

TEAMWORK

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Play Games For A Quick-Thinking Team

Not everyone is great at thinking on their toes—so to speak. You may find that you or another teammate actually need some time to reflect on an idea before offering input. But being able to think quickly will help you to come up with ideas in a snap at your next team meeting.

In her book “Interpersonal Skills,” **Marlene Caroselli** spells out the rules for a number of brain games designed to help you think quickly and clearly. Pair up with a teammate and try one of these activities:

◎ **The Last-Word-Heard Reply.** Set two timers and ask a friend to begin speaking. When the timer goes off, your friend stops talking and you begin. “The challenge is to use the last word your friend spoke as the first word of your two-minute talk,” explains Caroselli. “In addition, your talk must be relevant to the comments made by your friend.”

◎ **The Two-Minute Challenge.** At least twice a day, each of you gives the other an unexpected challenge when you see each other in the hallway or when you meet for a break. The challenge may be something like: “You have exactly two minutes. Give me at least two book titles that contain a color,” or “List seven state capitals west of the Mississippi river.” ■

QUICK TIPS

- **Spit the gum out.** Before you enter the meeting room, spit your gum out into the trash. Nobody wants to listen to you make chomping and snapping noises. If you forget, find a tissue or scrap piece of paper and remove it discretely.
- **Let your teammate speak first.** If you are meeting with teammates and have patiently waited for the silent pause to interject your comments, it's possible another teammate has also. If you hear someone else chime in, politely hold your comment.
- **Stop wandering eyes** When you visit a teammate at her desk, make it a point not to look at her monitor. Respect her privacy by not paying attention to what she is working on. ■

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Express Your Opinions Tactfully

Your teammates have complained that you're too opinionated, but you don't want to lose your assertive edge.

There's a fine line between being assertive and coming across as pushy or aggressive. While you want to state your opinions with confidence and conviction, make sure that you're not sounding too critical of your teammates. You might be too opinionated if:

- ✘ Your teammates start looking wary every time you open your mouth.
- ✘ Colleagues avoid asking you for your opinion.
- ✘ You've started several arguments by speaking your mind.

If you fear you might be sounding too judgmental, try these tips:

- ✓ Remind yourself that others' opinions are important to them. Though your teammates may say things that strike you as foolish or off-the-wall, keep in mind that their ideas matter to them and phrase your responses accordingly.
- ✓ Remember that different people have different value systems and ways of thinking. If you tend to be pragmatic, a creative type's ideas can sound strange to you—but that doesn't necessarily mean they won't work.
- ✓ Soften your language. Use conditional words like "might" and "could," as in "That might not work ..."
- ✓ Use "I" statements to make it clear you're just stating what you think. For example, instead of saying, "That's going to cost way too much," say, "I think that could wind up being too expensive because..." Also, mention one or two good things about someone's point of view before you criticize it. ■

Say 'No' Politely

Many people have trouble saying "No" to others' requests because they fear they'll come across as unwilling to help. If you're afraid to say no to your boss or teammates, here's what to do:

* Don't get defensive or apologetic. Simply say, "I'm sorry, but I'm not able to do that right now." If they ask why, tell them your schedule is full. Most people will accept this response.

* It's fine to say, "I'm not sure, let me get back to you on that" if you'd like some time to think. When the pressure's off, you'll find it easier to say no if you need to. ■

Be Proactive

When your team doesn't have the manpower necessary to get a particular job done, don't wallow over your workload.

Complaining to your boss about not having enough resources to tackle the project is a waste of time. Instead, take the initiative and figure out how much manpower your team needs to finish the job, and then present that information to your boss in a professional manner.

When you take a proactive approach to problems rather than whining about them, your boss will likely listen to your grievances. ■

INSIGHT

"Take a chance! All life is a chance. The man who goes furthest is generally the one who is willing to do and dare."

~ Dale Carnegie

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Take These 5 Steps To Recognition

If you want recognition for your ideas and accomplishments you can't sit by idly. Here's how to get noticed for your ingenuity.

It's an unfortunate occurrence but one that happens all too often: You have a fantastic solution to your team's problem, but before you know it, your teammate offers a similar solution and she receives the praise for her innovative idea. What went wrong?

Plenty, says **Mary Miles**, author of "In Decision-Making, Plan Effective Solutions." Follow these tips to ensure your ideas get the credit they deserve:

1. Collect information. Gather as much data as possible relating to the core problem. For example, if your boss is trying to deal with the team's first case of sexual harassment, research current employment laws and find similar cases. Organize all of your information in a straightforward, easy-to-read manner.

2. Identify the problems. A complex issue involves lots of sub-problems. Use your research to anticipate the major obstacles you'll face. In the previous example, how was the employee compensated for her trials and how were other employees affected? Keep your analysis free from bias.

3. Set goals. Find out what your boss is trying to accomplish by resolving the problem. Is he trying to raise awareness about respect on your team? Make sure your goals are specific and be sure they line up with the company's vision or charter.

4. Implement the idea. Present a solution in as much detail as possible, but let your boss know that you'd like feedback. Use dates and timeframes based on what has worked in previous cases and what you believe would best work on your team.

5. Evaluate your solution. How well did your plan solve the problem? Solicit feedback from your boss and teammates alike. ■

Tell Me What You Think!

To help me ensure this newsletter is filled with articles you care about, please write to me at Teenaa@elijournals.com and tell me what your biggest teamwork related challenge is! ■

Are You Prepared To Lead Your Team?

Think you have what it takes to lead your team to greatness? Take this quiz to find out. Next to the statements below, write *Yes* or *No* depending on whether you agree with each statement. Then, read on for the optimal answers.

Answer "Yes" or "No" to the following:

1. I help others see "the big picture." _____
2. I welcome innovations, even tiny ones. _____
3. I'm very cautious about bringing new ideas into practice, and spend a lot of time weighing the pros and cons before I do so. _____
4. People need lots of punitive rules to keep them in line. _____
5. I go about bettering my team little by little, one day at a time. _____
6. I rarely think about what's going on outside my department. _____

The best answers are as follows:

1. **Yes.** The best leaders help others think outside the confines of their job description and see how they fit into the company as a whole.
2. **Yes.** Foster creativity in all its forms. Be open to new ideas, whether they're large, risky projects or small tweaks to procedures already in place.
3. **No.** Good leaders are known for their initiative. They take reasonable, calculated risks rather than sit around waiting for the perfect moment to do something.
4. **No.** Most strong leaders "discipline" by coaching employees and modeling good behavior, rather than by punishing them. They know that workers who are subject to many strict rules feel resentful and, therefore, are less productive.
5. **Yes.** Effective leaders are rarely satisfied with the status quo. They're always thinking of ways things could be better, but instead of making sweeping changes, they alter things incrementally.
6. **No.** To be a strong leader, you should prepare for future contingencies by taking note of what's going on company-wide. Form solid relationships with departments who service or are serviced by yours so you'll be able to cooperate with them should the need arise. ■

Mediate Between Disagreeing Teammates

When your teammates can't get along, one of the things you can do to dilute the current conflict is to become a mediator between your disagreeing teammates.

But how exactly does one go about repairing inter-personal issues between other team members, and what skill set does a mediator need to have?

Stephen B. Goldberg, Professor of Law at Northwestern University and the co-author of "Dispute Resolution: Negotiation, Mediation, and Other Processes," says that every mediator must demonstrate these four qualities:

1. Rapport. In order to reach a conclusion that benefits both teammates, you need to develop solid relationships with them. In showing empathy and consideration, you will earn their trust.

2. Focus. As a mediator, you should pay attention to your teammates' and your company's interests. Thinking about entitlements or rights (such as seniority) will distract you from the larger goal of reaching a resolution.

3. Creativity. Try to think of new responses for recurring issues. Put yourself in each side's shoes: how would you want the situation resolved?

4. Patience. Let both sides air their grievances and blow off steam before you try to jump in and fix things. Take time to let the situation become clear. ■

Can't Get A Word In Edgewise? Try This!

It's a common problem among teams: Someone presents an idea, and then a single teammate takes up the entire meeting voicing his opinion about why the idea is a bad one.

If your team has an unbalanced mixture of long-winded and soft-spoken members, ensuring that all teammates get to respond or propose their ideas can be a real battle. But accomplishing this doesn't have to be so difficult. There are simple solutions that your team can try, such as:

◆ Set an egg-timer, and allow each teammate three minutes to say why he thinks an idea is good or bad. You can also use a timer when teammates are voicing their own ideas during brainstorming sessions.

◆ Pass the torch. This is similar to the egg-timer method in that each teammate would speak for a set amount of time when he is holding a special object, like a baton or a ball.

The difference is that nobody else can talk or interrupt the speaker when he is holding the object, forcing others to listen to the speaker's entire message before responding. This method works best for teams with members who interrupt too much or tend to be judgmental.

At first, these strategies can feel uncomfortable or too structured for your team. But over time, you'll find that both methods encourage all teammates to participate actively, listen more carefully to each other and respond more thoughtfully to ideas. ■

Solve Conflicts Diplomatically

Many people go into a conflict with a teammate thinking they want to come out the winner. But this isn't the best way to solve problems, author **Stewart Levine** explains.

Levine offers the following advice for resolving conflicts in a way that will satisfy both sides:

✍ Compromise, don't compete. Instead of trying to impress your will upon your teammate, discuss the issue with him with an eye to finding a solution that you both will be happy with.

✍ Try to understand the other person's point of view. Ask your teammate questions to find out where he stands on the problem and why.

✍ Agree to work together. After you establish common ground with your teammate, acknowledge that you both want to find a solution, and that you should work together to do so.

In the long run, you'll come out the winner if you are able to set your differences aside and resolve a dispute amicably. ■

Learn To Embrace Conflict For A More Cohesive Team

Conflict sounds so negative and often gets a bad rap. But contrary to popular belief, conflict can actually strengthen your team.

Many folks try hard to avoid any source of conflict. Then, others go out of their way to provoke conflict and get a rise out of someone. While neither extreme will prove healthy for your team, a little bit of conflict will actually do you all some good.

Here are some ways that conflict can actually help and enhance your team:

✱ **Conflict can increase cohesiveness on your team.** Conflict doesn't necessarily mean your team will fall apart. On the contrary, a disagreement or argument may be just what your team needs to band together. Struggling together to solve a serious dilemma—even

in the face of conflict—will bring your team members closer and strengthen your team.

✱ **Conflict can increase motivation and bring about change.** There are times when your team members know change is necessary but nobody has the gumption to get the ball rolling. Because some team members will be highly motivated at the onset of conflict, the conflict will serve as that much needed catalyst for change.

✱ **Conflict can bring forth better decisions.** When team members argue, they often force one another to challenge each other's opinions. This will in turn make people support their arguments based on facts, and in the long run, your team will dig deeper into the matter to find the ultimate solution. ■

Stop When You're Stuck

If your team's stumped for a solution, don't just sit around staring at one another. Call for a break. Walk around and grab a snack or coffee, go outside for some fresh air or discuss something totally unrelated to the problem.

Your brain sometimes needs "down time" to subconsciously process information, so give it a chance to do so. When you get back from the break, you may find the solution quickly leaps to mind. If all else fails, go home and sleep on the problem. ■

Create A Chart To Show Your Progress

You and your team might feel better as a whole if you can actually see the progress you're making on your project. The easiest way to do this is to create a chart so that you can visualize your progress.

First, make a large chart. Break different aspects of the job into sections, and then highlight the portions that are finished.

Seeing your progress in this way will also help the team evaluate the goals you've set and allow you to establish new ones if those seem unobtainable. ■

Keep Your Team's Goals In Sight

Your workday can get chaotic at times. Running around between team meetings and constantly switching gears can sometimes make you lose sight of your team's vision and goals. One way to be sure to keep your team's goals in mind is to post them where you can see them.

Consider writing down your team's top five goals and placing them on a sticky note on your monitor or anywhere you will be sure to see them. Then, when you stop for a break to catch your breath and get caught up on emails, you'll be reminded of what your team is striving for, and you will be able to refocus better on what's important. ■

Is Technology Helping Or Hurting Your Team?

Many companies are quick to get on board with the latest technology, figuring that anything new and advanced will lead to greater productivity. But oftentimes, technology becomes an end in itself, complicating tasks that were once simple.

To determine whether technology's helping your team or hurting it, ask yourself these questions:

- ▲ Are you running your system, or is it running you?
- ▲ Are your teammates more productive with the new technology, or do they just look busy?
- ▲ Are security features, such as multiple levels of passwords, slowing you down?
- ▲ Has your team been trained properly in how to use the technology?
- ▲ Have "improved" communication systems actually bogged you down? For example, does your team spend too much time deleting unnecessary e-mails?
- ▲ Has new technology become a substitute for genuine change? Are you basically doing the same things you did before the new technology was implemented? ■

Is Email Flushing Your Productivity?

Do you ever feel like some days you just don't accomplish much? Your email could be to blame.

If you allow yourself to get distracted from your designated tasks with every email request that comes through your inbox, you're diminishing your efficiency.

To combat the problem, designate a few times each day that you set aside to check email. The rest of the time, focus on your work and resist the temptation to open the email box. If it's common practice in your office to reply to emails immediately, notify others that you intend to only check your email at specified times and offer them an alternative for getting in touch with you, such as a quick phone call instead. ■

Don't Be A Laughing Stock: Avoid These PowerPoint Gaffes

Most workers will have to sit through a bad PowerPoint presentation at some point in their careers. Make sure you're not the one getting on your teammates' nerves by remembering these tips the next time you create a presentation:

- ☞ Never read straight off the screen. PowerPoint should be a supplement to your talk, not the talk itself.
- ☞ Don't use transitions, wipes or sound effects.
- ☞ Keep your verb tense and sentence structure consistent.
- ☞ Use *The Art of the Start* author Guy Kawasaki's 10/20/30 rule: have no more than 10 slides, take no more than 20 minutes and use a 30-point font.
- ☞ Seth Godin, author of *Free Prize Inside: The Next Big Marketing Idea*, suggests that you use no more than six words per slide. Though this goal is difficult to reach, try it as an exercise to make your writing more concise.

Bonus tip: Check out Peter Norvig's version of the Gettysburg Address online at www.norvig.com/Gettysburg/index.htm) for a humorous antidote to lousy PowerPoint presentations. ■

Respond To Criticism With Grace

Though no one likes being criticized, it's an inevitable part of any job. Therefore, try to see criticism in a positive light.

Learning about your shortcomings is the first step towards changing them. Plus, if others see that you can take criticism well, they'll see you are willing to improve. Consultant **Harry E. Chambers** offers the following advice about receiving criticism:

❑ **Don't take it personally.** Avoid becoming combative or defensive when criticized. If a colleague criticizes some aspect of your work, think of it as just that: a comment on your work, and not on you as a person.

❑ **Ask for clarification.** If a teammate says something vague in the way of criticism, such as "This doesn't make sense," or "You handled that the wrong way," ask him what he means specifically so that you can get the information you need to make a change.

❑ **Acknowledge the criticism.** Don't be afraid to admit you made a mistake. Acknowledging that you did something wrong shows the person who criticized you that you respect his point of view, and that you're willing to learn from your mistakes.

❑ **Remedy the situation.** Find out what steps you need to take in order to correct your mistake. Start by asking the person who criticized you what he thinks you can do better. And, once you've fixed the problem, let others know that you've done so. ■

Help Your Team Bond Quickly

More than ever, companies are forming short-term cross-functional teams to achieve certain goals. But it can be difficult for a new team to come together and start producing results right away.

To help employees bond quickly, consultants **Jerry Garfield** and **Ken Stanton** have developed an approach they call *rapid team building*. They say that teams should use the following methods:

1. Share personal information. Have team members tell everyone about their work history and experience. Doing so will create a sense of shared history and create a respect for everyone's skills and talents.

2. Discuss what's worked in the past. Ask your teammates what worked — and didn't work — well for them on previous teams. Use their advice when determining how the current team will function.

3. Set clear guidelines. Make sure everyone knows what's expected of him or her, what the team's goals are and when crucial parts of the project are due.

4. Capitalize on team members' strengths. Assign everyone a role on the team that will make the best use of his or her competencies.

5. Clarify the decision-making process. Let everyone on the team know which decisions he or she will be expected to make or participate in, and which will be made by the supervisor or team leader.

6. Streamline the flow of information. Determine the best mode of communicating with each team member and with the team as a whole, be it e-mail, voice mail or face-to-face meetings. ■

Build Mutual Trust On Your Team

Without trust, a team is doomed, claim *Why Teams Don't Work* authors **Harvey Robbins** and **Michael Finley**. They offer the following strategies for creating trust:

➔ **Have clear, consistent goals so all team members feel secure about what they're doing.** If teammates aren't sure which direction they're headed in, they'll look out for their own interests rather than the team's.

➔ **Be equitable and open-minded.** If your teammates know that you'll give them a fair hearing, they'll be more likely to trust you with their ideas and plans.

➔ **Support your team members.** Think of them as siblings, Robbins and Finley advise. You may not always get along with your brothers and sisters, but you're still loyal to them. Stick up for your teammates, and don't broadcast team problems to people in other departments. ■

Use What Motivates You To Motivate Others

Everyone's motivated by something different, be it money, prestige, accomplishments or recognition. Knowing what motivates you best and channeling that drive can help you to achieve more at work. Psychologist **David McClelland** has identified four major sources of motivation and offers advice on how you can use them to your advantage:

✦ **Achievement.** People who are motivated largely by achievement enjoy challenges and accomplishing new things. If this sounds like you, try taking on more responsibility at work or educating yourself about a facet of your job that you're not that familiar with.

✦ **Affiliation.** Highly social types who enjoy interacting with other people are most motivated by affiliation. If this is your main motive, focus on building strong relationships at work. Befriend teammates you don't know well, and indulge in a little schmoozing.

✦ **Personalized power.** Those who have personalized power as a motive seek status and like to be seen as important. If power motivates you, set your sights on that promotion and cook up a plan to get it. Take charge if there's a leadership vacuum on your team.

✦ **Socialized power.** People who are most motivated by socialized power take satisfaction in helping others and making a positive impact on society. If this sounds like you, learn about the ways your company helps people. Take on a supportive role on your team: aid others to learn new concepts and "pick them up" when things aren't going well for them. ■

Call For Case Studies!

I want to hear about your team's finest moment! How has your team come together to combat this tough economy? What makes your team stand out from the rest? Please write to me at teenaa@elijournals.com, share your success story, and I may feature you in an upcoming Case Study column!

Not sure if you handled something appropriately? Our team of experts will critique your performance and offer valuable tips you can put into action right away! ■

Relax Your Body

Many of us spend our workdays planted in front of our computers. This fixed position decreases circulation and can cause muscle tension, soreness, stiffness and the potential for developing a repetitive stress injury.

To help release tension and diminish chances of injury, try the following:

✦ **Stretch and change positions** at least twice an hour.

✦ **Avoid rapid, high-force stretches**, which can lead to injuries.

✦ **Breathe while stretching**, inhaling while lifting your arms.

✦ **Engage in cardiovascular exercise** for 20 minutes three times per week.

✦ **Stretch when you can**, even while waiting for copies, walking to your car or before a meeting.

✦ **Drink water.** Divide your weight in half, and drink as many ounces per day.

✦ **Vary work tasks.** Perform some tasks while standing. ■

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