

Leading GREAT Teams

GREAT Team Leadership Strategies

The essence of GREAT Teams is that they benefit from the sharing of leadership. Formal team leaders play a crucial role in encouraging and enabling their colleagues to accept the responsibility of leading in situations when and where it is appropriate to do so. Moreover, very often GREAT Teams have several leaders; hence, the following strategies might be used by different team members depending on the situation.

1. Sharing team leadership: GREAT Team members share leadership in a routine manner, that is, as tasks, issues or problems arise, the leadership of the team shifts to those who are most capable of leading the team towards the objectives that the members have agreed upon. Basically, formal team leaders simply try to encourage and support the leaders that emerge at different times. In doing so, they are aware that there is a tendency for the more capable members of the team to be asked to take on more responsibilities than they can readily handle; hence, wise formal team leaders try to ensure that the more capable people do not over commit to tasks as they arise.

2. Encouraging personal and professional growth: Team leaders facilitate the sharing of ideas, skills and resources so that team members can work collaboratively together and, most importantly, learn from each other. Very often, team leaders make members aware of professional learning opportunities that might be of interest to them. In some situations, younger members benefit from the support of more senior members, who can be especially helpful in guiding them through challenging or difficult situations. Formal team leaders and senior members can also be very helpful by providing sensible advice about career development changes or advancement opportunities.

3. Encourage reflection about personal and team performance: The leaders of GREAT teams recognize that taking the time to reflect on personal and team performance can be a very productive way to improve the work of the team. In some cases, team leaders encourage members to complete questionnaires on teamwork or team behaviors so as to facilitate a discussion of their strengths and the areas that might need improvement. One of the initial signs of a GREAT team is the willingness of team members to reflect on and discuss their performance as a team.

4. Provide external support for team development: In order to sustain GREAT teams, at times their leaders engage external support by employing team development consultants who can facilitate the evaluation and enhancement of how the team is actually functioning. A key characteristic of GREAT teams is that the members and the team as a whole are continually learning. Most importantly, they are confident about discussing how their team operates and are willing to consider other strategies that might make the team even more effective and efficient. By reaching out for external support, the team is demonstrating its commitment to ongoing improvement.

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5. Encouraging and maintaining collegial trust: At times, even GREAT teams, have problems. Interpersonal conflicts, using inappropriate group or leadership processes, or simply not moving forward towards team objectives, can impact the degree of collegial trust on the team. Wise formal team leaders use a variety of strategies to openly address such problems and, at times, may consult with recognized experts in team development to consider how best to deal with these issues. The key point to note is that the leaders of GREAT teams do not simply ignore such problems, rather they try to openly and as skillfully as possible address them.

6. Scanning the environment for opportunities and support: GREAT teams are aware of the environment in which they are working and are able to take advantage of the opportunities that are afforded by it. Formal team leaders play a key role in scanning the environment and updating team members about the challenges and opportunities that arise in it. Most importantly, they are able to access the financial, technical and human resources the team requires for it to continue to reach its shared goals.