



Being a Team Player

Independent Learner's Guide

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COURSE OVERVIEW

Teamwork is essential in any successful organization and to have an effective team, an organization must be comprised of individuals who pride themselves on being great team players. Many of us would consider ourselves to be team players, but are we really? Do we know what that takes and what managers consider to be the qualities that make a person a team player, or that make a good team player a 'great' team player? Everyone brings their own skills and strengths to the table, understanding how to use those skills within the context of a team is vital to help an organization succeed.

Learning Objectives

At the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Understand the definition of a team player and a non-team player.
- Know the difference between a team player and a non-team player.
- Learn the qualities possessed by a team player.
- Determine what type of team player you are and how that functions in your workplace.
- Know and understand what it takes to be a team player.
- Discover the different types of teams that exist within a company.
- Learn what working together as a team looks like
- Learn the different types of workplace teams and what types of team's successful organizations need
- Develop strategies to improve teamwork.

What is a Team Player?

The Oxford dictionary defines team player simply and concisely:

Noun: A person who plays or works well as a member of a team.

It defines teamwork just as simply:

Noun: The combined action of a group, especially when effective and efficient.

Think of your favorite sports team: Broncos in the NRL; Queensland in cricket's Sheffield Cup... All sports teams have one thing in common: teamwork is essential to achieve the win.

Think of a business, any business. Unless you work alone, successful businesses have one thing in common: team players working together.

For example, in a newspaper, everyone has a role to play: reporters write the stories, photographers take the photos, sales representatives sell advertising, production departments compose and print the newspaper, and the circulation department looks after distributing it.

The same level of teamwork exists within a restaurant: The front of the house looks after the dining room with hosts seating customers, and waiters and waitresses taking orders and delivering food, while the back of the house looks after preparing, cooking and plating the meals for customers.

Everyone in any organization has an essential role to play to get the job done. You, and your organization, are no different.

Characteristics of a Team Player

In your work life, who stands out to you as a team player? What makes you think about that person as the right person to do the job? What qualities do they possess that make them stand out as a team player?

Teams need strong players who perform well, and companies are no different: They need strong employees who do the same thing. There are several characteristics that all team players have in common. Here are 10 of them:

Reliable

An effective team player can be counted on to do their fair share of the work and get it done on time. They adhere to deadlines and follow through on assigned work. This person delivers a good performance with every task, every time.

Communicates Constructively

There is a way to express thoughts and ideas to others in a constructive way: clearly, directly, honestly and respectfully. Teams need people who do this, and great teams have people who excel at it.

Actively Listens

Everybody knows someone who they would call a good listener: they listen first and speak second. Good listeners are essential for successful teams to function effectively. Teams need team players who are willing to absorb, understand and consider ideas and points of view from others without debating and arguing every point. Such a team member also can receive criticism without reacting defensively.

Actively Participates

Good team players have a can-do approach to the task: *“What contribution can I make to help the team achieve success?”* They come prepared for team meetings, are focused and speak up in discussions instead of sitting passively on the sidelines. They take the initiative to help make things happen and they volunteer for assignments.

Share Openly and Willingly

Information, knowledge and experience are shared openly and willingly by good team players. While much of the communication within teams frequently occurs informally, great team players keep the lines of communication open all the time and share their knowledge and expertise willingly.

Cooperative and Helpful

Each member of a team has their own way of doing things and their own method for getting the job done. Good team players figure out ways to work together to accomplish a job, despite differences they may have with other team members concerning style and perspective, method and delivery. They respond to requests for assistance and take the initiative to offer help to a team member who may be struggling in a specific area.

Flexible

Great team players can roll with the punches. In a perfect world, everything goes according to plan, but we do not live in a perfect world. Effective team players deal with challenges or changing conditions on the fly. Great team players do not stress over or complain about new conditions or new directions; they just deal with them and work to accomplish the task.

They are flexible to deal with the new situation and are willing to compromise, if needed, to head in a new direction.

Committed

Great team players show up every day willing to work together to further the goals of the team. They truly care about the work, their teammates and the task at hand. Strong team players give their best effort all the time and want other team members to do the same.

Problem-Solver

Let us face it, problems happen. It is a fact of life. Sometimes the work one team does create problems for others and other times a team exists to do just that: solve problems.

Great team players are ready and willing to deal with problems – large or small – in a solutions-oriented manner. They do not assign blame or judge: they just work together to develop an appropriate solution in a collaborative, supportive way.

Respectful and Supportive

The mark of great team players is the way in which they treat other members of the team — with courtesy and respect – all the time. They exhibit understanding, support and willingness to help their colleagues get the job done. Of course, it does not hurt to have a sense of humor and know how and when to have fun, while at the same time dealing with others in a professional manner.

Team players who show commitment do not come in any specific style or personality. They do not need to be rah-rah, cheerleader types. In fact, they may even be soft-spoken, but they are not passive. They care about what the team is doing, and they contribute to its success — without needing a push.

Team players with commitment look beyond their own piece of the work and care about the team's overall work. In the end, their commitment is about winning — not in the sports sense of beating your opponent — but about seeing the team succeed and knowing they have contributed to this success. Winning as a team is one of the great motivators of employee performance. Good team players have and show this motivation.

BEING A GOOD TEAM PLAYER

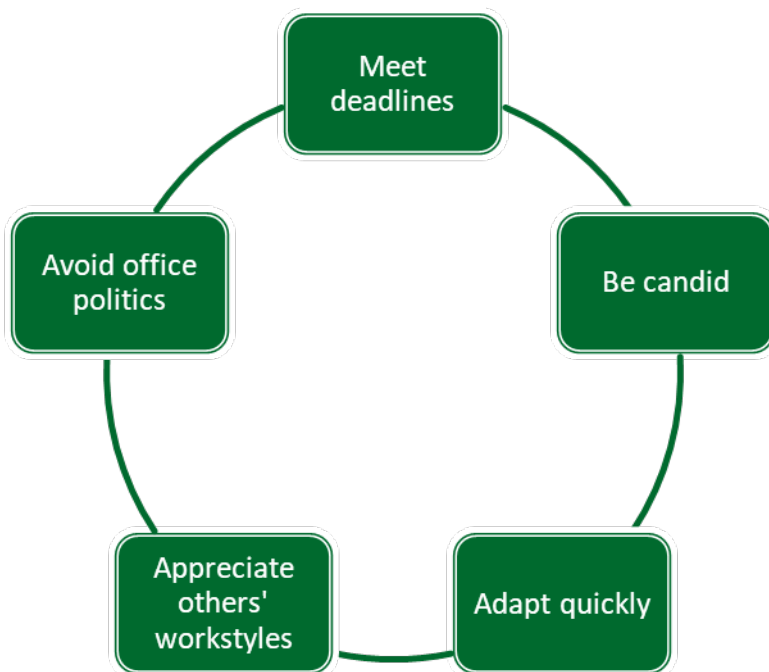
Actions Speak Louder Than Words

Teamwork is essential in any organization. Employers expect it. They will look for the qualities of a good team player during the interview process and they will value that person once he/she is hired.

Colleagues will also value a team player in the work environment. Knowing you can depend on a co-worker who is reliable, non-judgmental, a good listener and who is willing to do their fair share of the work makes that co-worker a valuable part of the rest of the team.

How do you demonstrate you have what it takes to be a great team player?

Here are five ways to show employers and colleagues you are a good team player:



1. **Meet deadlines:** Oftentimes, teams have a common goal to meet that means individuals within that team, or groups of individuals – depending on the size of the team and the goal at hand – may each have a sub-goal or work to do that is a smaller part of a bigger whole.

If this is the case, the most important rule of thumb is to make sure you meet your deadline.

In many businesses, the flow of work is like a domino effect: a chain reaction that is the cumulative effect produced when one event sets off a chain of

similar events. In the case of many organizations, one department completing its work depends on another department doing its job in full and on time, and that department depends on the next to do the same thing and so on. Meeting deadlines ensures the entire team functions smoothly and there are no holes in the process. This creates a chain reaction of good events.

2. **Be candid:** While a successful team player is someone who gives 100 per cent each day, that does not mean they are not entitled to an opinion – and the right to ask questions. A great team player will ask questions and voice opinions and criticisms in a constructive manner, trying to ensure they understand fully the task and trying to contribute to ways of doing it effectively.
3. **Adapt quickly:** There is a saying about best laid plans and another about whatever can go wrong will go wrong. One of the abilities of a good team player is the ability to be flexible and willing to change when necessary.

Today's work environment may also mean that teams are working together but from different locations. Technology makes this possible and enables teams and team players to be more productive and creative.

An effective team player will adapt to changes quickly and easily and be willing to change their own style of working to adapt to another, if it is in the best interest of the team.

4. **Appreciate others' workstyles:** If everyone were the same, not a lot would get accomplished and goals would be one-dimensional.

On a team, one person may be a great facilitator and more comfortable at delivering the charge, another may be a better communicator while another may play devil's advocate and challenge the team to think in a new direction. It takes all these strengths to make a team function well together.

A great team player is someone who can understand each member's strengths and weaknesses and work well with those who have a different style.

5. **Avoid office politics:** In other words, do not get distracted by issues and circumstances that are not critical to the team's mission; this is counterproductive. Office politics are the strategies people employ to gain advantage – personally or professionally – at the expense of others or the greater good.

Are You a Good Team Player?

We have discussed what it takes to be a good team player. You must listen and understand, communicate and collaborate, share and know when to encourage others to speak up.

If you already do all of this, you are well on your way to be an effective, strong team player.

There are wonderful team players in every organization just as there are people who damage or destroy teams. Do you work for a team(s) where everyone pitches in and your goals are achieved through perfect harmony? Or is your team more dysfunctional and just not able to get together and achieve its tasks?

Sports teams are perfect examples of how many players working together can achieve much more than one player who is acting alone. As the saying goes, there is no “I” in team.

It takes everyone working together in their own way to accomplish a goal or using a sports analogy — to get the goal.

For example, you may not be the best goal scorer on the soccer team, but you are great at defending the net. If you stymie the opposing attackers, you are doing your part and enabling your goal-scoring teammate to do his.

Everyone on the team plays a different role, according to their individual strengths – and by excelling at yours, and helping and encouraging one another along the way, you can make some inspiring things happen.

Be Prepared for the ‘Teamwork’ Question in an Interview

Do you work better on a team or independently? Are you a good team player? These questions are asked by just about every person interviewing a prospective employee, and they are often followed by: Give me an example of a project you were involved in with your team and talk about your specific contribution.

Most everyone answers yes to this question without hesitation. The interviewer is trying to differentiate the individual contribution from the team’s accomplishment and determine if the candidate was a help or a hindrance. In essence what they are trying to identify is if the goal was accomplished was it because of that person’s contribution or despite it?

Many people consider themselves to be true team players yet are not sure how to answer the question during an interview.

Do you know how to respond?

Since this question, or a variation of it, is asked by almost every interviewer, it should be easy to be prepared for it. The best way to handle it is to give the interviewer an example of how you used your skills as a team player to help your team reach success. Discuss how well you communicate with your peers, your listening skills and what results were achieved, making special mention of outstanding contribution to the team – both your own and others' as well.

A good way to answer the question:

“Yes, I consider myself to be a team player. In my last position I was a member of the company’s spirit committee. We looked after planning and executing the company Christmas party. We were all responsible for a specific aspect of the event and, even though I was late to join the committee, my responsibility was arranging for safe rides home for all the staff. I contacted a local transportation company and negotiated with them to provide their service to our company on the night of the party. Even though my task was just one small part of the overall success of the Christmas party, I executed the plan and delivered to make sure every staff member who needed a safe ride home after the party received it. Fellow staff members depended on me to be able to deliver my goal, as did the rest of my team. Because I was later joining the team, I made sure to communicate with the rest of my team to make sure I was on the right track. The result was a successful party and a happy staff.”

How not to answer the question:

“Yes, I am a good team player if the team is a right fit for me; if not, I will make sure I get put on another team. I mean, I am all for being a team player, but it must be a good team, you know? I need to get off the team I am on now and get a better team because I am stuck doing all the work. I want to play with a team that wins championships.”

Task 1 - The Interview

Think of five questions you would ask potential job applicants to gauge their ability to work with a team and answer the ‘teamwork’ question. For each one, also write a response.

TEAMWORK

“Teamwork makes the dream work, but a vision becomes a nightmare when the leader has a big dream and a bad team.” – John C. Maxwell

Teamwork Definition

The adage that says there is no “I” in team is a perfect way to think about how teams work together.

While teams are comprised of individuals, each with their own function within that team, it takes the collaboration of all the individuals on that team working together to help the team reach its goal and be successful. Everyone brings their own gifts, talents and expertise to the role, but it is the combination of everyone, working together, which makes a successful team. Like the quote above says, *“Teamwork makes the dream work.”*

When talking about teamwork and being an effective team player, it is necessary to understand what the term "teamwork" means. Basic requirements for effective teamwork are:

- An adequate team size.
- Clearly identified roles within the team
- Goals that can be measured
- Availability of resources needed to fulfil the team goal.

Types of Workplace Teams

A workplace team is a group of employees who are working together for a common objective. The teams can be permanent or temporary, depending on need. Essentially, your business or organization is one big team comprised of separate moving parts or sub-teams.

There are three common types of work teams:

Project team: Sometimes referred to as a steering committee or task force, this team is as simple as it sounds — a group of people brought together to accomplish a specific project. Typically, when the project ends, the team ends. For a project team to

succeed, the team's task needs to be appropriate for a group of people to work on together.

Cross-functional team: Again, as simple as it sounds — cross-functional teams are made up of employees from different departments or areas of the organization bringing their knowledge and expertise from that area to benefit the team.

Self-directed work team: Sometimes referred to as a self-managed team. Like a project team and a cross-functional team, a self-directed work team is just what it sounds like — a team that determines how it will get a job done and has the authority, and often the budget, to carry out decisions. This team is responsible and accountable for its decisions, as opposed to proposing action that will be approved or denied by someone outside the team.

Task 2 - A Closer Look

Examine your own workplace or organization and divide it into the sections that exist in that business.

Does every member of your organization fit into a type of workplace team?

What is each section's major focus or area of expertise?

Where do you fit in?

What is your focus on your team?

Could your role be strengthened? How would this benefit the team?

Five Types of Workplace Teams Organizations Need

Many large businesses have teams and sub-teams or teams within teams in much the same way a non-profit organization functions with a board of directors. In some cases, team members may represent one team but serve on a sub-team with a more specific or narrow focus.

For example, you may have a general role on your company's environmental team with a role of motivating your colleagues about the importance of reducing re-using and recycling. On that team are several sub-committees that may include education, rewards, safety, etc.

It takes teamwork and team building to help a company grow and thrive. Here are five work teams every organization should have:

Leadership Team — The leadership team is responsible for the strategic direction of the company, and often consists of an organization's senior managers or department heads. This team plans, sets goals, provides guidance to, and manages your organization.

Motivation or Employee Morale Team — (aka, the 'fun' team) This team helps plan events or activities that motivate employees and generally boost morale and elevate spirit. They do this by hosting employee social events such as lunches or fundraising or planning celebrations that mark company or employee milestones. Simply, this team functions as a company's social committee.

Safety and Environmental Team — This team is responsible for the safety and health of everyone in the workplace. Roles can include safety training, providing monthly newsletters, giving safety talks, etc.

Wellness Team — Focuses on the health and fitness of employees. Sometimes this team can have responsibilities or functions that overlap with the safety and environmental team or the employee morale team. The wellness team can be responsible for organizing fitness clubs within the workplace, such as a running group, or bringing in health professionals for lunch and learn sessions on topics such as blood pressure monitoring or diabetes prevention.

Culture and Communication Team — As the saying goes, communication works both ways, and this team fosters two-way communication in an organization to ensure employee input up the chain of command works to create the defined company culture necessary for the success of your organization. This team's responsibilities may include organizing a monthly newsletter or employee satisfaction surveys.

If your company does not have one of these teams, take the initiative and start one. Thriving, successful teams like these within a company act as a magnet for other employees, drawing them in. That has a domino effect and interests even more employees in becoming engaged. When employees are more engaged with their company, the company benefits. The teams make the company a better place to work and provide an opportunity for increased employee commitment. Successful teams help a company build a true sense of teamwork.

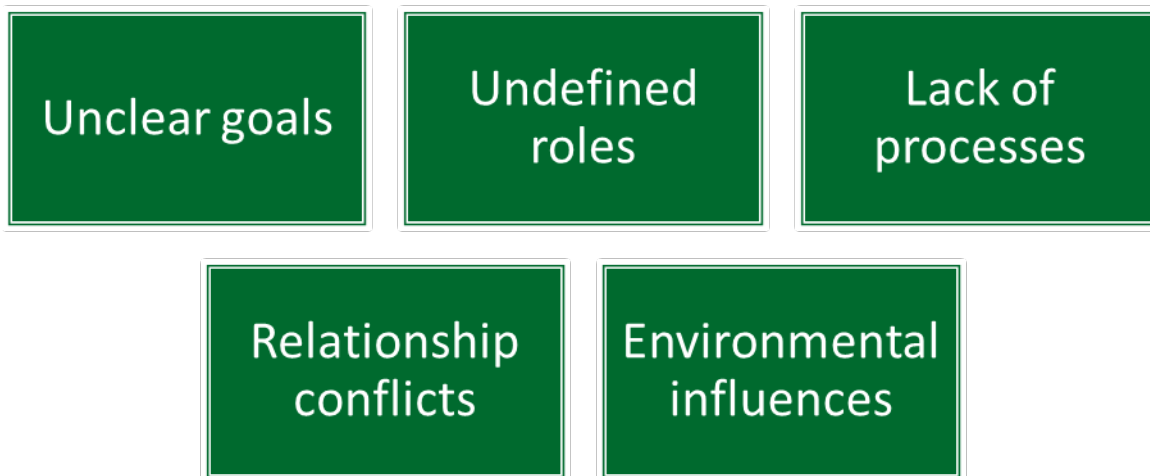
WHY TEAMWORK FAILS

Five Reasons

Sometimes, despite hard work and the best of intentions, teams still fail. It is a fact of life.

There are several reasons why teams fail, and it is important to understand these reasons, because a failure can affect the entire team and the morale of the employees. Sometimes, a team failure has drastic financial repercussions for the entire company, which can, in turn, loop back to affect the employees.

Just like there are five types of teams that organizations need to succeed, there are five broad reasons for failure:



Unclear Goals:

Lack of participation from members in setting goals can spell disaster for the success of the team, as can ambiguity about goals and lack of communication about goals. For a team to succeed, goals must be clearly identified and communicated early on; that way, if there are any questions they can be addressed before the team sets off to put the plan into action. Everyone will be on the same page and there will be no miscommunication or misunderstanding.

Undefined Roles:

A team can fail because the roles and responsibilities of the team members are poorly defined. If team members are not sure what their role on the team is, it can lead to a lack of action from them. Leadership on any team is vital and if no clear leader is identified, it can lead to lack of commitment and purpose. A good leader outlines the team strategy and charts the path to success.

If roles are not clearly defined it can also cause team members to pass the buck, play the blame game and adopt a negative attitude – all of which can lead to failure by the entire team.

Lack of Processes:

Just as it is important to have clearly defined roles, it is equally as important to have clearly defined processes to make the team successful. This makes decision-making a non-issue. Simply put, actions taken without planning will lead to team failure.

Relationships:

Conflict between team members is always difficult. Sometimes, personalities just do not gel or there is competition – disguised or otherwise – among team members. Fortunately, these issues can be resolved in a variety of ways.

Environmental Influences:

Depending on the size of an organization and the scope of its mandate, team members may be placed at different geographic locations, making it difficult for them to meet frequently. One part of your team may be in an office building downtown while another team may be in a different town or city. Since communication is key for any team to function well, it is also the key to solving this failure as well.

Thanks to advances in technology, physical distances can always be overcome with the use of tools such as video conferencing, conference calls, and Skype. A wide variety of tools can be used to close the geographical gap.

Teams that work well together are vital for any organization. Their failure leads to the failure of the organization.

Employee Recognition

An aspect of environmental influences as a reason for team failure is lack of recognition within your company. Teams that are recognized for their hard work and dedication will thrive, which will mean good things for an organization. Lack of recognition is a real downer for employee morale.

What is employee recognition?

- The acknowledgement of behavior, effort and accomplishments that support an organization's goals and values.

This recognition makes an employee feel valued, validated and that they are an important part of the team.

Effective acknowledgement reinforces actions and behaviors you want employees to repeat, along with reinforcing their self-worth and self-esteem in the workplace. It improves morale, fosters loyalty and helps build a positive work environment.

Employees want to know they have done a good job and that you noticed — it makes them feel important. Employees who feel appreciated often exceed what is expected of them and are more productive and motivated. A common reason why people leave their jobs is that they do not feel appreciated. Recognition is crucial to increase retention and decrease turnover.

Letting people know their work is valued does not have to cost anything, and the results can have a long-lasting impact.

Types of Recognition

Informal

Acknowledgment of day-to-day accomplishments through gestures of appreciation, communication and/or feedback.

- Frequent
- Low or no cost awards
- Examples: Verbal praise, thank you notes, certificates, refreshments

Formal

Structured programs with scheduled activities or events using specific criteria to recognize employee contributions and accomplishments or achieving specific targets.

- Less frequent (monthly, quarterly or annually)
- Can involve more costly awards.

- Can involve more elaborate ceremonies.
- Examples: Career milestone awards, service awards

Recognition programs are usually the most effective when they contain formal and informal components.

Tips for Recognizing Employees

It is essential for an organization to have a considered employee recognition program with explicit goals. This will take time and effort, as what works for one company may not work for another. Fairness, consistency and clarity are also important. To be effective, it must be heartfelt and sincere.

Be as specific as possible. Tell the individual exactly why he/she is receiving the recognition.

Thought needs to go into what would be appreciated by the person being recognized. Ask employees how they would like to be appreciated. Some people may like public recognition, while others may prefer to receive more private acknowledgement.

Recognition needs to be a common practice and occur on a regular basis. Make sure recognition is offered consistently and fairly but that it does not become expected as an entitlement.

Avoid singling out a few employees who are mysteriously selected for recognition.

Recognition does not always have to come from managers or supervisors, peers can also offer words of thanks and positive observations to fellow employees.

One bad apple ...

When it comes to teamwork, one bad apple really can spoil the whole bunch. This was the finding of PhD student Benjamin Walker after working with 158 undergraduates, sorting them into teams and assigning them a task. He presented his findings at the ninth Industrial and Organizational Psychology Conference in Brisbane. The findings were surprising because it was previously assumed that in a workplace scenario, a team worked to the capacity of its average member.

Here is how it breaks down:

Each student was psychologically tested for their level of conscientiousness before being placed on one of 33 teams. Each team had a member who was what researchers called 'motivation-challenged'. The students on each team were told they would all receive the same mark, depending on how well they completed the case study they were assigned.

The study found that a single lazy person dragged the team down, reducing its satisfaction and performance overall.

The participants were also evaluated for impulsiveness, to see whether this trait affected performance, but it found the overall group mentality over-rode the reckless element.

But the team could not compensate for its laziest link. "These findings show the person who contributes the least has a huge impact," Mr. Walker said. "Even if on average the rest of the team is pulling their weight, they won't be able to compensate for that member and they won't be happy about it."

While the research pinpointed the fact that it was the laziest contributor that led to the most feelings of resentment within the team and its ultimate failure or success, Mr. Walker conceded he did not separately collate reactions of the perceived offenders. Presumably, they were satisfied with the exercise.

<http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/life/in-teamwork-one-bad-apple-really-does-make-a-difference-20110626-1glug.html>

STRATEGIES TO BUILD TEAMS ON

We have established that teamwork sometimes fails, and we have identified reasons why.

Here are 20 straightforward strategies to help improve teamwork in your operation, thanks to Azendoo, an application that groups teamwork planning, sharing, organization and communication tasks in one place.

20 Strategies

1. **Lead by example:** Treat your own roles, responsibilities and relationships with coworkers the same way you want others to. If you want your team to communicate with each other, make sure you communicate with them. If you want your team to work hard, show them how it is done.
2. **Build trust and respect:** If there is no mutual trust between workers and management, or among team players, nothing will get done. Team members must trust each other to each do their part as well as trust their leaders to guide them in the right direction.
3. **Encourage socializing:** A workplace should not be all work and no play ... ensure team members get together socially so they get to know each other on a personal level. Just get people talking!
4. **Foster open communication:** Communication is a two-way street and employees should feel like they can add to the conversation both with superiors and peers. If team members are encouraged to speak up, share ideas, make suggestions and voice their opinions it will build up trust and respect.
5. **Clearly define roles and responsibilities:** Limit confusion and indifference to tasks by clearly identifying who is responsible for what. This will save time and headache in the long run.
6. **Organize team processes:** There should be set team processes in place for working on a project, mitigating setbacks, communicating, and providing feedback. This will help employees spend less time on logistics and more time on their actual work.
7. **Set defined goals:** Measurable goals will ensure team members are working on time and on task. It will also allow group members to measure themselves both individually and as a team and let them know where they stand in relation

to the outlined benchmarks. This will provide added motivation and incentive to work together.

8. As mentioned in Session Five, **recognize good work:** This cannot be stressed enough. Praising and recognizing a job well done will boost confidence and morale, encouraging teams and individuals to keep up the good work. It will also spread like wildfire and may encourage other individuals to get with the program.
9. **Mediate conflict:** Conflict is everywhere and working in a team environment is no different. How conflict is managed should be clear under the team processes. Mediate conflict quickly and efficiently and do not wait to see how it will “play out.” That could spell disaster.
10. **Allow team members to actively take part in decision making:** This will give team members a sense of importance and ownership. Having a sense of personal involvement in the decision-making process will solidify individuals’ connection and investment in the team, making them feel like they are an integral part of something rather than just a piece of the puzzle.
11. **Use task management tools:** Collect and streamline team tasks, progress, deadlines and updates with a project management system. This type of application allows teams to gather information and conversations in one place with real time synchronizing across the board.
12. **Maintain the workload balance:** Try to ensure that every team member has a comparable workload, even though they may all be working in different aspects of a task. No one individual should be bearing the brunt of the work.
13. **Meet regularly... and mix it up:** Do not meet for meeting’s sake, that is just a waste of time. Meetings should not get in the way of productivity, but teams should still meet regularly to touch base, check in on progress and goals, communicate, collaborate, brainstorm and build awareness about what each member is working on. Make sure meeting time is used efficiently and effectively and consider switching things up by trying a different location.
14. **Do not micromanage:** Allow each team member to do their assigned tasks. Give your team the time, space and independence to produce work on their own without feeling like they are being watched or judged.
15. **Create space:** Give your team the physical and mental space they need to create and work in peace. Things can get done more quickly as a team; however individuals still need their personal time to focus on their part of the project.

16. **Start team traditions:** Create traditions to help bring people together and establish a sense of unified culture and solidarity. Find a way for the team to connect on another level that is not just work related.
17. **Use size to your advantage:** Whether your team is large or small or somewhere in between, use that size to your advantage. Larger teams have more manpower, but smaller groups often show more personal investments and take individual responsibility for getting things done.
18. **Make hiring a team responsibility:** Let the team weigh in on the final decision when hiring someone new for the team; they will all be working together so why not give them a voice? By having the opportunity to weigh in on newcomers, the existing team will be able to help choose the best fit.
19. **Give frequent feedback:** Team members should hear from each other as well as leaders. Remember: Communication is key.
20. **Remember to celebrate:** Not only is celebrating simply fun, but it also helps reinforce a team's willingness to work together and work hard for the company when their effort is clearly appreciated and celebrated.

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you are looking for further information on this topic, we have included a recommended reading list below.

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