Equal Contribution and Timelines

Inquire: Being a Good Teammate

Overview

Being a good team member can be tricky. Making sure you do your part — not too much, but not too little — is a difficult balance to find. Knowing how to identify when you are too controlling, or when procrastination is controlling you, can help make you a valuable team member. You do your share of the work and are a positive influence on the team. This lesson explains how to avoid being too controlling, how to avoid procrastinating, how to establish reasonable personal goals, and how to incentivize yourself to get your work done on time.

Big Question: Are you a procrastinator or a control freak in a group?

Watch: Doing Your Share

Think of the last time you had to work with a group of other people to get a project done. This could be a planning committee for a baby shower, a business group in charge of a big event, or even a small group of friends organizing a get-together. Regardless of the task, these groups can have contribution problems. Usually contribution problems are caused by one of two things: control freaks or procrastinators. It is important to have equal contribution and timeliness from all members of a group. In this lesson, you’ll learn how to ensure success in working with groups in the future.

First, you’ll learn about the dreaded control freak. If you know you can be controlling, it’s okay to admit it! In fact, it is important to know if you do get too controlling so you can monitor it with these tips. If you find yourself drowning in work during a group project, know that it is okay to ask for help. The work should be equally split between members. As you work on a group project, reflect and determine if you are holding onto too many tasks or maybe not enough. Recognize when another group member is taking on too much and offer to help them as well. It is important to remember, though, that if you offer your help, it is okay for the person to refuse help. Just because you are offering does not mean they have to accept it.

Then, you will learn how to avoid procrastination. We have all either been there or seen someone else there: hours before a deadline, rushing to get everything finished, frazzled out of their mind! This is not a good place to be, and it is (usually) completely avoidable. If you know you are someone who struggles with time management, come up with a strict, manageable timeline. It is not going to be easy, but you will need to stay on a strict schedule. Your group members can even help to keep you accountable. To keep yourself motivated, always reward yourself when you accomplish a task.

Think about these two types of people: control freaks and procrastinators. Which one have you been in a group? Are you going to try these tips to help you in future groups?
Read: Doing Your Best in a Group

Overview

Working in a group can often be a frustrating experience. Almost everyone has been in a group setting where only one or two people contribute all the work or one person tries to be overly controlling of other members. This lesson will provide some tips on how to avoid being a control freak, avoid procrastination, set reasonable goals, and provide incentives to reach your goals.

How to Avoid Being a Control Freak

A control freak is someone who must control everything a group does. Often they try to do everything themselves and don’t allow others in the group to help. There are three things you can do to avoid that: ask for help, admit when you are having a hard time letting go, and offer to help someone instead of commandeering their task.

First, ask for help. When you take over a situation, you can overwhelm yourself with work. The group is there for a reason, so when this happens, ask others to help you. It isn’t a failure on your part to need help from others.

Second, admit that you have a hard time letting go. It can be difficult to tell someone that you don’t want help — for whatever reason. So, tell them you are struggling to let others help you, and talk through why you don’t want their help. Talking to someone about it can really open you up to figuring out a solution.

Finally, offer to help. Don’t just start doing things. Rather than taking over another group member’s work and doing the task yourself, ask if they need help. Check to see what they need rather than assuming you know best. Listen to what they have to say. If the person says they don’t need help, trust that they can do the task that has been assigned to them. It is okay not to be involved with every part of the process in group work.

Avoiding Procrastination

Procrastination is putting off work rather than accomplishing tasks in a timely, organized manner. As you get closer and closer to deadlines, procrastination can cause you to overload your schedule, increasing your stress level and decreasing the quality of work you produce. This section will provide some tips on how to avoid procrastination so that you can maximize your productivity in a group setting.

First, come up with a timetable. Set up a schedule of what you need to accomplish and when you plan to do certain things. You need to follow this schedule, so it’s important to understand what a reasonable amount of work is. Don’t set out small tasks that leave you with a lot of work left at the end, but don’t overload yourself early with tasks that are too large to manage.

Next, seek accountability from your work group. Tell the group leader, or someone in the group that you trust, that you struggle with procrastination. Share the schedule you have made for yourself, and ask for help sticking to it. When they help you and prompt you to get back to work, don’t get upset with them. Remember that you asked them to do so, and that it is for your own good.
Next, reward yourself for staying on schedule. When you accomplish everything you need to do in a day, reward yourself with a treat. Or take some time for an activity you enjoy but rarely get to do. If you have something to look forward to, it makes it easier to accomplish tasks.

Finally, take breaks between tasks. Burnout is a real problem. If you charge through one task to the next, you risk serious harm to your health. Between tasks, take a few minutes — no more than five or ten — to walk around, get a drink, stretch, and not work. Giving yourself breaks helps you feel less worn down while you continue working through your day.

Reasonable Goal Setting

Setting goals to work toward is all well and good, but if you don’t know how to set attainable goals, it won’t help as much. This section will give you three tips to keep in mind when making goals. These tips can ensure that goals are manageable and will be helpful in finishing the overall task.

First, know your limits. Does it take you two hours to put together one part of a presentation? Then, don’t schedule yourself to do four parts of the presentation in a day. Knowing how long it takes you to do things and how to put your schedule together in a way that doesn’t overload you is important. Biting off more than you can chew can set you up to fail in a work setting where you don’t want or need that.

Second, know what needs to be done. Clarify your goal and the tasks you need to do to get there. If you are unclear of what is expected of you, then you can never hope to schedule effectively.

Finally, identify specific steps within the overall task that need to be accomplished in a specific order. If you are writing a paper for class, don’t just schedule a day where you write the paper. Instead, schedule separate times to write the introduction, the first main point, the second, and then the conclusion.

Incentives and Reaching Your Goals

Incentives motivate us to do things. An incentive might be a paycheck or a nice dinner with friends. Incentivizing yourself is a great way to ensure you actually accomplish your goals. One such incentive is down time. Reward yourself, not only with small breaks, but big ones, too. If you have a hard day and accomplish a lot, give yourself the evening off. Don’t worry about the project. Rest is important, and taking a step away can reignite your motivation to work even harder when you get back. It is important to keep in mind that rewards should be proportional to the task. If you have a hard goal and reward yourself with a small three minute break, you won’t get your release. You want to make sure the reward matches the work. That way, when the work becomes hard, you have something to look forward to. A reward gives you something for that last push to finish.

Reflect Poll: How to Use Incentives

Should incentives be used to help a team work together better?

● Yes
● No
Expand: The Importance of Self-Care in Team Settings

Overview

Working in a group can cause stress and burnout. This section will identify some steps to take to take care of yourself and make sure you perform your best.

Self-Care

The only way you can contribute to your team is if you are in good mental and physical condition. The best way to ensure you feel your best is to regularly take care of yourself. It is important that you recognize when you start to feel burnt out. If you’re tired all the time, stressed, or unable to motivate yourself to work on what you need to get done, you might be burnt out. If so, it’s exceptionally difficult to focus on the task at hand, and the work you do manage to get accomplished is not as good as you usually produce. When this happens, you need to take some time for yourself.

Make sure you eat right and eat enough. Make sure you rest often and are getting enough sleep. Make time for a healthy social life and do the things you enjoy doing in your down time. Your work can’t be the only thing you do in a day if you expect to stay healthy and put your best work forward.

Once you recognize that you’re burnt out, take steps to help yourself feel better. You need to make sure you take stock of why it happened in the first place. Were you doing too much? Not giving yourself enough time? You need to figure out why it happened and adjust your schedule to prevent it from happening again.

Finally, take a step back and look at the big picture. What things can you change to take better care of yourself? Maybe you need to talk to your boss about sharing some of your responsibilities. Maybe you need to change your daily schedule to include more productive work time. These larger changes can be difficult to make, but if you can find ways to make the needed adjustments, you will be rewarded by feeling much better about how you handle your work.

Lesson Toolbox

Additional Resources and Readings

An article explaining how to set goals for yourself to ensure you are successful at achieving them

An article providing some suggestions about how to take care of yourself so you can work your best

An article providing in-depth strategies to prevent procrastination
  ● Link to resource: https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_96.htm
Lesson Glossary

control freak: someone that must control everything a group does
procrastination: putting off work until later rather than accomplishing tasks in a timely, organized manner
incentives: things that motivate us to do things, such as a paycheck or a nice dinner with friends

Check Your Knowledge

1. You should never ask for someone to help you manage your procrastination habits.
   a. True
   b. False
2. Control freaks should be allowed to do everything since they are just going to anyway.
   a. True
   b. False
3. Taking care of yourself is an important part of making sure you contribute to the group.
   a. True
   b. False

Answer Key:
1. B 2. B 3. A

Citations

Lesson Content:

Authored and curated by Alexander Amos, Elizabeth Amos for The TEL Library. CC BY NC SA 4.0