

Charge Up

5 Essential Skills for Collaboration

Curious Listening

Curious listening means asking great questions:

✓ **Problem Understanding Questions:**

Help uncover needed information, explore issues from diverse points of view, engage others, and reduce the risk of jumping to solutions too quickly.

- Why do you think we're missing 35% of the customers' calls?
- What data will help us know if we're losing sales?

✓ **Problem Solving Questions:**

Expand people's thinking about possibilities and open the door to more innovative kinds of solutions while helping build support for the ultimate solution.

- What would happen if we added more inventory?
- What would happen if we did nothing?
- What ideas do you have?

⊘ **Do NOT ask Problem Creating Questions:**

Help uncover needed information, explore issues from diverse points of view, engage others, and reduce the risk of jumping to solutions too quickly.

- Whose idea was it to...? (This question attempts to place blame.)
- Do you think it would be better if...? (This is a "leading" question, which is really "telling" in disguise.)

Feedback

GIVING Feedback:

- Be respectful
- Communicate fact-based observations
- Don't judge
- Describe the impact
- Be candid
- Be honest

✓ "I notice that we keep talking over one another, and I'm concerned that we're not really hearing and understanding all of the perspectives being presented."

NOT

⊘ "We created ground rules about listening to each other. Let's follow them."

RECEIVING Feedback:

- Ask for specifics
- Don't get defensive
- Keep justifications under control

✓ "Could you give me examples of when you've observed me talking over others?"

NOT

⊘ "I would've liked to have known this sooner. We agreed as a team that we'd call these things out quickly."

Virtual Collaborations

Create Detailed, Structured Agendas

Ensure that a detailed and structured agenda is distributed in advance of meetings that:

- Identifies the purpose and specific expected outcomes clearly.
- Outlines how attendees should prepare and when and how they will be expected to participate.
- Indicates when and how specific individuals are to join if it's unnecessary for all participants to attend simultaneously.

Establish Ground Rules

Set ground rules, such as those that follow, for how the meeting will run, how interaction will occur, and what you expect from attendees.

- Say your name each time you speak so others will get to know your voice. Also say the name of a person you are addressing directly.
- Keep cell phones and other electronic devices off so they don't disrupt the quality of the call.
- Use the mute button unless you are speaking to eliminate background noise.
- Don't make distracting noises, such as shuffling paper, scraping chairs, and tapping your pen.
- Don't have side conversations with others during the call.
- Don't put your phone on "hold" because background music will play, making it impossible to continue the call.

Foster Engagement

Take care to foster engagement all throughout the collaboration:

- Start with a check-in question to get everyone's voice "in the room."
- Start with agenda items that require input and participation from attendees. Get people while they're fresh, focused, and motivated.
- Assign roles (time keeper, note taker, etc.) to people during the meeting to keep them actively engaged.
- Ask all participants to state their names each time they speak until they recognize each other's voices.
- Make sure everyone has the opportunity to speak up and have a voice.
- Use frequent polling/questioning to make sure people are "in the conversation."
- Ask people to explain their:
 - Silence when others might be expecting them to speak (e.g., "I'm taking notes" or "I need a moment to think about that").
 - Any gestures or behaviors they are making (i.e., "I'm throwing up my hands in disgust," "I'm smiling," or "I'm drawing a diagram").
 - Tone (e.g., "I know I sound upset, but I'm actually just puzzled").
- Keep a list of participants nearby so that you can track participation. Place a check beside each person's name when they speak. Call on others to ensure all ideas are heard.

Speak Live When It's Necessary and Possible

Forego email and speak in person (or by telephone) if:

1. It's your first meeting. There's no substitute for getting together when you need to bond with someone.
2. The conversation will be difficult. If the message may be interpreted negatively or stir unpleasant emotions, meeting in person will help to gauge responses in the moment.
3. Intention and tone are critical and could be misinterpreted. The more complicated, emotional, or nuanced your message, the more advantageous it is to have the benefit of nonverbals.

Power Imbalance

What's Happening

One team member is at a higher level in the organization than others.

One team member is the sole representative of a department or function.

A team member is making minimal or no contributions.

What To Do

Ask for the leader's support up front to encourage the participation of others.

Have a group discussion up front about ensuring that this individual's voice is heard.

Provide feedback and invite them to share their concerns or point of view (e.g., I've noticed that you've been unusually quiet. What's going on?).

Healthy Conflict

To ensure that conflict is healthy and productive:

- Instead of creating a situation wherein individuals are trying to convince each other that their point of view is "right," set the expectation that you will invite differing points of view and discuss and debate them openly. If you do, you're more likely to get the best solution, and team members are more likely to support what the group decides.
- Make clear choices about how the group will make decisions and come to consensus. For decisions, use an approach detailed in *4 Decision-Making Options*. For consensus, try using the *Fist to Five* technique (fist: no support, one to two fingers: not ready to support, three or four fingers: may not be the first choice but can support the proposal and will not undermine its success, five fingers: full enthusiastic support).