

BE A TEAM PLAYER



Team-building — Your Pathway to Achievement

The mention of team-building often elicits cynical groans and visions of silly, feel-good workshops, but teamwork doesn't have to be a dirty word. Look around you and you'll see that extraordinary achievement almost always involves a cooperative, cohesive group working closely together toward a mutual goal.

What's missing from today's often superficial treatment of team-building is any positive long-term effect. Team-building isn't a weekend getaway. It's an ongoing process in which every member of an organization plays a role.

How you impact others

It may not be immediately apparent, but your own behavior has a significant impact on the level of teamwork in your organization. Individuals tend to be reciprocal by nature, and when you are conscientious about team-building, others respond in kind. Get enough people working hard to help each other, and suddenly everyone's day runs more smoothly. The effect is exponential.

Doesn't team-building require leadership? Yes, but no one said anything about *official* leadership. You can take the initiative yourself by changing your daily behavior. Here are things you can do, starting today.

Embrace conflict. Conflict is a necessary and healthy part of problem-solving. *Expect* others to disagree with you, and be respectful of their right to express themselves by listening carefully when they speak and not interrupting until it's clear that they've finished.

A different opinion isn't a personal attack. Do your best to weigh the merits of a contrary opinion objectively and dispassionately. Work through conflict by emphasizing points of agreement and soliciting input from everyone who may be affected by the final decision.

Always try to resolve disagreements within your peer group before taking an issue to a higher authority. Accept rulings that don't go your way, and do your best to ensure a successful outcome regardless.

Broaden your understanding of others. It's no secret that people who like each other tend to work well together, but there are always one or two personalities that seem destined to clash. You can minimize flare-ups and resentment by making it your priority to understand how others think and approach their work.

A simple question like, "How do you organize your workload?" or, "What do I do that frustrates you?" not only has the potential to reveal useful insights, but it will also please your coworker because you showed an interest in how he or she thinks.

Allow everyone to participate. Don't be too focused on chalking up "wins." Be willing to let go of some measure of control and authority to ensure that *everyone* has the opportunity to take ownership of a given task or project.

Acknowledge the importance of other people. Put team goals ahead of your personal agenda. Credit others publicly for their part in any success.

Back to basics. Being honest about your shortcomings and displaying a willingness to admit when you are wrong is a sign of strength, not weakness. The more your coworkers see that you're open to different ideas, the more likely they'll be to deal with you in good faith.

Challenge yourself to be the first to admit a mistake and the first to apologize when a disagreement becomes personal. Imagine the kind of person that you'd like to work with and *become* that person. Chances are your coworkers will follow your lead.

