How to Be a Good Team Player
Maximizing Your Contribution

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Have you worked for teams where everyone pitches in, and you all work together in perfect harmony? Do you always play to your strengths in a team, or are there times when the group you're in just doesn't gel? Either way, teamwork is such a vital way of completing projects that it's worth developing and refining the skills that will help you make a valuable contribution to whichever type of team you're in.

Sports teams are perfect examples of how many players working together can achieve much more than one player who is acting alone. For example, you may not be the best goal scorer, but you're great at moving the ball forward. You know that if you pass that ball to the person who CAN score, the team has a better chance of winning. Everyone on the team plays a different role, according to their strengths – and by helping and encouraging one another along the way, you can make some inspiring things happen.

Off the sports pitch and back in the workplace, we hear the term 'good team player' a lot. But what does this really mean in a business context? What do leaders want from their team members, and how can you make a more significant contribution to your team?

These are some of the questions we address in this article. We show you what makes a good team player, and we offer some tips on how to make a bigger contribution in the future.

The Importance of a Good Team Player

Teams are created for several reasons. They may need to deliver a one-time project, or work together on an ongoing basis. Either way, if you take advantage of a group's collective energy and creativity, the team can accomplish much more in less time.

What does this mean for you? Well, teams are probably an integral part of how things are done in your organization. If you show that you have the ability to work well with others, this could have a major impact on your career.

Being a valuable team member can open new career opportunities, because leaders may see firsthand what a great job you're doing. You may even be invited to bring your strengths into play in another team setting – and in higher profile, business-critical projects. This is why learning to be a good team player is so important. If you make a good impression, you never know what possibilities might open for you.
Use Your Strengths

Do you know what you do best?

Perhaps you're incredibly organized. Or, you might excel at motivating people, helping resolve disagreement, or researching hard-to-find information.

Whatever your strengths, you have something valuable to offer. Find a role within your team that allows you to do what you do well. This will help you make a meaningful contribution – and increase your chances of doing a great job. Plus, it's usually much easier, and more satisfying, to do tasks when you're naturally good at them.

Teams usually come together to handle an issue that's difficult, if not impossible, for people to do on their own. When a group works well together, creativity levels are generally higher, as people tap into one another's strengths. This often leads to increased productivity, and an inspiring sense of collaboration and cooperation that moves everyone – and the project – forward.

The most successful teams don't just combine different technical skills; they also allow members to take on more general roles that cross traditional functional lines.

Understand the Team's Objectives

On the occasions that teams don't function well, it's often because there's a lack of communication and understanding about what the group's objectives are.

If you want to be a good team player, make sure you understand the group's goals. Ask key questions like these:

- Why are we here?
- What is the 'perfect ending' to this project?
- What is our deadline?
- How often will we meet?
- What is our budget?
- Who is in charge of implementing our ideas?
- What roles and responsibilities will each of us have?

Be clear about what you're there to do. This will help you complete your tasks to the best of your abilities.
**Be Reliable**

We've probably all worked with people who have made promises they didn't keep. It's frustrating when someone says one thing and does another, and it can really slow a group's progress.

You can be a valuable asset to your team simply by delivering what you said you would do – on time. For some people, it's all too easy (and, unfortunately, quite common) to make promises they can't keep. But you may really surprise and impress people by following through on what you say you'll do. If you commit to completing something for the group by the end of the day, make sure you do it. If you say you'll attend the 5:30 meeting, don't be late.

Being reliable also applies to the work you do for the group. If you have high standards, people will depend on you to produce quality work. If your output is excellent one day, but only average the next, the team may regard you as being unreliable.

**Be a Good Communicator**

Be involved and active within the group. If you sit silently while someone else discusses an idea that you know won't work, you could damage the team's chances of achieving its outcomes. If you're got an alternative suggestion that might be more effective, then share it with the group.

The opposite applies as well: If people discuss a plan that you think is great, then speak up. Tell them what an inspiring idea you think it is. They might really need and appreciate your support, even if they don't show it.

When you communicate with your team members – whether showing support, or challenging their thinking – it's important to stay positive and respectful. Even if you disagree with someone, don't become emotional. Being objective and fair will make a good impression; getting upset and angry won't.

**Stay Flexible**

If you've ever worked with a team, you probably know that things can change quickly. People may join or leave the group, budgets may be reduced, or goals may be redefined.

The best team players know how to be flexible. They don't fight change – instead, they see it as a new opportunity for growth.

You may find that that the group members, the approaches you use, and the goals you started with have all changed by the time you've finished. By staying flexible, you can take advantage of the new opportunities that arise during the project, and you'll be able to help others do the same.

Your willingness to remain comfortable and positive in a constantly changing environment is an important business skill – and your boss will likely notice.
Tips for Being a Good Team Member

- Don't cherry-pick projects. It can be tempting to choose only those projects that seem easier, or ones that offer more benefits. But if you choose more difficult projects, and accept what's offered to you, you'll earn a reputation for being a hard worker. Your boss will notice your willingness to take on a challenge, and it will pay off in the long term.
- Support other people on your team by offering positive feedback, and providing help if they need it. Your willingness to collaborate and help others will make a good impression on both the group and upper management.
- Share information and resources with your team. Remember, you're all there for one purpose – and by keeping everyone informed, you contribute to that goal. If you have past experiences or knowledge that can help others, then offer it. They'll appreciate the help.
- Keep a positive attitude. If you complain, delay, or give the tough assignments to others, people will notice – and they may start to avoid you. A positive attitude can be a refreshing change, and it will help others stay focused and productive as well.

Key Points

- Being a good team player isn't always easy. Teams are usually created to solve difficult problems, and they often have tight deadlines and strict budgets. But this can be your chance to shine. Look at teamwork as not only a challenge, but a great opportunity.
- Help your team by using your strengths, clearly understanding your role, and staying flexible and reliable until the project is completed. Be positive, and help others as much as you can. By being cooperative and willing to work hard, you’ll make a good impression on everyone – including your boss.