

How can I be a team member at work?

Chapter 14

Being a Team Player

Key Terms

teamwork
brainstorming
constructive criticism
ridicule
sarcasm
conflict
compromise
argumentative
rumor
grapevine
gossip
harassment

Chapter Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will be able to

- **explain** the importance of being a team player at work.
- **list** several tips for new workers.
- **describe** how to accept constructive criticism positively.
- **distinguish** between a good sense of humor and the poor use of humor.
- **state** the importance of avoiding arguments, rumors, harassment, and comparisons to coworkers.

Key Concepts

- To achieve success at work, you must work well as a member of a team.
- It is important to gain the acceptance of your fellow employees.
- Accepting instruction and constructive criticism positively show you are a team player.
- A positive attitude and a good sense of humor can get you through difficult situations at work.
- Being a team player means avoiding arguments, rumors, harassment, and comparisons to coworkers.

Teamwork Leads to Success

Being hired by a business as an employee is only the first step. You need to work well as a member of the team in order to achieve success.

Consider how a high school drill team functions. It can function only if every member cooperates. It is important for all members to be team players. When one member fails to cooperate, the entire team looks bad.

Companies depend on teamwork in the same way.

Teamwork is two or more people working toward a common goal. If one employee fails to cooperate, the entire company can look bad. Without cooperation, the company cannot produce products as quickly or provide services of the highest quality. If customers feel they are not getting the best a company can offer for the price, they shop elsewhere. A company that disappoints its customers will lose business as a result.

teamwork

Two or more people working toward a common goal.

Becoming an Effective Team Member

No single employee, no matter how good he or she is, can make a company successful. Employees must work as a team to achieve that goal. As a new employee, make it your business to be a team player at your company. Don't focus on what great work *you* can do. Focus on what great work *your company* can do because you are part of the team.

Employers are looking for people who can work together harmoniously. They are looking for people who can share ideas and solve problems. Strong interpersonal skills are workplace skills workers need to be effective.

No single characteristic or trait makes a team member effective. It requires a combination of interpersonal skills. This chapter discusses several interpersonal skills important in the workplace and ways to develop them.

Developing an Effective Team

A capable team can accomplish more than one person left to do a job alone. Forming such a team is not easy. It requires the skills, talents, trust, and cooperation of all members.

Teams must learn to work together before they can be successful. Consider a successful sports team, chorale group,



Community Connections

Interview a coach from your school. Ask him or her how skills learned from being on a school team relate to being on a workplace team. Write a report and share it with the class.

or planning committee. Members must get to know each other's strengths and weaknesses. They must develop a plan and an organized way to accomplish it. Most importantly, they must learn to trust each other and function as a team. The following behaviors are signs of an effective team.

Sharing Ideas

Every member of an effective team is encouraged to participate. No one feels that his or her input is not valued. All ideas are considered important. One way of sharing ideas is through brainstorming. **Brainstorming** is a way to come up with many ideas in a short time by listing everyone's ideas, no matter how ridiculous the ideas may seem, and then discussing and evaluating them.

brainstorming

A way to come up with many ideas in a short time by listing everyone's ideas, no matter how ridiculous the ideas may seem, and then discussing and evaluating them.

Being Open to New Ideas

Keeping an open mind is most important to team planning. Predetermining that an idea won't work without first discussing it often discourages members from making suggestions. Not allowing all members to get involved can doom the team to failure. See 14-1.

14-1

Companies want employees to recommend new ideas that could improve the company.



Sharing Leadership

The leader's function is to facilitate the group's efforts. That person has the responsibility to encourage everyone to participate. However, no single person is likely to have strengths in all the areas needed. For that reason, the leader of an effective team welcomes seeing others contribute to the group's effort.

Creating an Action Plan

After much thought and discussion, the members decide a course of action. Goals, objectives, and timetables are developed.

Working Toward a Common Goal

All members of an effective team have a clear understanding of the task at hand. Each individual knows what he or she must do to accomplish the group's goal. The plan of action is followed carefully, but modified if the team considers it necessary.

Showing Trust

Every member shows support for his or her fellow team members. Each speaks freely, without fear of being criticized or ridiculed for their input. Everyone tries to do his or her assigned tasks as well as possible and on time.

Staying Focused

The hardest part of teamwork is keeping everyone focused on the task at hand. It is easy to get sidetracked and lose focus, especially if the task takes a long time. Periodically, the members of an effective team remind each other of the importance of their mission.

Teams become effective after going through several stages. Experts who study group behavior identified the four stages of team development. Recognizing and understanding these stages will help you succeed as a team player. These stages are summarized in 14-2.



Making a Difference

Contact the United Way. Inquire about the ways this organization uses teamwork. Find out how volunteers are used in the agencies that are part of the United Way. Inquire about projects in which you could become involved to develop teamwork skills.



Your Reading

Why is teamwork important to a company?

14-2

Before a team becomes effective, members must know, accept, and trust one another.



Making a Difference

Form groups to work on a volunteer project for a local agency. Plan your project and then carry it out. Upon completion of the project evaluate the results. (Project ideas include baking bread for a local food bank, making drawstring bags for the American Red Cross or Salvation Army, or making small stuffed animals for the emergency room of a hospital.)

Stages of Team Development

1. Forming

Team members share personal information as they try to get to know and accept one another. It is an exciting new adventure, but not everyone is comfortable.

2. Storming

Team members usually compete for status and often question why the team was formed. Tensions arise as members jockey for control. Leadership from members may not be evident.

3. Norming

The team begins to work as a unit. A leader emerges and members begin to listen to one another. Trust forms.

4. Performing

This is the highest level of team performance. The team accomplishes complex challenges. Tasks are handled efficiently.

Tips for New Employees

On your first day of work, your main concern should be learning to do the job. However, even at this early date, devoting some of your attention to your coworkers is important. Your early dealings with them may have long-term effects. You are the new person on the job. You need to be accepted by your supervisors and coworkers. Being a friendly, respectful, likable person will help you gain the acceptance of your fellow employees.

Be Friendly

When you start a new job, introduce yourself to other employees with a smile and a firm handshake. Get to know your coworkers by name. Greet them when you arrive, and say good-bye to them when you leave.

Don't overdo it. Trying too hard to be friends with your new boss can be a mistake. You might be labeled an "apple polisher."

In short, be friendly and pleasant. However, do not expect everyone at work to be your friend. Attaining the friendship of your coworkers is nice, but receiving their respect and cooperation is your main goal.

Respect Your Coworkers

As you meet your coworkers, remember they deserve your respect as workers and as people. As workers, respect your coworkers for their knowledge and skills. They would not be working for the company if they did not have useful talents to offer.

Respect your coworkers for their positive qualities. Like all people, your coworkers have good and bad traits. Don't focus on their bad traits. Instead, look for their good traits.

Present Yourself as a Likable Person

Your new coworkers will start to form impressions of you from your very first meeting. Consequently, you want to present yourself as a likable person who gets along with everyone.

Avoid appearing self-centered. Your coworkers will quickly tire of hearing you talk about yourself endlessly. You will bore them by always talking about your own problems and interests. Listen to what they have to say. Talk about your common interests.

Also avoid acting like a know-it-all. Don't assume a superior attitude and pretend to know all the answers. Listen to instructions and follow them. Ask questions when necessary. See 14-3.

As a new employee, do not tell your boss or experienced workers how to do their jobs. There will be plenty of time to offer suggestions after you get to know the job and your coworkers better.



Your Reading

In what ways can you gain the acceptance of your fellow employees?



14-3

Successful companies rely on employees who have good interpersonal skills with coworkers and customers.

Accept Constructive Criticism Positively

constructive criticism

The process of offering judgmental remarks about you or your work.

When you start a new job, you should be prepared to accept instructions and some constructive criticism.

Constructive criticism is the process of offering judgmental remarks about you or your work. As you work, your supervisor may show you a better way to do a job. A coworker or your boss may tell you when you have done something wrong. See 14-4.

No one likes to be criticized. Being told that you have done something wrong is not fun. However, when employees make mistakes, their supervisors must tell them what they did wrong. This helps the employees learn. If employees were not told what they did wrong, they would continue to make the same mistakes. Your supervisor understands that new employees may make some mistakes. You must understand that mistakes can cause a company to lose business and money.

The way you react to constructive criticism shows how willing you are to be a team player. You can react to constructive criticism in two ways: negatively or positively. Being defensive is a negative response to criticism. You defend yourself by blaming others or making excuses. Another negative response is getting angry with yourself. Staying upset about constructive criticism for a long time is also negative.

14-4

Your supervisor may use constructive criticism to help you improve your work. Learn to accept it positively.



None of these responses will help you or your coworkers achieve the team goal of getting a job done.

To respond in a positive way, try to keep a good attitude. Listen to what is said. Accept it as a suggestion for a better way to do your job. Think of it as a learning experience. Do not overreact and assume that you are a failure. Remind yourself that you are a valued employee. Tell yourself that you can and will do better next time. Then apologize and express your desire to improve. Recognize that no one is perfect and there is always room for improvement. Most job performance reviews will suggest ways to become a better worker. Do not take offense by this, but rather view it as a natural part of performance reviews.

A positive reaction to constructive criticism will help you be a better team player. You will save yourself from being too upset. Your supervisors and coworkers will be impressed with your willingness to improve. If you improve enough, you may be promoted!



Your Reading

Why should you view constructive criticism as a learning experience?

Have a Positive Attitude

People like to be with coworkers who have a *positive attitude*. Those with a positive attitude see the optimistic side of everything. They are upbeat, cheerful, and eager to find solutions to problems. On the other hand, people with a *negative attitude* only see the problems. They look at the gloomy side of everything. They are grumpy and full of complaints.

Negative attitudes do not help team members achieve goals at work. Positive attitudes do, 14-5. Try to develop behaviors that reflect a positive attitude. Try to be a worker who does the following:

- smiles often
- shows enthusiasm
- seldom complains
- makes changes willingly
- tries to understand the views of others
- seldom criticizes others
- volunteers help

14-5

Working cooperatively is a sign of the positive attitude needed to achieve goals at work.



Your Reading

Why is it important to have a positive attitude at work?

- avoids making excuses
- accepts responsibility for mistakes
- always tries to perform at a high level

A positive attitude can be reflected in what you say. Saying something positive about someone is just as easy as saying something negative. Your coworkers are more likely to accept you as a team player if you speak kindly of them.

Keep a Good Sense of Humor

A good sense of humor can help your team get through difficult situations at work. Having a sense of humor is being able to laugh at yourself when you do something foolish or silly. When this happens, try not to get angry at yourself or at others. Try to laugh it off and avoid repeating the mistake. No one likes a person who acts too seriously. Don't take yourself so seriously that you forget how to laugh.

Avoid the Poor Use of Humor

Knowing how to use your sense of humor in the workplace is important. However, you must not get carried away.

Most people like to hear and tell jokes. Jokes make people laugh. Jokes are fine to tell as long as they do not deliberately offend anyone. Crude jokes should be avoided. Crude jokes are vulgar and in bad taste. They are offensive to most people. A person who tells crude jokes is seldom held in high regard by coworkers.

Having a sense of humor does not mean spending a lot of time at work telling jokes or acting silly. You may get a laugh or two, but your coworkers might begin to see you as a clown. Your supervisor may consider you a *slacker*. That is a person who avoids work or responsibility. You might put your job or your chances for promotion in danger.

You should not cause laughter at the expense of someone else's feelings. Ridiculing another person is never funny. To **ridicule** a person is to make fun of him or her. A person who ridicules another person is cruel and insensitive. You should always try to respect the feelings of others.

Like ridicule, sarcasm is not funny, nor does it contribute to the team effort. **Sarcasm** is the use of cutting remarks. The intention is to put another person down. Words can often hurt as much as, if not more than, physical force.

Do Not Cause Conflict

Being a team player means cooperating with your coworkers to do the best job your company can do. Most of your adult life will be spent working. A good portion of your time will be spent with coworkers. If you don't get along with them, you may not be able to advance in your job, 14-6. In fact, you stand a good chance of losing your job altogether.

People have to work together to get most jobs done. Friction on the job creates unpleasant working conditions. Starting arguments, spreading rumors, and gossiping are three ways to cause conflict. **Conflict** is a hostile situation resulting from opposing views. It can become a destructive force if not resolved. You cannot work at peak performance when you, or those around you, cause conflict. In some

ridicule

To tease or belittle.

sarcasm

The use of cutting remarks.



Your Reading

What is the difference between a good sense of humor and a poor use of humor?

conflict

Hostile situation resulting from opposing views.

14-6

This case study illustrates how your ability to work well with coworkers can affect your chances of getting a promotion.

You Must Be a Team Player Before You Can Be a Coach

Tom had recently been transferred into Sally's department. Sally was asked to help Tom in his new assignment. Tom made a minor error and Sally became upset. A great deal of friction developed between them. Sally told everyone of Tom's mistake. As the weeks went by, she continued to be highly critical of Tom. The entire department began to feel sorry for Tom because of the treatment he received from Sally.

When an opening for the position of department supervisor became available, Sally applied for it. She knew her skills were excellent. She felt that she was qualified to do the job. However, Sally did not get the promotion.

Sally observed her new supervisor, Kathy, to figure out why Kathy got the job. Like Sally, Kathy had very good skills. She also got along well with other employees. Kathy did her work and helped others when needed.

Sally realized that her attitude toward others had caused her to lose the promotion. She realized that she must learn to get along better with her coworkers. She made up her mind to make an effort to do so.

compromise

Giving something up to resolve a conflict.

argumentative

Easily creating arguments.

conflict situations, compromise is necessary. *Compromise* means giving something up to resolve a conflict.

Do Not Cause Arguments

Being a team player at work means avoiding arguments. There are two sides to most situations. Try to see the other person's side.

Some people seem to look for arguments. They disagree with just about everything. If you say it's nice outside, they'll say it isn't. These people are described as being *argumentative*. Don't become this type of person. Most people tend to stay away from people who are argumentative.

If you have frequent and major disagreements with your coworkers, they will shun you. You may lose not only their friendship and cooperation, but also your job or a promotion.

Another situation to avoid is taking sides in other people's arguments. Often the arguing parties eventually make up and you become the outsider. It is best not to get involved in the first place. See 14-7.

**14-7**

Being able to avoid arguments with your coworkers will help you become a more valuable team player at work.

Do Not Spread Rumors

Rumors can interfere with your ability to work with your coworkers as a team. **Rumors** are bits of information that pass from one person to another without proof of accuracy. At work, rumors pass swiftly along the **grapevine**, an informal and unofficial flow of information.

Rumors are usually only half-truths. Perhaps someone hears part of a conversation. This person then tells another person what was heard. The person who starts the rumor usually does not have all the facts. The person either invents or adds facts to make sense of the message. As the rumor passes through the grapevine, others add or delete information.

Gossip is part of the rumor mill or grapevine. When you **gossip**, you tell personal information about another person. Sometimes this information is true. Often it is not true. Gossip, like rumors, is usually information that should not be told to others.

Do not gossip or spread rumors. Your employer and coworkers consider people who gossip and spread rumors as people who can't be trusted. You will lose everyone's respect if you talk about others.

Also avoid letting others spread gossip to you. Some people may try to use gossip to influence your impressions about your

rumor

Information passed from one person to another without proof of accuracy.

grapevine

An informal and unofficial flow of information.

gossip

To tell personal information about someone.



Your Reading

How can conflict affect work performance?

harassment

Doing or saying things that make people feel different or uncomfortable.



Your Reading

Why should harassment be avoided?

fellow workers. Form your own opinions without listening to gossip. Rumors and gossip can deeply hurt your coworkers.

Avoid Harassment

Harassment is doing or saying things that make people feel different or uncomfortable. Harassment is unacceptable behavior. Never harass others. Do not tell jokes or make remarks about any of the following:

- age
- birthplace or ethnicity
- color of skin or race
- disability
- family
- gender
- looks
- sexual preference
- political or religious beliefs

Everyone has a right to expect their employer and coworkers to treat them with respect and dignity. Everyone has a right to a safe work environment. If that right is violated, a person should tell a trusted friend or someone in authority about it. There are federal and state laws that protect workers against harassment. (These laws were discussed in Chapter 3.)

Avoid Comparisons

As a new worker, you may see some of your coworkers enjoying benefits that are greater than yours. Do not compare your work or benefits with theirs. Although you are players on the same team, senior employees are often entitled to more benefits. They may have worked for the company for many years. Perhaps they have positions that require more responsibility.

Avoid comparing workloads, salaries, and the treatment of coworkers. Senior employees will not appreciate questions about their benefits. See 14-8.

**14-8**

Employers expect workers to stay focused and not waste time by comparing their assignments to those of their coworkers.

Don't Compare Workloads

Your first obligation to your employer and your coworkers is to do the work described in your job description. It is your responsibility to perform those tasks to the best of your ability.

Always ask your supervisor for more responsibilities when you have completed your assigned duties. You should also be willing to give your coworkers a helping hand when you have extra time. However, do not show off by trying to take on more than you can handle. You do not want your coworkers to think you are trying to put them down.

Never compare your workload to a coworker's workload. Another employee may appear to have a light workload. However, you may not realize how complex his or her tasks are. Let your employer judge the work you do.

Don't Compare Salaries

Employers set different salary levels for different jobs. Employees with more experience usually earn more than workers with little or no experience. Employees with special knowledge may also receive higher wages. As you gain experience and knowledge, your salary will increase.

Don't Compare the Treatment of Coworkers

Senior employees usually receive more benefits than beginning workers. Extra benefits are earned by having more years of experience with the company, 14-9. They may also be earned by holding jobs in the company that involve greater responsibilities. The employees are rewarded with benefits such as the following:

- preferred parking spaces
- longer vacations
- first choice on vacation schedules
- preferred working schedules
- bigger bonuses
- stock options

If these benefits appeal to you, don't just envy those who have them. Work as hard as they did to earn them.



Your Reading

Why should you avoid comparing your benefits to those of other employees?

14-9

Employees often receive special recognition for many years of service to a company.



Summary

Being a team player at work is necessary if you want to get along with your coworkers and succeed at your job. If you are not a team player, friction with your coworkers will cause unpleasant working conditions. Neither you nor your coworkers will be able to perform to the best of your abilities. The company could suffer losses. You could lose a chance for a promotion. You might even lose your job.

When you are a team player, everyone wins. The work site becomes a pleasant place. All jobs are done well and on time. The employees and the company enjoy success.

You can develop skills and behaviors that will help you become a team player. No one characteristic or trait makes you a team member. It is a combination of effective interpersonal skills. Put forth your best efforts right away, from the very first day at a new job. Be friendly and respect your coworkers. Accept constructive criticism positively and have a positive attitude. Keep a good sense of humor, but avoid the poor use of humor. Do not cause arguments or spread rumors. Finally, avoid comparing your work situation with your coworkers' work situations. Your efforts to be a team player will be rewarded.



Reviewing Key Concepts

1. Why should you, as a new employee, make it your business to be a team player at your company?
2. Which of the following statements are true?
 - A. You should always be a team player.
 - B. You should *not* expect everyone at work to be your friend.
 - C. As a new employee, you should tell experienced workers how they could do their jobs better.
 - D. It is easier to be accepted by others if you speak kindly of them.
 - E. When coworkers have a dispute, you should get involved right away and help them settle it.
3. Describe a positive way to respond to constructive criticism.
4. List five behaviors that reflect an employee's positive work attitude.
5. How does having a good sense of humor help you when you do something foolish or silly at work?
6. Name three types of humor that should be avoided.
7. Describe an argumentative person.
8. Why should you avoid spreading gossip and rumors?
9. Why should you avoid comparing your workload to that of a coworker?
10. Why do senior employees usually receive more benefits than beginning workers?

Building Academic Skills

1. **Research, speaking.** Investigate debate strategies and suggest a topic related to the workplace to debate. Find out how to argue constructively. Plan and prepare a topic to debate.
2. **Research, writing.** Research conflict in the workplace to find out how employers handle it. What effect does conflict have on employee output and the number of sick days taken. Is workplace conflict a major cause of stress? Does stress relate to a company's accident record? Summarize your findings in a written report.

Building Technology Skills

1. Work in small groups. Using video or digital cameras, record role-plays of effective team members in action. Reverse the role-play to show what happens when team members do not work together. Share the pictures or video with the class.
2. Use a computer software program to design a citation to give to a classmate who demonstrates outstanding teamwork skills. Determine the criteria for this award. Vote by secret paper ballot. Ask your teacher to announce the winner and hold a small award ceremony.
3. Search the Internet for sites that address positive attitude. Write a report from your sources on how a positive attitude affects your life and health.
4. Use the Internet to investigate job descriptions for careers of interest to you. Print copies of the descriptions and add them to your personal career information file. Review your future job description to see if you are ready to learn all the tasks you will be asked to perform on that job.

Building Career Knowledge and Skills

1. Write a two-page fictional story about an employee's interactions with coworkers. Then exchange stories with a classmate. What behavior improvements would you recommend for the employee in your classmate's story?
2. Watch a television show in which the main characters are at work together. Make a list of the scenes in which they cooperate.
3. Give a one-minute oral report on why the workplace needs team players.
4. Invite an employer to class to talk about the importance of teamwork. Be prepared to ask questions.
5. Make a list of team player skills you would like to see in your coworkers. Circle the skills you already possess. Pick at least three team player skills you would like to develop and create a plan of action to do so.
6. Interview workers regarding team skills that are expected in the work world. Summarize your findings in a statement.

Building Workplace Skills

With two classmates, visit a local store, library, or government office to observe how coworkers interact with supervisors, customers, and each other. (First talk with the manager and ask permission to observe examples of teamwork and take notes, otherwise people will wonder what you are doing.) Note and record what is said and done when employees work together. Decide with your classmates how to divide the following tasks. Make an oral report to the class summarizing the best example of teamwork skills you saw as well as the worst example. Identify how the second situation should have been handled.