



# Encouraging Teamwork as a Project Manager

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When you're the project manager, it's up to you to make sure that plans are laid out, deadlines are met, deliverables are up to scratch, and clients are happy. But you can't do any of that alone. A project manager needs a team to lead, and it's their job to ensure that team works like a well-oiled machine.

The intentions of every individual team member need to reflect *your* intentions if the project is to run as smoothly as possible, and that can be difficult to achieve. Everyone on the team has a different personality and has diverse work experience. There will likely be several contradictory perspectives on how the job should be done.

That can result in conflicts and miscommunication, which cause barriers to progress, and projects failing to hit their deadlines or fulfill the client's expectations. Encouraging teamwork should be a priority for all project managers to keep everyone on the same wavelength, working together to achieve a common goal.

It will minimize the possibility of a stressful, unhappy working environment and allow for more creativity and innovation. Tracy Middleton conducted a study on teamwork for *Atlassian* in which she said this:

*When people with different perspectives come together in group brainstorming, innovative ideas can rise to the surface...This can only happen when the team is open and collaborative...The most creative solutions come up when there's a level of trust that lets team members ask 'stupid' questions, propose out-there ideas, and receive constructive criticism.*

This kind of environment will be a breeding ground for better quality deliverables, and it's something you can cultivate by encouraging teamwork. So let's talk about *how* you can do that.

While every team is different, there are some universal truths about ensuring a strong, functional team environment. *McKinsey Quarterly* studied teamwork from the perspective of 5,000 executives and narrowed the ingredients down to three areas. The article states:

*The first is alignment in direction, where there is shared belief about what the company is striving towards and the role of the team in getting there. The second is high-quality interaction, characterized by trust, open communication, and a willingness to embrace conflict. The third is a strong sense of renewal, meaning an environment in which team members are energized because they feel they can take risks, innovate, learn from outside ideas and achieve something that matters.*

If you can master these three ideas, you can apply them in all of your projects and get yourself on track to that ideal team environment, so let's talk about each of them.

When aligning direction, you must create concrete goals that build to the result. Your team can refer back to them for guidance throughout the project. Often, disillusion can grow within a team if they aren't sure of the benefits of what they're developing.

Everyone wants to feel like their hard work is building towards something meaningful and have a clearly defined path of getting there. If everyone on the team is walking that same path, they will be inclined to support each other and help each other because their teammates' success is their success.

In a study for *Forbes*, Adi Gaskell concluded that:

*Participants in research who were primed to act collaboratively stuck at their task 64% longer than their solitary peers, while also reporting higher engagement levels, lower fatigue levels, and a higher success rate. What's more, this impact persisted for several weeks.*

So what you need is for the significant tasks to be collaborative ones. Some big picture focus is an excellent way to do this. When you're laying out the plan of action for the project, break it down into a series of SMART goals, but clarify the relevance of each of these individual goals to the big picture.

Suppose your team is working on new online software for a major bank. The result will be a system that offers complete online-banking services to the customers. One goal may revolve around developing a live chat function.

This may seem like a small and somewhat menial task that your team may feel directionless participating in. Thus, you should emphasize its importance by discussing the necessity for customers to have a line of communication when conducting transactions. That will clarify the specific goal as a relevant part of the project's overall benefit, align the team's direction, and encourage them to work together on it.

And that leads us quite nicely to the second essential dimension of good teamwork: high-quality interaction. Figuring this one out will compliment the first dimension quite well because it involves good communication. A team that communicates well can better work together towards shared goals.

What you want is a team that trusts and respects each other. That way, they will be more likely to listen to each other's views about pursuing certain goals. They will be more open with their ideas, won't fear being dismissed or looked down on by those they trust, and conflict resolution can happen without hostility.

Building that trust and effortless communication within the team is the tricky part. An article by Martine Haas and Mark Mortensen for HBR offers an interesting and tested solution. They refer to it as "structured, unstructured time," which serves as an opportunity for team members to discuss matters not related to the task at hand.

The article says:

*This is done by reserving the first ten minutes of teamwide meetings for open discussion. The idea is to provide an opportunity for members to converse about whatever aspects of work or daily life they choose...This helps people develop a more complete picture of distant colleagues, their work, and their environment.*

Allowing your team to get to know each other will build upon their levels of trust and understanding and open up these all-important lines of communication. When these periods of unstructured time are in effect, you will have to act as somewhat of a mediator.

Don't force interactions amongst the team, but you may have to get the conversation started and try to steer away from topics like politics and religion that could lead to strife. Dedicating valuable time to small talk - when you could be getting more work done - may not sound beneficial, but it's only ten minutes per meeting. It will add up without hindering critical work discussion.

And so we come to the idea of renewal. *McKinsey's* study uses that word, but a better one to use might be "reward." The concept of being energized by the work you're doing because you feel like it's meaningful. You are rewarded with a new sense of purpose every day, especially when you feel like you have a certain amount of freedom to be innovative and creative.

As Project Manager, you can contribute to this in a few ways. One way is celebrating the success of the team. Be sure to thank them regularly for the job that they're doing and maybe even set aside some time every week purely for gratitude. Just a few minutes in a meeting where you can express your gratitude, or where it can be expressed among the team members themselves.

You should also make a point of recognizing specific achievements from your team and broadcasting them. Deirdre Scully in *Teamwork* refers to this as 'Boosting the Recognition Signal' and offers this advice:

*It's easy for recognition to stop at team level, so consider making a cross-department or company-wide platform for sharing feedback. It can be as simple as a channel in your workplace chat app that you use to announce wins and testimonials, where everyone can post and congratulate the employee in question for a job well done.*

This will energize your team and also encourage them to congratulate each other. Another thing you can do to boost their sense of reward is to regularly offer advice and even training if you have the time. As a project manager, you are likely to have a broader skillset and more experience than most of your team, so your input will be valuable. The team will feel rewarded when they put it into practice and improve upon their work.

So again, the key to better teamwork can generally be broken down into three dimensions: alignment, interaction, and renewal. Exploring methods of conquering all three of these can help to encourage your team to work together.

Your big takeaway should be that a team works most effectively when there is an established bond between them all, based on trust and communication. It's your job to ensure those virtues are a part of the project. Your challenge for this week is to put some time aside specifically to congratulate your team on the quality of their work.

That's all for today. Thanks for listening, and remember: keep building the best you.

### **Reading List:**

**[Article]** The Importance of Teamwork (as Proven by Science), Tracy Middleton

**[Article]** High-Performing Teams: A Timeless Leadership Topic, Scott Keller

**[Article]** New Study Finds That Collaboration Drives Workplace Performance, Adi Gaskell

**[Article]** The Secrets of Great Teamwork, Martine Haas & Mark Mortensen

**[Article]** How to Express Gratitude to Your Team, Deirdre Scully