

TEN COMMON PROBLEMS THAT CAN SABOTAGE YOUR TEAM

1. FRAGMENTED TEAM

PROBLEM: Team is not cohesive. Groups have formed within the team and are taking "sides" on various issues.

CAUSE: Conflict causes this type of polarization; the leader is not involved enough or a team member is attempting to take the leadership role.

SOLUTIONS: Discuss the feelings and needs of each subgroup separately (not in the group as a whole).

Reduce conflict by changing assigned tasks, if necessary. Perhaps the team has too much to do in too little time without the proper resources.

Re-establish your position as the leader and remain involved. Your personal strength is very important; if team members do not follow you now this team will fail.

If a team member is trying to gain power, talk with her privately to determine her agenda. If needed, reprimand the person or remove her from the team.

2. TEAM IS NOT PRODUCING

PROBLEM: Team does not achieve the anticipated results at a specific point -during meetings or discussions, at a check point, or at the end of the team project.

CAUSE: Lack of communication. The team's goals are unclear and/or commitment to them is less than solid.

SOLUTIONS: Remind the group what the nature of their task is and their collective purpose.

Provide adequate feedback to the whole team as well as to individuals.

Make sure you clearly communicate your expectation to the team.

Make sure there is an agenda for each meeting.

Ask the team to make periodic status reports to you on their progress (even if you're in each meeting).

Establish "check points" for various steps along the way to ensure that the team is on the right track. Prevent unproductive discussion within the group: small talk, personal

anecdotes not related to the subject, or team members arguing procedural points rather than tackling the job.

Give members appropriate training and information.

3. TEAM IS UNMOTIVATED

PROBLEM: Team meetings are lackluster, members fail to demonstrate any initiative.

CAUSE: Lack of communication and absence of human relations skills.

SOLUTIONS: Establish (or reiterate) the rewards the group can expect when the goal is achieved. (Use caution in rewarding individuals rather than the whole group...this can cause division among team members.)

Reaffirm your belief in the team; let team members know that you feel they can do a good job; praise them when appropriate.

Reinforce that you honestly believe a solution is at hand; emphasizing that nothing is impossible; give hope. If needed, relate similar situations that were successful.

Ask team members to make an actual verbal commitment to the team process and project.

Delegate more responsibility to team members. Give each member an equal amount, and retain your position as leader.

4. RESENTMENT OR MISBEHAVIOR

PROBLEM: In team settings, hostility is evident or appears to be part of the exchange. One or more members behave in a manner not appropriate to teamwork.

CAUSE: There is a difficult person on the team; the leader is perceived as weak; one member of a vastly different mindset is in a group of "think-alikes".

SOLUTIONS: Discuss the difficult person's problem one-on-one. If a solution is obvious, implement it and return the person to the team. If the person remains resistant, remove her from the team.

Talk with the difficult person and other members of the group about the difficult person's behavior. Discuss why she does not fit in. This can be done with each member separately or as a group.

If the person is removed from the group, quickly re-establish togetherness by honestly and objectively describing the situation and explaining why you took this action.

Assert yourself to the group by emphasizing the need for fair participation by all members.

5. ONE PERSON DOMINATES THE PROCESS

PROBLEM: Discussions become unbalanced because a domineering person monopolizes meetings, forces her viewpoint on the group, or develops more ideas than the others.

CAUSE: An especially creative person is placed with others who are less verbal or less talented. The team leader or team facilitator is not properly monitoring the team, or one person has considerably more knowledge or experience regarding the project than other team members.

SOLUTIONS: Compliment the person on her good work and ask for a more even level of participation from all team members.

Ask the verbal person, privately, to put extra ideas in writing to you or meet with you separately to discuss her additional ideas and suggestions.

(NOTE: Do not squelch the person's willingness to assert ideas; you simply need to find her an additional outlet.)

Make sure the format for discussion is understood and followed.

Set time limits for discussions, or give each person a turn in answering questions.

When the group meets, carefully balance the contribution made by each member. Level out these contributions by gently interrupting when necessary asking certain members for more information and, in general, encouraging participation from all.

6. ONE TEAM MEMBER IS TOO QUIET

PROBLEM: A team member does not participate in the team setting, thereby creating a lack of balance.

CAUSE: A member is unassertive or has previously been burned in team settings, is unsure of her knowledge or abilities, or is intimidated by other members or the process.

SOLUTIONS: Give extra praise to the individual when she speaks up.

In a one-on-one meeting, encourage the person to express thoughts and ideas as they arise. Affirm the person's good qualities and show your appreciation for her. (NOTE: Do not say that you've noticed the person is too quiet, need to contribute more, etc. These statements will sound like criticism.)

In a private meeting, ask the person why she is not participating. Depending on the reason, determine if the problem can be solved or if the individual should be removed from the team.

Cut short any remarks from the other team members like, "That's the wrong way," or "That's not a good idea."

7. OVERDEPENDENCY ON TEAM LEADER

PROBLEM: Team members appear unable to proceed without the leader's direction. Team members constantly query the leader for advice and direction, especially in times when they could be self-sufficient.

CAUSE: The leader has not empowered the group with the ability to complete the project and she is over-involved in the process.

SOLUTIONS: Reaffirm the team's goals and clearly explain the leader's function.

Ask team members to develop solutions without relying as much on the leader's involvement (but restate your commitment.)

Initiate discussions and then step back. Take an equal "physical" position in the group (sit if they're sitting, dress the same.)

8. CONFLICT AND ARGUMENTS

PROBLEM: Team discussions involve outright arguing and unconstructive disagreement.

CAUSE: The solution identified threatens personal interests; team members are carrying resentments from other chorus situations; the leader is not asserting enough power.

SOLUTIONS: Evaluate the goal to be achieved. The topic outcome could be too threatening to the team members. They are bringing too much personal bias to the meetings. Find a different way to gather information or complete your project.

Ask team member to resolve problems they have with one another, especially problems that occurred before the team began or which have nothing to do with the team's objectives.

Take a look at your methodology. Do you pit one member against another? Perhaps you inadvertently show favoritism. Are you rewarding individuals instead of the group as a whole?

9. LACK OF INTEREST

PROBLEM: Team members do not seem concerned about the outcome of the project or excited about being part of the team. Team meetings get little or no results and are boring and unproductive.

CAUSE: The leader has not assembled the right people; no real challenge has been given; no reward is apparent.

SOLUTIONS: Re-examine the traits, background and skills of each team member. Perhaps some of them are not "team players" and are too independent or dependent to be on a team. Regroup your people if necessary.

Give team members a project with more excitement, something with more at stake or something that more closely involves their interest in the chorus/region.

Convince team members their work has an impact on the chorus/region. Don't give them the impression that you can veto their work if you don't like their solution.

10. TOO MUCH ACCOMMODATION/AGREEMENT

PROBLEM: Team members are too willing to agree with one another and do not have the confidence to express differing viewpoints. Solutions achieved seem weak because the team is more interested in agreeing than working through conflicts to come up with a good solution. The danger here is "group-think".

CAUSE: Members desire harmony more than productivity; the leader is not asking the right questions in the group setting.

SOLUTIONS: When asking team members for their thoughts, give either/or and multiple choice type questions -- not open ended questions such as, "How do you feel about that?" Make them commit to a particular course of action.

After one opinion is expressed ask another member if he agrees or disagrees -- and why. If the answer seems soft, continue to probe. Play "devil's advocate" and ask "what if" questions to stimulate opposing viewpoints.