

A Team versus a Collection of Individuals

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Contrast two teams each within a different company. The first team calls itself the “Silos”. The Silos are very talented people. Each person is intelligent, experienced, and competent in their field. But they rarely ask for help or offer to help others. They work in silos. When their work interfaces with someone else’s work, they quickly hand it off so they can go back to their own work. When they attend meetings, they often withhold information and protect resources for themselves. When there are issues on the team, they are quick to blame others rather than take responsibility. The team often feels uninformed because there isn’t a spirit of collaboration or transparent information flow.

The second team calls itself the “Band”. They are not as individually talented as the Silos, but they work as a team. Rather than depend on their own individual capabilities they leverage each other. Everyone knows each other’s strengths and weaknesses. They proactively assist each other so that their weaknesses are minimized and their strengths are amplified. They encourage and praise each other. They brainstorm, plan, and make decisions together. They have clear roles as individuals, but work in jointly agreed upon interdependent processes that ensure efficient handoffs. Because they help each other, they know what everyone is doing. There is good information sharing and peer accountability.

Comparing the Band and the Silos, which team do you think is the most productive? The most fun? Innovative? Which team would more likely attract and retain good people? I know I would prefer to work for the Band.

Here are a dozen characteristics of high performing collaborative teams to consider as you evaluate your team and strive to improve teamwork:

1. **Unselfishness** – Teamwork starts with a collaborative mindset. Collaborative team members see their work as a part of the team’s work, not merely their own work. They consider themselves and their resources to be the team’s resources.
2. **Conscientiousness** – Team members are conscientious about each other’s needs. They spot opportunities to help others rather than wait to be asked for help or told to help.
3. **Competence** – Each team member is knowledgeable and skilled in their area of competence. They treat each other with respect and admiration because they see each other as experts in their field who can be depended upon.
4. **Transparency** – Conversations on collaborative teams take place publically with the team rather than privately between individuals. If someone has something to say in a meeting they say it rather than saving it for a post-meeting gripe session.
5. **Communications** – Team members communicate frequently staying up to date on what others are doing. They are invited to regular team calls making them feel informed and in the know about important team activities.
6. **Feedback** – Collaborative teams promote feedback. They give each other praise and encouragement for work well done as well as constructive criticism when they spot opportunities for improvement.
7. **Decisions** – Team members feel involved in setting the direction of the team because their opinions and ideas are sought after. They are asked to give input into important decisions.
8. **Empowerment** – Team members are delegated the flexibility and resources to get their work done. They feel ownership for their work because they are given the responsibility and authority to get it done.
9. **Conflict** – Collaborative teams manage their conflict. They remain constructive when they challenge each other. They debate ideas and actions rather than personalities and feelings.



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10. **Roles** – Team members know their roles on the team and the dependencies that others have on them. They interact efficiently because everyone’s responsibilities are clear.
11. **Processes** – Work processes are well defined with interdependencies clearly stated. Emphasis and detail is added where teamwork is expected.
12. **Accountability** – Team members are held accountable for their contributions to the team and for being a team player. Recognition is given to those who perform. Candid conversations with improvement plans are given to those that don’t.

As the legendary baseball player Babe Ruth said, *“The way a team plays as a whole determines its success. You may have the greatest bunch of individual stars in the world, but if they don’t play together, the club won’t be worth a dime.”*

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