12 ways to improve teamwork at your workplace
Great teamwork is hard to come by in the workplace. The fact of the matter is, a lot of workforces suffer from poor communication, lack of trust, and low engagement - all of which erode the chances of teamwork.

But, this isn’t because we don’t want teamwork. It can just be a bit tricky sometimes. If it isn’t happening naturally, most people are stumped by the challenge to generate it. The key is to give your team the right conditions to develop and grow. Here’s how:

1. **Have your leaders set the tone. They should:**
   - Work cooperatively and respect each other’s opinions.
   - Consider teamwork in annual reviews and promotions.
   - Listen to the feedback from their teams and the rest of the company.

   **Why?** Leader should lead by example. They’re the ones that the rest of your company look to for guidance, so they should be establishing teamwork as the norm.
2. Communicate, every day, every way

**Touch base:** Encourage informal meetings, information sharing, and huddles between team members. People shouldn’t have to wait for a weekly catch-up meeting to get together.

**Set the tone:** Have some basic communication ground rules, e.g. when is it acceptable to close your office door? An outline will help to keep everyone on the same page and communication flowing.

**Listen:** Make sure you're listening to fellow team members and actually considering their thoughts before offering your own solutions and input.

**Method:** Use the most suitable tool for your communication needs, whether that's email, a chat tool, phone call, or face to face.

**Collaboration tools:** Get a good tool that connects your team across the world, or across the office. Good tools have the potential to streamline the way you work and boost productive communication.

**Why?** Good communication is at the heart of great teamwork. Great teams communicate well and often, their members are happy to share ideas, brainstorm together, ask for feedback, and be contradicted.
3. Consider team building exercises

- Assess the specific challenges your team is facing, e.g. they don’t know each other well enough, or they keep coming into conflict.

- Choose suitable exercises for each situation.

- Do these team building exercises as frequently as needed. Like physical exercise - if you do it often, the benefits are more long-lasting.

**Why?** You can’t summit Everest if you train twice a year. Teamwork is similar. If you want to achieve your teamwork goals, find a way to “exercise” with each other frequently.
4. Establish team rules

- Establish fundamental team rules early.
- Ask for contributions and feedback from the entire team.
- Be willing to change them if they’re hindering rather than helping your team.
- Be clear on why they exist. Unnecessary rules often feel restrictive and demotivating.

Here are some examples:

- When we meet, we’re all present (no cell phones or laptops).
- We’ll be open about our frustrations.
- We listen with intent, rather than waiting for our turn to talk.

Why? Rules are everywhere - on the sports field, in daily interactions - and they exist to keep everyone safe and on the same page. How can we move forward together if we don’t know where we stand? Rules will safeguard the success and productivity of a team.
5. Clarify purpose

- Be clear on what your end goal is and why you're striving for it.

- Keep the ‘why’ at the heart of each task that gets you to your goal.

- Encourage your team to speak up if they lose the sense of why a task is needed.

**Why?** If a team doesn’t understand the purpose of their work, their attention and enthusiasm can dwindle. Knowing why you’re doing what you’re doing is the key to motivation.
6. Recognize and reward

- Recognize your team members for big and small achievements.

- Time is of the essence - reach out immediately when you want to recognize good work.

- Reward with gift-cards, bonuses, lunches, time-off, etc.

- Encourage a culture of recognition amongst the entire team.

Here are some of the ways employees want to be recognized and rewarded:

- Company or team-wide emails recognizing individuals/teams.

- In-person recognition and thanks.

- Perks such as extra vacation days

**Why?** A recognized employee is more likely to feel valued and satisfied, which in turn leads to higher levels of happiness, engagement, and productivity.
7. Office space

- Try to create workspaces for different modes of work (e.g. silent, collaborative, quick conversations).

- Leadership should lead by example so staff are unafraid to use casual workspaces such as lounges or coffee bars.

- Consider adding stools at every other desk, so people can stop by and have quick informal chats (which improves #2: Communication).

**Why?** Physical workspace can seriously hinder communication and teamwork. If it’s too open, people are often afraid to disturb the peace, if it’s too closed then the physical barriers will impede communication. Physical workspace needs to evolve to support collaboration.

8. Take a break

- Break up the week by having one of your team meetings out of the office, on foot or in a cafe.

- One morning, pick up some sweet treats and gather your team for an informal chat to start the day.

- When the weather is good, encourage people to head out for 10 minute walks with each other for mental breaks and catch-ups.

**Why?** Team building doesn’t have to happen while you’re actively working. In fact, it’s proven that taking breaks together can result in a higher level of productivity and help re-evaluate goals as needed.
9. Focus on strengths

- Celebrate your team members’ strengths and successes.
- Provide opportunities for them to use and grow these strengths.
- Don’t critique weaknesses. If they’re an impediment to your team, focus on constructively building and improving upon these weaknesses.

**Why?** Focusing on the weaknesses of your team members can seriously affect engagement and consequently lower the team’s productivity.

10. Show gratitude

- Say thank you. It costs nothing, but it has a big return.
- Be thankful for the big and the small things, to the entire group and to individuals.
- Don’t overdo it though, your thanks should be genuine. Quality, not quantity.

**Why?** Gratitude is known to lead to an increased sense of self-worth and trust within the workplace.
11. Accept differences

**Remember the importance of balance:** Think of Bert and Ernie from The Muppets. They are polar opposites but best friends. Our lives, workplaces, and output benefit from a mix of characters; a workplace with just one or the other would become monotonous and less robust.

**Embrace disagreements:** These are often learning opportunities. Opposite opinions should be dealt with respectfully and carefully to ensure everyone is happy and innovation is maximized.

**Appreciate the differences:** Both Bert and Ernie bring something to the table. One is smart and logical, the other is playful and fun. Even though your team members have different attributes, they should be recognized for the strengths they bring. Don't play favourites based on your own personality.

**Why?** At some point, there are differences of opinion in every organization. They can lead to frustration, disagreements, and sometimes even conflict. Conversely, they can also benefit a project or final product due to unique perspectives and influences. The difference is all in your approach.
12. Celebrate

**Have a weekly casual Friday meeting:** Chat about the small successes of the week. Celebrating small successes brings people together, shows that goals are achievable, and keeps motivation high.

**Get out of the office for lunch or drinks:** Be clear on the purpose of this celebration, e.g. if you reached a big milestone or your team received praise from senior leadership.

**Have a small token mascot:** A magic eight ball, a pair of glitzy scissors, a plastic figurine - whatever it is, it gets passed to the team member who was most successful or helpful in the past month. Have every team member contribute to this decision through an anonymous vote.

**Why?** Celebrating your success as a team will bring people closer together, encourage conversation, and boost happiness. Woohoo!

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