

## **What Are Team Norms or Relationship Guidelines?**

Team norms are a set of rules or guidelines that a team establishes to shape the interaction of team members with each other and with employees who are external to the team. Team norms can be developed during an early team meeting. More norms can be added as the team sees the need for additional guidelines.

Once developed, team norms are used to guide team member behavior. Team norms are used to assess how well team members are interacting. Team norms enable team members to call each other out on any behavior that is dysfunctional or that is negatively impacting the success of the team.

In one of my favorite quotes, Ken Blanchard, of One Minute Manager fame, said that a river without banks is a pond. Likewise, a team without relationship norms leaves itself open to potential interpersonal problems.

Most team members won't intentionally harm the project or the team's success. But, the lack of an agreed upon framework for interaction creates the potential for misunderstanding and negative conflict.

## **Team Norm Essentials**

Predictably, teams have trouble with particular components of interpersonal communication and interaction. You will want to develop norms in these areas for team success. These are the steps to follow when you create your team norms. Additionally, here are sample team norms in several areas of the more important aspects of interpersonal and team interaction.

- Team members as coworkers: all team members are equal; every team member's opinion will be thoughtfully considered; each team member will keep all commitments by the agreed upon due date; each team member agrees to constantly assess whether team members are honoring their commitment to the team norms.
- Team member communication: team members will speak respectfully to each other; will not talk down to each other; will positively recognize and thank each other for team contributions.
- Team member interaction in meetings: team members will listen without interrupting; hold no side or competing conversations; follow the rules for effective meetings; attend the meeting on time; always work from an agenda; minutes will be recorded at each meeting; end meetings on time.
- Team organization and function: leadership will rotate monthly; the team management sponsor will attend the meeting, at least, monthly.
- Team communication with other employees including managers: team members will make certain they have agreement on what and when to communicate; complaints about team members will be addressed first in the team.

Adapted from

[http://humanresources.about.com/od/teambuilding/ht/group\\_norms.htm](http://humanresources.about.com/od/teambuilding/ht/group_norms.htm)

- Team problem solving, conflict resolution, and decision making: team members will make decisions by consensus, but majority will rule if timely consensus is not reached; conflicts will be resolved directly with the persons in conflict.

Team norms can encompass as many topics as the team deems necessary for successful functioning. Start with a few team norms and add more norms as needed. Make sure the team norms are written and posted where team members are reminded of their commitment. Take a look at Twelve Tips for Team Building to identify other areas for potential team norms.

With effective team norms in place, your team will be able to focus on its business purpose. The team was undoubtedly founded to help the company continuously improve and achieve its strategic goals. Don't let ineffective relationships and interactions sabotage the s work.