**Being an Effective Team Member**

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Teachers spend a considerable amount of time in teams. They may serve on district-wide teams, strategic-planning committees, or university partnership teams; or they may facilitate parent conferences, Individualized Educational Planning (IEP) teams, or other special education meetings. They may lead the team or contribute ideas and information. Even educators who do not officially serve on a team or committee still team with a co-teacher, paraprofessional, student teacher, or mentee.

Considering the number, type, and variety of school-based teams, it is important for educators to develop skills for being an effective team member. Applying these skills can make a significant difference in the effectiveness of any team.

**Be Prepared**

Nothing takes the place of being well prepared. Knowing the time of the meeting, location, purpose, and names, and roles of other members helps you prepare. Meeting facilitators can distribute periodic reminders to team members with an agenda and other necessary documents to give everyone sufficient time to prepare. Presenters can use prewritten notes or note cards with reminders of key points.

If the team’s purpose is to brainstorm interventions, consider solutions in advance to maximize team efficiency. All team members need to be aware of the team’s operating procedures—especially when new to the team. Being well prepared and contributing relevant information indicates commitment and professionalism, which will be appreciated by all team members.

**Use Good Communication Skills**

Teams succeed or fail based on the communication skills employed by their members. The effectiveness of role models is demonstrated by how they act, what they say, and how they say it (Conderman et al., 2010). When facilitating a meeting, consider using the purpose, procedure, and permission (PPP) statement after initial small talk. The PPP statement briefly reviews the meeting’s purpose, states the procedure (or sequence), and then asks permission to begin.

The best means to gather information from others is to ask open-ended questions. Misunderstandings are avoided when the facilitator and team members communicate with words that all members understand. Therefore, check periodically for understanding and summarize before concluding. When sharing views, team members should use “I messages” (e.g., I feel, I believe, It is important to me). Finally, to avoid sending mixed messages, facilitators and team members need to ensure that their body language and verbal messages are congruent.

**Present Specific Information**

“Specifics” promote trusting relationships...
with parents and increase the team’s efficiency and productivity (Lawrence-Lightfoot 2003). That is, provide student work samples, charts, graphs, or photographs that depict the student’s progress; share data that support or negate an intervention’s effectiveness, along with your recommendations, whether addressing a support team or conferencing with parents. Similarly, rather than making general statements such as “Neila is unmotivated,” be specific: “Neila has not submitted the last four out of five math homework assignments.” Statements backed by specific data or examples clarify meaning and give direction to brainstorming for solutions or individualized interventions.

**Point out Positives**

Share positives first. Be optimistic and professional. It is hard to imagine that there is nothing positive about team members, a student, or the team’s task. Beginning a meeting with parents by sharing positive attributes about their child communicates to parents that you care about their child. Start a meeting with your student teacher, co-teacher, or mentee with sincere acknowledgement of his or her effort, improvements, or unique contributions. Emphasizing positives throughout the meeting creates a collaborative and safe culture. It does not mean, however, that you avoid disagreeing for the sake of maintaining team harmony. When disagreeing, focus on the issue, not the person. Use “I statements” or the sandwich technique, which introduces the issue between two positive ideas (Conderman et al. 2010).

**Respect Differences**

Diverse school populations call for teachers to acknowledge and respect that their students’ families may have values, beliefs, or communication patterns very different from their own or the school culture. For example, in Korean culture, children are taught, as a sign of respect, to avoid eye contact when elders (including parents and teachers) scold them. Some teachers, however, may misinterpret this behavior as disrespectful (Yang and McMullen 2003). Further, some families hesitate to accept special services due to custom, embarrassment, or pride. As their knowledge of cultural diversity expands, teachers can explore various ways to communicate with culturally diverse families. The first step is to avoid making assumptions; instead, learn each family’s unique needs and communication preferences.

**Follow Up**

The meeting is not over when the meeting is over. The real work usually begins after the meeting. Follow up with assigned responsibilities as soon as possible, while events are fresh in your mind. Did you volunteer to research a particular reading method or complete certain paperwork? Send parents a written thank you note—not e-mail—for their participation. Reflect on the meeting, and consider what could be done differently next time. Follow-through indicates a commitment to the team and its outcomes.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Teams set goals, share information, and solve problems essential to their organizations. Because teams are only as successful and effective as the contributing individual members, being prepared, communicating effectively, expressing positives, giving specifics, respecting differences, and following up are six skills that all team members can develop to create great teams. Effective members build effective teams.

**References**

