

Develop **TEAMWORK SKILLS** in bite-sized action steps

Slowly, slowly is the smart way to develop teamwork skills.



FROM THE US

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Developing teamwork skills is hard if you don't know how. Plus, "teamwork" is a very vague term, and can be defined many different ways. This may make it harder to execute.

Happily, it can be fairly easy to develop teamwork skill if you break it into small, bite-size chunks. The following lays out a series of small, bite-sized action steps you can take. The intent here is for these to be a starting place. As you do these more often, you will find it easier to extrapolate them into more "teamy" things, more often and better.

BITE-SIZED ACTION STEPS **DESIRED BEHAVIOUR #1: HELP TEAMMATES WHEN THEY NEED IT.**

Bite-Sized Action Step: In the next week, ask one of your teammates if you can help them do anything, even if it's not in your wheelhouse.

Comments: If they say yes, make sure they give you some instruction. Then, show them an early sample of what you did and get feedback, to make sure you are doing it right. **Bonus:** You've now expanded your capabilities!

DESIRED BEHAVIOUR #2: ASK TEAMMATES FOR HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT.

Bite-Sized Action Step: In the next week, ask one of your teammates to help you with something. If they say yes, train them.

Comments: Even if you don't need the help, you are still cross-training them. And, between this and #1 above, you are creating a work structure that can flex around the peaks and valleys of customer demand.

DESIRED BEHAVIOUR #3: HELP THE TEAM CAPITALIZE ON YOUR STRENGTHS.

Bite-Sized Action Step: Identify something work-related you are good at, that others are not as good at. Send an email to your team (or simply discuss, depending on your physical layout), volunteering to provide them pointers on doing that well. If they take you up on it, great!

Comments: This may seem arrogant to others, so consider doing it in unison with #4.

DESIRED BEHAVIOUR #4: CAPITALIZE ON YOUR TEAMMATES' STRENGTHS.

Bite-Sized Action Step: Identify something that a teammate does better than you. Ask them how they do it.

Comments: They will likely be very appreciative that someone is noticing their strengths, and they will likely be happy to share. Then, little by little, incorporate that strength into your approach. Repeat this with other teammates.

Initial Cross-Cutting Comment: If your work environment is competitive, the above will feel very out of place. And, just the novelty of the above may make you feel awkward. But the more novel it is, the more your company (and you) will benefit from your doing it. More on this later, but one bite-sized step by one person

today leads to many bite-sized steps by many people in three months. That can be a vastly improved work culture, with equally improved work output.

MORE BITE-SIZED ACTION STEPS

DESIRED BEHAVIOR #4: ASK OTHERS FOR INPUT, INCLUDING PEOPLE YOU DON'T WORK WITH MUCH.

Bite-Sized Action Step: In the next week, ask three teammates for input on a decision you are going to make, even if you are comfortable with your own preferred approach.

Comments: You'll be surprised at how many ways there are to tackle the same problem. Even better, if you do this ten times, then the other person's approach will be better in three of them. Congratulations, you've learned!

DESIRED BEHAVIOR #5: TURN DISAGREEMENT/ CONFLICT INTO A POSITIVE.

Bite-Sized Action Step: The next time you disagree with what a teammate says or does, ask them to constructively explain their opinion/action. Then thank them.

Comments: First, their explanations will often make perfect sense, and you will learn something. Second, you may make subsequent decisions better as a result. Third, and most importantly, don't bark at them or convince them that you are right and they are wrong. Even if that is true sometimes, it is likely not true often. Win/lose is a long-term lose.

DESIRED BEHAVIOR #6: COMMUNICATE MORE PROACTIVELY.

Bite-Sized Action Step: In the next week, tell your team that you are going to send them one email per week, for a few weeks, devoted to "simply sharing." Tell them you are just experimenting. Then do it, sharing comments, unusual events, or learnings, on things that happened recently.

Comments: First, make it a handful of bullets,

not an essay. Second, by doing so, you are developing your own reflection skills. Third, this is a fuzzier version of the important practice of "debriefing."

DESIRED BEHAVIOR #7: GIVE CREDIT TO TEAMMATES FOR SUCCESS.

Bite-Sized Action Step: The next time someone gives you positive feedback for something you did well, respond by saying how someone else contributed.

Comments: First, people will like you more for having done so. Second, after doing this a handful of times, you will realize that what you are saying is correct; other people did contribute to the success.

DESIRED BEHAVIOR #8: SHARE TANGIBLE RESOURCES. THIS CAN BE MATERIALS, TIME, OR BUDGET DOLLARS.

Bite-Sized Action Step: In the next week, identify something you have a surplus of. Then, offer to share it with a teammate.

Comments: Note that the following week, that teammate will make you the same offer.



CLOSING COMMENTS

First, by doing the above, you are creating a culture change, one bite-sized action at a time, one person at a time, one day at a time. I now do over 300 pushups per workout session, two or three times a week. A year ago, I did four pushups, once. It grew over time.

Second, will doing the above help generate revenue? Will it help save expenses? Will it help extend or renew customer contracts? I don't know, but let me devolve those questions into the following, more answerable ones:

- Will it help the team adapt to erratic, customer-driven workflows?
- Will team members' day-to-day decisions be better?

- Will knowledge spread around your team/ organization like wildfire?
- Will it reduce the number of service failures?
- Will the improved teamwork culture decrease employee turnover?
- Will product development or other innovation have fewer hiccups?

Third, if you are a business owner, manager, or supervisor, you can adapt these to team-building, rather than team-playing. In probably all the above cases, your influence will be felt by having you role-model the above actions. Imagine the exponential impact it will have. Also, you can jumpstart this by being more participative in your decision-making. This can take many forms, but the essence is that you ask people's opinions more before you make decisions.

Fourth, doing any of the above cross-functionally will also likely have exponential results. You might experience a friction barrier between operations and sales, between management and non-management, or between other departments with different needs ("Us versus Them"). The more communication, teamwork, respect, cross-training, and give-and-take there is, the more the functions will evolve. Don't try to accomplish this overnight. Rather, do the action steps listed above, and the respect and growth will come.

Fifth, if you look at a handful of competency models, you will see that the above concepts can fall under teamwork, communication, collaboration, diversity, or continuous improvement. I believe, probably rightly, that

the borders of each of these concepts are gray. That's fine. It doesn't matter what you call it; it matters what you do.

Sixth, the above will undoubtedly help folks from the different generational cohorts learn from one another and capitalize on one another's strengths, rather than resist and alienate one another.

Seventh, if you are not already doing the above, fear not. Few people are. And if they are, they likely got that way through experience with healthy corporate cultures. To this point, you have likely focused your attention on the skills and knowledge that helped you start a business in the first place. Your energies were well spent.

Eighth, if you only do half of what I suggested above, that's good, too. My veterinarian once told me to quit giving my dog tuna fish. I told him I couldn't do that. He said, "Cut it in half." I thought that was genius.

As workplace stress continues to rise, companies prioritizing employee well-being and adapting their wellness strategies will be best positioned to succeed in retaining talent, boosting productivity, and building a supportive, resilient company culture. ■

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