Groups: Teamwork and Projects

Inquire: What are You Good At?

Overview

Teamwork is something that can take a while to create. Knowing how to help those in your group and knowing how to ask for help can make a large difference toward effective group work. This lesson will cover how to work well in a group, how to know your role in a group, how to cooperate in a group, and how to ask for help or change your role when needed.

Big Question: How do you advertise the skills you bring to a group?

Watch: Cooperating in a Group

When thinking about a team player, what comes to your mind? A cheerleader building a pyramid stunt? A soldier standing in perfect line with other soldiers? Maybe you think of a specific instance when you were on a great team. Did it feel like a well-oiled machine? Effective teams should feel that way: supportive and strong.

*Effective teamwork* is being able to collaborate with the members of a team to successfully accomplish your goals. When this happens, team members are contributing equally, willing to help each other, and not distracting to other members.

There are several parts that make up an effective team member. Let's watch Greyson as he collaborates with his team to put together a group presentation for the rest of the class. Victoria has been nominated as captain of this five-person team. At their first meeting, Greyson takes notes when Victoria lists out the basics of the project. He feels he is best at researching, so when Victoria asks who can research the topic, Greyson is first to raise his hand. He feels confident that he can contribute best to the team by researching, but so does another member of the team, Lance. Greyson and Lance decide they can do the research together.

The team breaks off to start on their individual tasks, so Greyson and Lance begin discussing the best way to research the topic. Greyson consciously chooses to use “I” language when he speaks, meaning he is not speaking for Lance. Greyson says, “I think we should go in this direction instead,” rather than, “You aren’t picking a good direction for us to go.” This sets a foundation of openness and allows both team members’ ideas to be heard.

When Greyson and Lance meet back with the other members of the team, two members explain the difficulty they had with their tasks and end up trading. This swapping of roles allows for the whole team to feel confident in their project.
This example demonstrated several techniques of teamwork that you will learn in this lesson. Be sure to come back and watch this video again to identify each specific technique that was used!

Read: Teamwork and You

Overview

When working in a group, it is important to know how to be a team player. This lesson will help you learn how to do just that, as well as know your role in a group, cooperate well, and ask for help when you need it.

How to Be a Team Player

Effective teamwork is being able to collaborate with the members of a team to successfully accomplish your goals. This kind of teamwork only happens when all members of a team know how to do their part to ensure the success of the group.

No one likes the members of a team that are either not helpful or don’t do their fair share. This section has some tips on how to avoid being that person in a group. First, contribute evenly. Do your share of the work and don’t leave others to pick up the slack that you were supposed to take care of.

Second, be willing to help others. Big projects can be daunting, and sometimes people need help. It’s a hard thing to ask for help, so if someone asks for it, be willing to give it. Not only will it help get the task done, reducing stress on everyone, but it will also make it easier to receive help in the future when you need it.

Finally, don’t distract the members in your group. Working in a group brings enough complications that make tasks more difficult. The group doesn’t need you adding to that list by distracting people and preventing them from getting their work done. When you distract others, it slows the process down and piles stress onto everyone involved. Don’t be that person. Be a good group member by focusing on your work and helping everyone else do the same.

Knowing Your Role in a Group

When you are working in a group, it is important to know how to fit into the group and do what you need to. The best first step to help your team succeed is to listen to the boss. Your boss will tell you what your job is and when it needs to be done. The easiest way to know what you need to do is listen to the person assigning the tasks in the first place.

Second, know your strengths. Sometimes your boss will need to know what you can contribute to a project so they know what task to give you. If you know your strengths and how to tell others about them, you can help solve problems for the group as they arise because others will know to ask for your help.

Finally, offer to do tasks you’re suited for. Growing yourself is an important way to advance in your career aspects. Group work is an excellent place to grow. When people need help, you can grow your skills by volunteering to help them. This helps you, and helps the team since more and more tasks are going to be addressed.
Teamwork and Cooperation

Working in a group can be a pleasant experience if everyone in the group cooperates to make it that way. There are three things you can do to help accomplish that: use "I" language, avoid "you" language, and give people the benefit of the doubt.

"I" language is language that reflects how you personally feel, think, or have behaved. In a group setting, this is very important. "I" language is a great way to contribute to discussions and bring attention to your own feelings about an issue without casting blame or lessening someone else.

On the other end of the spectrum is "you" language, which you should avoid. "You" language is language that tells others what they feel, think, or did. The problem of "you" language comes when you realize that you have no idea what another person is thinking or feeling. Telling them what they did often comes off as a blame game, which is a bad thing that can hurt the cohesion of a group. "You" language should be avoided as you don’t want to speak for others in your group; they are capable of speaking for themselves.

Finally, when in a group, mistakes can happen. Things can go wrong. When it happens, give the members of your group the benefit of the doubt. Assume it was an honest mistake that the group can learn from. Don’t assume it was malicious or incompetent. Everyone in the group is human, so extend some mercy when they make mistakes. It will help turn a bad situation into a learning situation to avoid the problem in the future, build trust between members of the team, and set a precedent of forgiveness in the group if ever you make a mistake.

Seeking Help and Swapping Roles When Needed

When group work gets to be too much, sometimes you’ll be the one who needs help. Or maybe you’ll need to switch roles or jobs with someone else if you can’t finish the job as well as they might be able to. This section has some tips on what to do in these situations. First, trust your group members. They want the same outcome that you do: a successful finish to the task. Since you have the same goal, trust that they will help you when you ask and it won’t be an opportunity for bad things to happen.

Second, know their strengths. You can’t know who to ask for help if you don’t know who can best help with your problem. Knowing what they are capable of will make sure everything gets resolved in the best way possible.

Finally, admit when you’re overwhelmed. People can’t help you until you ask, and if you don’t ask, you will pile on more and more stress. Not only is that bad for the overall success of the group, but more importantly, it’s bad for you. Unnecessary stress because you are overwhelmed can have large negative effects on your health, relationships, and mentality. When you start feeling overwhelmed, reach out to other members in your group so they can help you fix the problem and come up with a way to avoid that problem, or similar problems, in the future.

Reflect Poll: Working in a Group

When you work in a group, which is harder: helping others or asking for help?

- helping others
- asking for help
Expand: Team Building 101

Overview
Team building is something that many people take for granted. Oftentimes, the basics of how to build a good team get glossed over. This section goes back to the basics and explains the fundamentals of building a team: trust, openness, and no judgement.

The Basics
The most important aspect of successfully building a team is trust. If members of a group don’t trust each other to do their jobs or help when it is needed, the group is not a cohesive unit that works toward the same goal, but rather is a group of individuals double checking the other members of the group. This is stressful and adds more work to all involved. Avoid this by building trust between each other. One of the best ways to do this is to make sure you follow through on the things you say you will do, and stay willing to pitch in to help each other when someone needs it.

Second, openness is vital in a team. Trust can’t flourish if members of a team are hiding things from each other. This doesn’t mean share your deepest, darkest secrets with each other. It does mean you need to be honest about issues you have with your work or with your team members. Don’t talk about someone behind their back, but instead address problems as they develop with the person you have a problem with. This ensures that conflict can be resolved quickly and smoothly without negatively affecting the group’s ability to work together.

Finally, don’t judge the other members of your team. Everyone is different. Everyone does, says, acts, or thinks differently from someone else. Rather than judge someone for that difference, embrace it. When a team is diverse in ideas, it has the most opportunities to succeed. This diversity flourishes when you embrace the differences of people in your group, rather than judging them for something you don’t quite understand or agree with.

Lesson Toolbox

Additional Resources and Readings
An article explaining the difference between “I” and “You” statements
   ● Link to resource: https://www.tonyrobbins.com/love-relationships/words-matter-you-vs-i/

An article providing tips on how to maximize your effective teamwork skills
   ● Link to resource: https://smallbusiness.chron.com/teamwork-effective-694.html

An article providing suggestions on the best ways to ask for help at work
   ● Link to resource: https://www.themuse.com/advice/the-right-way-to-ask-for-help-at-work

Lesson Glossary

effective teamwork: being able to collaborate with the members of a team to successfully accomplish your goals
“I” language: language that reflects how you personally feel, think, or have behaved; in a group setting, this is important

“You” language: language that tells others what they feel, think, or did

Check Your Knowledge

1. “I” language places blame on someone else.
   a. True
   b. False
2. “You” language causes tension in a group.
   a. True
   b. False
3. Effective teamwork requires knowing how to collaborate with team members.
   a. True
   b. False

Answer Key:

Citations

Lesson Content:

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