

Building Your Team Norms

Often in our eagerness to embark on a new project, we overlook an essential aspect that must happen first - creating an agreement on the expectations defining the working relationship between team members. Team norms, or rules for how the team will work, are important for effective functioning of the team. Establishing team norms early provides team members with clear expectations about how everyone on the team will behave and how business will be conducted.

Think about the following categories:

Time

- When and how often will we meet?
- When will the meetings start?
- When will they end?
- What do we do when we will go overtime?

Listening

- How will we encourage listening?
- How will we handle people who interrupt?

Decisions

- How will we make decisions?
- When will we use consensus?
- How will we handle disagreements and conflict?

Expectations

- How will we communicate expectations?
- How will we ensure integrity?
- What do we expect from the team?
- What do we expect from individuals?

Confidentiality

- How will we be transparent?
- How will we respect privacy?
- What things should be said in a meeting?
- What things should not be?

Participation

- How will we encourage participation?
- Will we have an attendance policy?
- How will we ensure all feel valued and included?

Have each team member think about what behaviours they believe will be necessary for their team to be successful and propose one team norm that they feel strongly about. Combine similar ideas and narrow the list down to 10-15 norms that everyone agrees to. Record these team norms. If possible, post the team norms for reference throughout the remainder of the Company Program. From now on, any team member can remind others of what has collectively been agreed to. The team can revisit the norms at any time and change or add to the list to help the team function more effectively.

Sample norms to consider:

- ☐ Listen respectfully to all ideas.
- ☐ Strive to understand each other's perspectives, rather than jumping to conclusions.
- ☐ Try to resolve problems without blaming.
- ☐ Acknowledge or respond to important messages in a timely manner.
- ☐ When you've made a commitment you can't keep, let the other party know as soon as possible.
- ☐ If you don't understand something, ask for clarification.
- ☐ If you see a problem that others haven't noticed, bring it to the attention of the group.
- ☐ Treat concerns as valid even if you don't agree with them.
- ☐ If you think team members have a conflicting understanding, ask for clarification.
- ☐ Focus on the positive: what's working well, not on what's going wrong.
- ☐ Complete individual tasks – do the work that you are responsible for.
- ☐ Take initiative– look for ways to contribute rather than waiting for someone to tell you what to do.
- ☐ Come prepared for meetings.
- ☐ Start and end on time.
- ☐ Post the agenda before the meeting.
- ☐ Avoid interrupting others when they are speaking.
- ☐ Dress comfortably, but appropriately.
- ☐ Express disagreement with ideas, not individuals.
- ☐ Maintain confidentiality regarding disagreements expressed during the meeting.
- ☐ Reach decisions by consensus.
- ☐ Conduct group business in front of all members.
- ☐ Conduct personal business outside of the meeting.
- ☐ Silence all cell phones during meetings.
- ☐ Avoid checking for or sending text messages or e-mail messages during meetings.
- ☐ Avoid personal grooming (brushing hair, applying makeup, cleaning fingernails) during meetings.
- ☐ Be attentive to your personal hygiene.
- ☐ Respect "do not disturb" signs.