

How to Improve Teamwork

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Does this situation sound familiar? Picture a CEO meeting with his/her direct reports. After finishing the typical staff meeting agenda, the CEO says, "I'm concerned that we are not helping each other out as well as we could. We need more teamwork." The direct reports shake their heads up and down in agreement—after all, how can anyone argue with wanting more teamwork?

They leave the meeting, agreeing to more cooperation, but quickly slip back to their department-centric way of doing things. It is not a deliberate slippage; they have the best of intentions. They want to improve teamwork; they want to be better team players, and they want to improve teamwork in the teams they lead. But the day-to-day pressures of running their departments consume them, and they probably have not really taken the time to think about what they need to do to enhance teamwork. In fact, if you were to ask each person in this scenario about the energy he/she had put into developing an action plan for better teamwork, he/she would probably shrug and tell you there just is no extra time in a day to get around to this right now.

So what's a manager to do? This article provides some suggestions any manager can use to help build a stronger team and enhance the overall teamwork in a credit union, even in the busiest of environments. After all, teamwork and cooperation will make you more efficient in the long-run.

Step 1: Define Teamwork on Your Team

If you were to ask five managers on the same team to define teamwork, they would all give a very different response. But we never ask this question because we all assume everyone knows what teamwork is. However, this is often not the case. In order for a team to become a true team they must have a *shared definition of teamwork*, not a one sentence, Webster-like definition such as, "A group of people working towards a common goal."

The definition should be a list of 10 to 15 bullet points that describes specific, observable behaviors that paint a picture of what teamwork looks like in their world. Examples are:

- Tellers help other tellers without being asked.
- Departments that are slow volunteer to help departments that are busy.
- Employees compliment other departments rather than complain about them.
- People admit mistakes rather than blaming others.
- People respect the start time for meetings by arriving on time.

Get the picture? Once a team creates a set of bullet points that define teamwork, the next thing they need to do is assess how well each person on the team emulates this teamwork according to their bullet points.

Step 2: Assess Your Team's Current Level of Teamwork

Once you have defined the set of bullets that signify teamwork in your organization, let's see how well your team actually practices this teamwork at the moment. Rank each bullet point as follows:

Have each team member rate the team on how well or how poorly they actually practice each of the bullet points. On a scale of 1 to 5, have them assign a ranking. For example, a "5" if they feel the team practices the individual bullet point consistently; a "3" if they feel the team practices it sometimes; a "1" if they feel the team never practices it, etc. Just as the bullet points are specific to your team, the ranking is also specific to your group.

Once you have assigned a ranking, tally up the scores for each bullet and divide by the number of respondents. This simple approach will give you the average score for each bullet point. Now your team has a homegrown scorecard that provides the team with a good sense of where they are strong and where they need to improve together.

Steps 3 & 4: Develop Action Steps and Hold Managers Accountable for Teamwork

Once the team has created a shared definition of teamwork and assessed the current level of teamwork, the action steps to help improve teamwork emerge naturally. The challenge is to follow through on the action steps and hold people accountable for continuing to improve teamwork. Here are some suggestions:

- Incorporate teamwork into your performance. Rate this factor in the performance evaluation process.
- If you have a bonus program, be sure teammanship is one of the indicators measured in determining the bonus. For example, make 25% of their bonus based on their ability to execute behaviors that enhance the team. If you really want to make a statement, you can make it 50% of their bonus.
- If you are trying to transform your organization into a strong team, include an update and evaluation on the successes/failures of the program on a weekly basis. As the team begins to take shape, this discussion could go out two weeks, and then monthly. However, you need to find ways to keep teamwork ongoing.

Building teamwork is a fairly simple process if you make the time to define teamwork, have your team assess itself against the definition, create action plans to improve teamwork, hold people accountable, and reinforce its importance on a regular and formal basis!

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