Work norms
- Facilitator norms
- Communication norms
- Meeting norms
- Consideration norms

What Makes Teams Troublesome

- Individual behaviors
- Group social psychology
- REMEMBER: Even people with good intentions can get into trouble.

Individual Behaviors

- “Ego integrity”
- Self-interest versus group interest
- Inability to observe self and/or use feedback
- Different styles of
 - Learning
 - Interaction
 - Expression

Group Behaviors

- “Defensive routines”
- Us versus them
- Reluctance to test assumptions publicly
- Getting “off task”
- Lack of boundaries
 - Ill defined roles
 - Unclear objectives and/or expectations

Common Problems in Teams

- Hogging—talking too much
- Flogging—beating a dead horse
- Frogging—jumping from topic to topic
- Bogging—getting stuck on an issue
- Dead buffaloes—tiptoeing around a contentious issue

Sources

- <https://tll.mit.edu/help/teaching-teamwork>