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12 ways to improve teamwork at your workplace

A playbook for giving your team the right conditions to develop and grow

Great teamwork is hard to come by in the workplace.

Many workforces suffer from poor communication, lack of trust, and low engagement—all of which erode the chances of effective 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.

Use the checklists on the following pages whenever you find yourself in need of inspiration to encourage teamwork. On the right-hand side, we explain how these prompts work.

Have your leaders set the tone. They should:

☐ **Work cooperatively** and respect each other's opinions.

☐ Consider **involving the team** in reviewing processes and setting new goals.

☐ **Listen to the feedback** from teammates and the rest of the company.

Why?

Leaders should lead by example. They're the ones that the rest of your company looks to for guidance, so they should be establishing teamwork as the norm.

Establish team rules

☐ Discuss and establish fundamental team rules **early**.

☐ Ask for contributions and **feedback from the entire team**.

☐ **Be willing to change the rules** 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 do our best to minimize distractions.
- 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.

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 ground rules:** Have some basic communication ground rules (e.g., if you'll be away from your desk for more than 15 minutes, give the team a heads-up). A guideline 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.

☐ **Methods:** Use the most suitable tool for your communication needs, whether that's a DM on your intranet, a chat tool, phone call, or face-to-face.

☐ **Collaboration tools:** Get a useful tool that can connect your team whether they're across the room or across the world. The right platform will 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.

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.

Consider team building exercises

☐ Assess the **specific challenges** your team is facing (e.g., people 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 longer-lasting.

Why?

You can't summit Mt. Everest if you only train twice a year. Teamwork is similar.

If you want to achieve your teamwork goals, find a way to "exercise" with each other frequently.

Office space (or your home)

- [ ] Try to create **workspaces for different modes or 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 communication).

- [ ] When working remotely, offer support and allowances for employees to **choose their equipment and customize their personal office**.

- [ ] Ample **light, airflow, and privacy** is crucial for a productive workspace.

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.

Take a break

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

☐ It's easy to forget breaks when you're working at home alone. **Block off screen breaks on your personal calenda**r. Make use of your flexible timetable to work on a hobby or walk your dog.

☐ When working remotely, encourage people to head out for a **10-minute walks**, make time to catch-up on life, or do a simple chair stretch together.

Why?

Team building doesn't have to happen while you're actively working. In fact, taking breaks together can result in a higher level of productivity and help re-evaluate goals as needed.

Accept differences

☐ **Remember the importance of balance:** Think of Bert and Ernie from Sesame Street. They're 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 favorites 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.

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.
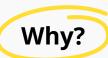
Why?

Focusing on your team members' weaknesses can seriously affect engagement and consequently lower the team's productivity.

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.

*Source:
https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/five_ways_to_cultivate_gratitude_at_work

Recognize and reward

☐ Recognize your team members for **big and small achievements**. Be specific.

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

☐ **Reward** with gift-cards, bonuses, lunches, and time-off. Try to match reward with individual preference.

☐ Encourage a **culture of recognition** amongst the entire team.

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

- Company or team-wide emails recognizing individuals and/or teams.
- In-person recognition and thanks.

Why?

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

*Source:

https://blog.jostle.me/blog/how-a-culture-of-appreciation-develops-engaged-and-loyal-employees/

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.

☐ **Be clear on the purpose of this** celebration, (e.g., if you reached a big milestone or your team received praise from senior leadership).

☐ **Experiment with new ideas:** Can't get out of the office for drinks? Try holding a virtual trivia session or hire someone to host a corporate calligraphy workshop to change it up.

Why?

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

Woohoo!

*Source:
https://blog.jostle.me/blog/lets-celebrate

Want an easy-to-use tool that boosts teamwork?

Get started on Jostle for free!

Now that you've gone through the checklist, it's time for a tool that can help you organize, communicate, and recognize your teamwork.

Try Jostle

About Jostle

Jostle helps leaders build connected organizations so that everyone at work can unite and grow together. We do this with our turnkey employee intranet and our online knowledge communities, both of which help leaders lead.

Our approach works: Jostle intranets are the go-to place for our customers' employees, delivering industry-leading employee participation rates. Since 2009, we've helped over 1,000 organizations connect their people.

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