

“Ability is what you are capable of doing. Motivation determines what you do. Attitude determines how well you do it.”
Lou Holtz



WHEN TEAMS DON'T WORK

By Colleen Kettenhofen

There are a number of reasons why teams fail, and why there is a lack of productivity or accountability within various teams in the workplace. In conducting leadership and team building programs worldwide over the last 11 years, I hear almost day in and day out the main reasons why teams aren't more productive. Team leaders often report to me, “There's no accountability.” Or, “Our team members handle communication and conflict resolution differently, and don't always get along.”

Communication and effective interpersonal skills are essential tools for a team's survival. Often, a team simply needs a good “airing” of the issues during meetings. Here are 10 of the most common reasons I hear that keep teams from achieving maximum performance:

- 1. BACKSTABBING.** If you are the team leader and backstabbing is an issue, suggest that the team come up with a rule. Example: if there is any backstabbing among team members and they can't resolve it on their own, it goes before the team leader.
- 2. INTERRUPTING.** This is a common challenge in meetings. Have the team come up with a rule such as, “No one is allowed to speak until the other person finishes and you raise your hand.” Remember, it starts with the team leader.
- 3. “TANGENTS.”** A team member is going off on tangents in meetings. If you are the team leader, tactfully ask the rest of the group if they want to hear any more about the issue being discussed. If not, let that person know they can talk with you privately after the meeting. Remember tact and diplomacy.
- 4. WHINING.** Have an unwritten rule that team members must come up with a solution whenever they complain. One team actually held up cue cards with a sad face whenever someone whined excessively. It added humor to the meetings but got the point across.
- 5. NOT SHARING JOB KNOWLEDGE, COMMUNICATION.** This is so important it should be in every employee's job description. Sharing of job knowledge, skills and ideas is central to a team's success. No matter how many team building exercises you engage in, your team won't be productive without this simple rule.
- 6. TARDINESS.** Is there an employee who is consistently late? What is the impact on the morale of the team? Have a personal standard in writing for what is considered “late.” This helps with accountability, too.
- 7. TOO MANY BREAKS OR THE BREAKS ARE TOO LONG.** Put the number of breaks allowed, along with time frame, in job descriptions. An alternative is to have the team come up with how many breaks a team member can have in one day. Include the number of minutes. Be specific.
- 8. DISORGANIZATION OF SHARED WORKSPACE.** Here are two common problems: 1) Shared workspace is so small it affects productivity. 2) If “Oscar” and “Felix” are sharing workspace, have them define the rules on what's considered neat and organized. Have them ask themselves, “Is this problem affecting productivity?” I love it when I go into an organization's break room and above the sink it reads, “Please clean up after yourself. Your mother doesn't work here!”
- 9. EXCESSIVE PERSONAL USE OF THE INTERNET, TELEPHONE, OR TOO MUCH TEXT MESSAGING.** In my seminars around the world, I frequently hear complaints from people receiving too many joke emails. Another common challenge is someone in the office talking loudly while on a personal call. And everyone knows every detail of their personal life. Or, there's the employee who is secretly text messaging their friends instead of doing their work. Have the team define the rules. While everyone likes to socialize, what is considered to be adversely affecting the performance of the team?
- 10. LEAKING CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION.** What is considered confidential? Be specific and put it in writing. Hold everyone accountable.

Effective communication is the key to the success of any team. Gather your team together for a team building meeting. Have everyone list and discuss any potentially unacceptable team behaviors. Are there any issues or activities adversely affecting the team? What issues could impact the team in the future? It's not just about how well your people are performing, but what about the morale of your team?

Write everything down. Print it out and give everyone a copy. There will be more “buy in” because they were involved in the solutions. Hold everyone accountable. Without accountability there's no incentive to change behavior. And your team members want to see you as a team leader who takes action.

Lastly, how are you performing as a role model? In thinking about how to be an effective team leader, remember your people are going to watch what you say, and more importantly, watch what you do. **N**

“What we prepare for is what we shall get.”
William Graham Sumner

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