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Murray Newlands Contributor

I teach entrepreneurs what they need to know to be successful.

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How to Develop a Team That Collaborates Effectively

In today's business environment – from culture statements to projects and strategies – collaboration is a critical success factor. As an investor I invest in teams of great people who can execute well. There are lots of entrepreneurs with great ideas who cannot execute their business, no one can do everything on their own and every great founder I know builds a great team. The concept of collaboration is about each person on a team offering or contributing something of value that will cohesively fit together to produce a successful outcome.

In theory, this is a great idea. However, putting it into action tends to be more challenging.

In order to achieve a feeling among the team that everyone works well together, there are some key strategies that you can implement:

Define Why the Team Exists & Its Goals

When each team members understands the purpose and goals associated with their team, they can more effectively visualize what they can offer related to that purpose and those goals. The goals can be quantitative or qualitative, as long as they are specific and are linked to what the team was formed to achieve.

Define Roles for Each Team Member

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Several team members may have similar or related skills, which may lead to confusion about who should be handling a particular aspect of a goal. It's up to the leader to delineate which team member should be contributing what to the overall project.

Rather than vaguely remarking something to the effect that each team member knows what they do best and decide amongst themselves, the leader should assign specific tasks. For example, Team Member A handles project management while Team Member B does the research, Team Member C handles logistics, and Team Member D oversees production. Then, the leader sets a timeline for task follow-up. This establishes expectations and roles rather than leaving the team confused and conflicted.

Keep Resources & Communications Flowing

Regularly meet with the team to review progress, listen to their questions, and address any uncertainties about the project or roles. If existing issues are related to resource needs, find out what those needs are so you can either connect a team member with those resources or maintain an open communications channel to let the team member know you are working on getting them what they need.

Spot Conflicts & Address Them Immediately

With a team of multiple personalities, it's a given that conflict will rear its ugly head at some point. However, conflict doesn't always have to be bad; when monitored and channeled, it can be a way to disrupt a project and generate something new or change a team member's perspective for the better.

Beyond allowing conflict to happen in a controlled environment to help generate constructive work, a leader should look out for those times that it can lead to hurt feelings or irritation that, when left alone, breeds contempt and interferes with the team's ability to work well together. Even if team members don't speak up and let their disdain for another team member

bubble below, pay attention to team dynamics, body language, and dialogue between team members so you can push the conflict to the surface and diffuse it before it breaks down team productivity.

Actively Listen

Allowing each team member to have their say, whether it is about a conflict or misunderstanding or it is a great idea they want to propose, is the best way to work together. Talking over each other, finishing each other's sentences, or glazing over when others are speaking does not build team cohesion or respect for each other's roles and skills. If a team cannot establish specific times to actively listen, your leadership responsibility is to step in and coach the team through sessions where they each get an opportunity to be heard.

Encourage Interaction Among Team Members

For a team to get along, they need to know each other and develop a context for why they were picked to work together. A team can do that formally or informally, including asking each other questions, engaging during meetings, and doing some activities together outside the office environment.

For example, meeting to work out, play a sport, or enjoy a meal offers an ideal time to relax and get to know each other. This goes a long way toward working well together at work because the individuals are building an understanding and respect for each other in an informal setting that is often more amenable for "just being yourself". Later on, this enhanced understanding of each other can help individuals achieve the team's goals because they feel more comfortable with each other.

Offer Rewards & Incentives

When a team sees they can 'win' something by working together, such as a performance bonus or some other incentive, they will act differently. These 'wins' can actually be multiple awards and celebrations that occur with each milestone, which shows how much you value that the team works well together. The rewards do not have to

be huge or financial in nature; they can be a special lunch, a letter of congratulations, or even a “high five” at a team meeting.

These are just opportunities to leverage positive reinforcement mechanisms to change individual behaviors. Be sure to also incentivize and reward on an individual basis, because this furthers the message that the team is made up of individual performances that integrate to generate the overall team performance.

Final Thoughts

Synching up a team on the part of a leader requires communication, commitment, and follow-through. Focusing on creating both a productive and cohesive teams is an effective way to nurture informal networks that not only accomplish individual projects, but they also contribute to the organization’s overall success. Therefore, helping your teams share the sandbox with each other can mean building something extraordinary from the camaraderie and teamwork you have helped to create.

Murray Newlands would be thrilled if you’d share this story with your networks. You can find him on Twitter ([@murraynewlands](#)) and learn more about his work at www.murraynewlands.com

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