Tips for achieving high performance through team work

Research shows that highly productive teams give as much attention to how they work together—their communication and coordination—as they do to their work tasks and results. In these teams, members communicate regularly and frequently through informal conversations and learning from each other. The result: successful goal achievement and members who respect each other and want to work together.

1. Embrace the teamwork mindset

Commit to the success of your team with belief that your own success is tied to the advancement of the group goals. Pay attention to the team dynamics and help people work through issues together. Consistently demonstrate through your actions that you value teamwork.

2. Use the strengths of every member

Pool the strengths of the group toward the achievement of the goals rather than 'silo' each member's contribution. If a member is not yet strong enough in an area critical to their role, make a plan for the person to shadow someone more experienced.

3. Show the big picture and break it down

Plan the milestones and the associated tasks and clearly define each member's role. Involve everyone in understanding the big-picture perspective about what the group needs to achieve, how team members are assigned, and expectations for collaboration. Prevent misperceptions about roles and workloads with discussion when someone is taking on a role different from the regular job.

4. Keep information flowing

Identify the reporting and feedback mechanisms you will use to keep each other updated and on target. Use collaboration and project management tools for routine updating and information sharing, and determine the points for meeting or conferences to keep the work progress aligned and everyone informed.

If plans get derailed, work together with a problem-solving approach—analyze the situation and brainstorm alternative ways to get back on track.

5. Be clear about who can decide what

Allow team members to make decisions that apply to their roles and units to the extent possible so that work can move ahead and individuals can own their work. When decisions require more consultation, talk about that openly to model decision-making and show future team leaders how it's done.

6. Align individual goals with the team goals

Spend time with each team member to discuss how his/her work impacts the unit's goals. When a member is ready to make a greater contribution be creative in thinking about how they might enlarge what they do within the unit, or if moving to a group where there is a better fit is the best option for growth.

7. Capture institutional knowledge for the next generation of project leaders

Go beyond the 'hand over' by having soon-to-be-retirees work across the team serving as mentors and sharing their professional expertise with less experienced staff members. Give opportunities for joint work on assignments that stretch the newer staff and pull the knowledge out of the experienced worker through teaching and coaching to ensure the continuity of knowledge and relationships.