

Collaboration - The Foundation of Great Teams!

By Paula Martin & Cathy Cassidy

Collaboration is the act of working together to achieve a common goal. Among high-performing project teams, collaboration is the means by which they not only achieve their goal but propels them forward, through the stages of team development.

Here are five ways you can facilitate collaboration with your team:

1. Use collaborative tools and techniques.
Just because someone on a team announces that the project will be run collaboratively, doesn't make it so. In order for collaboration to work, you need to use team-based tools and methods that require participation by everyone in attendance. For example, make sure that the project management methodology you use requires everyone to participate in the planning process and the decision making and problem solving methods you use firmly place the responsibility for the decision or the problem on the shoulders of the team.
2. Use proactive versus reactive accountability.
Reactive accountability is about assigning accountability after the job is done. Teams that use reactive accountability often find themselves with team members who do not take action to get things done because they are worried about being blamed when something goes wrong. Proactive accountability is about defining who will be accountable for what before action is taken. At the end of the project you ask if that accountability was fulfilled or not. There are no ifs, ands or buts. The team or person either fulfilled their accountability or they did not. If not, they are subject to consequences that are typically minor the first time around, but escalate each time they fail to learn from their mistakes. To facilitate collaboration using proactive accountability ensure that a) everyone knows what proactive accountability means, b) everyone on the team knows who is assigned to produce which deliverable, by when c) the entire team has a common goal leading to team accountability, and d) you communicate the consequences upfront if one doesn't fulfill his or her accountability.
3. Always work towards consensus.
A decision based on consensus is a decision that everyone can live with. They may not think it's the best decision, but they can support it and not criticize it later. To facilitate collaboration when making a decision, document the groups thinking as they brainstorm various options for the decision and then analyze the options identified and then use the multi-

voting tool, ask the question, "Is there anyone who can't live with this decision?" or ask for a show of hands to check that you have it.

4. Develop a team contract.

Have your team develop a set of guidelines that everyone agrees to follow. Include in it a set of commitments to the project that each team member agrees to, guidelines on team participation, decision-making, conflict resolution and meeting procedures. Keeping in line with proactive accountability, get the team to come to consensus, upfront, on the consequences everyone will be subject to, if they don't abide by the guidelines.

5. Act as a facilitator, not a director.

Your role as project leader is not about being the expert in a particular technical process (although you may be that as well); it's about being the expert at leading and facilitating the project management methodology to ensure the goal(s) of the project are met. When considering your role as facilitator, remember these three important rules for facilitating: 1) Honor individual differences. Every member of the team is an individual first. They use different sensory modes (auditory, visual and kinesthetic) to take in and process information. They use different methods for making decisions and completing their work. Therefore, it is your job to make sure everyone is able to get the information in their preferred sensory mode, use their own process for making decisions and complete their work in the best way for the them. 2) Enforce the team contract. Hold people accountability if they break the rules. Hold yourself accountable if you break the rules. 3) Make sure everyone has an equal opportunity to participate.

Collaboration accelerates the path to high-performance and drives better results. But it doesn't happen automatically. It needs a facilitator (you), methods and techniques that are collaborative in nature and it is enhanced with proactive accountability. Also, in our experience, when teams work collaboratively, there are fewer political battles to fight and there is less rework and fewer changes during execution. So, given that all of your work is completed by teams, you'll be best served by working collaboratively which will deliver results your customers will accept and you can be proud of!

Paula Martin is the CEO and Cathy Cassidy is the VP of Business Development of Martin Training Associates (MTA), which specializes in project management, change accountability and meeting management. See our website for information on our new Quick Guide series, the first of which is titled: *Sponsoring a Project*. For more information call 866-922-3122.