

Talent Development 35 Collaboration

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Section 1.3 in the CPTD Certification program for ATD is Collaboration and Leadership. Section A reads “A knowledge of theories, methods, and techniques to build and manage professional relationships, for example group dynamics, teamwork, shared experience, and negotiation.”

This article will highlight some techniques that can enhance collaboration. Recognize that

collaboration is significantly different in the post COVID-19 world, so new challenges and opportunities will unfold for some time.

The Foundation of Collaboration

Good teamwork and collaboration require a culture of mutual respect. This does not mean that everyone on the team will always agree on everything going on. The acid test of a team is how people react when there is an inevitable disagreement.

The way to generate this kind of excellent culture is to start the team off correctly by creating a charter that identifies how individuals intend to act when there are problems. Individuals on teams without a firm charter often regress to child-like behaviors when facing disagreements.

If everyone on the team agrees to a set of expected behaviors and also the consequences that will befall anyone who violates the charter and does so while the team is still in the forming stage, then there is a much lower potential for acting out later on.

Watch the Pronouns

This element is key, especially when several people on the team are working remotely. If you see a lot of language that contains the words “we” and “they” check to see if some silos are emerging within the team. For example, you might read, “We wanted to go

with the original wording, but they thought it was too harsh.” That kind of wording is indicative of problems in teamwork ahead, particularly if people are interfacing virtually.

Watch how People Address Each Other

The words selected as well as the body language and tone of voice will let you know if the mutual respect is deep and strong or shallow and fragile. Look for how the team members support each other and are inclusive with all team members.

Do not Allow Jokes at the Expense of a Team Member

Often teams make the mistake of allowing little snide jokes about the appearance or mannerisms of some team members. Even though everybody knows these side comments are made in jest, some damage to relationships occurs. If the habit persists, then long term damage to self esteem is going to follow.

An old pastor I once knew told me, “Never say anything hurtful about your mate, even if it is said in jest.” I have always tried to follow that advice, but I confess that I have been less than perfect in this. When working with teams of professionals, I insist on a strict adherence to the no jokes at the expense of others rule.

Help the Team Celebrate

Great teams enjoy celebrating milestones with the group. That is more difficult in a virtual world, but it is possible. You might have a kind of virtual cocktail party where each person serves a favorite beverage. You could play some simple games for small prizes to be mailed out, if the team agrees. Let your creativity figure out how to keep the atmosphere from becoming too somber.

These are just a few tips from my experience. In a virtual or hybrid world, the challenge is greater, but it is really worth investing in these kinds of activities for the benefit of better teamwork.

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