

# Leading SMART Teams

## Strategies for Leading SMART TEAMS

Meeting the challenges of leading a SMART team is very different from those associated with leading a BASIC team. Members of SMART teams are beginning to work quite well together and they are beginning to share in the leadership of the team. Hence, when considering the following suggestions on team leadership it is important to recognize that any member or group of members of a SMART team may actually provide leadership by suggesting or implementing these strategies. Quite simply, SMART teams share the leadership of the team.

The following leadership strategies have proven to be quite effective when leading teams that wish to become SMART teams.

- 1. Encourage the creation of Teamwork Guidelines:** SMART teams benefit from the use of a variety of group processes and strategies. A key strategy that has proven to be helpful in moving from a BASIC Team to a SMART Team involves encouraging members to develop a set of Teamwork Guidelines that can help members of the team to remember some of the most essential aspects of teamwork. Using the post-its group activity process to establish meeting guidelines has proven to be very successful. For example, the following activity could be presented to the team via a paper flip chart or a PowerPoint slide and an LCD projector.

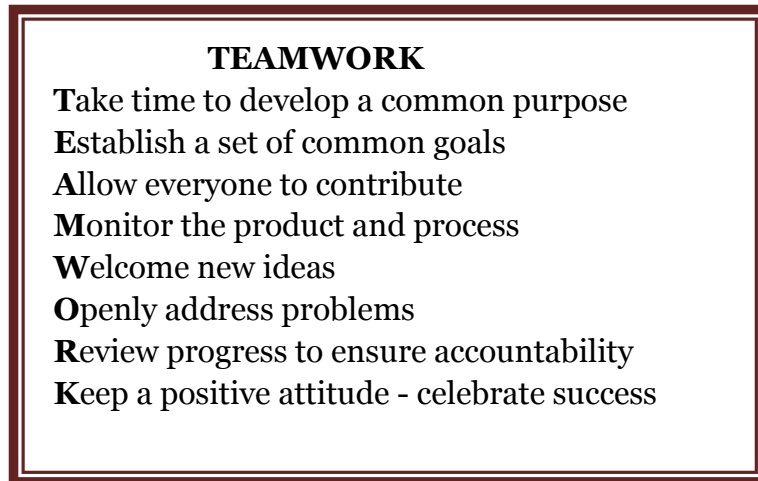
What teamwork guidelines should we use to ensure that we work in a collaborative, collegial and productive manner?

As individuals, on separate post-its, briefly describe potential teamwork guidelines that you want the team to consider.

Then, as a group, review the proposed guidelines, categorize them, and identify the three to five most important ones. Be ready to share your suggestions.

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An example of a product of this type of team building activity is presented in the following acronym-based reminder entitled: TEAMWORK.



The key point about this strategy is that the members create their own set of guidelines, which increases group ownership of the ideas and makes their implementation much more likely.

**2. Facilitate the use of ways to measure progress:** When teams are working on action-oriented projects, team leaders should encourage the team to identify ways to measure the progress they are making. Establishing clear objectives, setting sensible dates for accomplishing them, and assigning responsibility for key tasks, have all proven to be effective ways to ensure that the team gets things done. An additional benefit is that when team members assume mutual responsibility for reaching their shared goals and can note that the team is making measurable progress, they often feel more commitment to the team and its work.

**3. Assess the effectiveness of group processes:** One of the most effective ways that team leaders can enhance the performance of a SMART team is to ask the members to assess the quality of the group processes that they are using. For example, at appropriate times, taking the time to evaluate how problems are solved, how decisions are made and how the team distributes the work to be done, can often lead to discussions of better processes and strategies that might be used to do so.

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As mentioned earlier, effective team leadership, in fact, any type of effective leadership, usually depends on the options that leaders use to address the challenges, issues, and tasks that they face. The acronym-based reminders presented throughout this website can serve as prompts to leaders to encourage team members to evaluate whether they are using the most optimal group process options.

**4. Dealing with unproductive team members:** Team members who indicate that they will take responsibility for completing a task and then do not follow through to do so can pose a difficult challenge for leaders of teams. However, whether the problem is addressed privately or within a team setting; it is important that the problem be addressed. It is important to take the time to determine whether the person does not have the commitment, competence or the time to actually complete the task.

Based on the results of this discussion, strategies to deal appropriately with the issue can be determined. Trust on a team develops when people do what they say they will do and team members accept that they are collectively responsible for reaching their common shared objectives. Collegial trust is the glue that holds the team together and establishing it can move a SMART team towards the goal of becoming a GREAT team.

**5. Sharing leadership:** As team members get to know each other and trust each other, there usually is a natural shift towards the sharing of leadership. Formal team leaders still play an important role in providing direction for the team; however, as different tasks or issues arise, members with acknowledged competence in these areas will take on more responsibility for leading the teams efforts. Shared leadership is a sign of increased strength on the team and highlights the collaborative nature of true teamwork.

**6. Celebrating progress:** As a team develops its capabilities and finds ways to improve its performance, it is important to celebrate the progress that it is making. Team leaders should publicly acknowledge the contributions members make or write short notes to thank members for their contributions. Ongoing appreciation and recognition for the contribution that team members make enhances the motivation of those members and develops a sense of pride in the work of the team.

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## References

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