



Auburn University Human Resources

Team Dynamics

Great teams develop agreements that everyone on the team, including the leader, will adhere to.

Try “Googling” questions like, “How do you create a great team?” or “What’s the secret to building a successful team?” If you did, you would get about 21 million links to read. That’s a little too complicated.

To keep it simple, great teams have one thing in common. **They have agreements.** Great teams develop agreements that everyone on the team, including the leader, will adhere to. Let’s look at an athletic team. Great basketball teams have agreements in place. Some agreements are obvious like, “Always help a teammate on defense.” Some are more subtle like, “Don’t forget, on the left side of the court we switch men on a screen; on the right side we don’t.” At the end of the day these players know they have each other’s backs.

It’s no different in an academic environment. Professional teams on a college campus need to develop agreements together and stick to them. Working agreements are valuable tools for establishing shared understanding and a way of working inside teams. After all, great teamwork is essential to seamless customer service.

Here’s an easy way to create agreements with your team. First, let team members know there is an upcoming meeting. Ask them to bring process problems, issues affecting customer service, or frustrations with them. Give them time to prepare and have them bring the solutions to the concerns with them to the meeting. It’s important to bring concerns and possible solutions. Next, hold a meeting. Focus on what is in the team’s control; not bigger systematic concerns. Third, make sure everyone has a chance to talk. Listen to issues first, then begin brainstorming solutions, also known as agreements. Next, have individuals or small groups begin creating statements that begin with “We agree...” addressing the issues. Pick them off one by one. Then wordsmith the agreements. Keep them simple. Then, agreement on the agreements are easy; it leads to accountability on their part AND yours. That’s how it’s done.

Here are a few great examples of professional agreements.

- 1. We agree to start and end meetings on time.** That’s an agreement everybody can hold on to and believe in.
- 2. We agree that our team is a gossip free zone.** When something is heard, we agree to go to the source so there are no rumors running around the office or the work environment.
- 3. We agree it’s okay to ask for help and to help others.** Teams don’t look out for number one, they look out for everyone. If a team member falls behind, he or she needs to feel safe asking for help and the rest of the team pitches in to get them caught up. We don’t want someone getting behind. A deadline is everyone’s deadline.

Great teams are full of agreements. Musicians who are part of large orchestras have agreements around nearly every note. Actors in a stage play have agreements. It’s no different for you, your team, and your department. Invite your team to come together and decide on agreements that can be morale boosters, aids to productivity, or solve some long term frustrations between team members. Once they are set, stick to them. If an agreement is developed by the team and put in place, it is easy to see nonconformity. If a team member isn’t sticking to the agreements, it’s easy to hold them accountable because the agreements are there for everyone to see. The bottom line for great, high-performing teams is to **create agreements, put them in place, and use them.** Now go and set some agreements and watch your team get better.

For more information, contact us at autrain@auburn.edu or at aub.ie/quickdive.



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