

OPERATING PRINCIPLES FOR MANAGEMENT TEAMS

Effective management teams develop their own operating principles. This tool provides three different examples of operating principles that have been developed by actual teams. We recommend that your team review these principles and decide which ones to keep and which ones to modify. The team can then use these as a basis to ensure it works consistently and effectively together.

Team Operating Principles: First Example

1. Our first responsibility is to the success of the entire organization.
2. We are responsible for helping one another achieve important organizational goals. That is how we can be effective as a team.
3. As team members, we need to view each other as supports, not threats.
4. As team members, we have a right to hear first from each other about issues that affect us, not second-hand or via the “grapevine.”
5. Since we have a responsibility to help each other, we must bring tough issues to the table and discuss them with each other.
6. When discussing difficult issues, we have a responsibility to ask questions first before we reach conclusions. We need to understand the **G**oal (both of the current discussion and the long-range goal), the current **R**eality, the **O**ptions, and what we **W**ill do next and when.¹
7. When discussing difficult topics, we need to tackle the issue, not each other. In the course of questioning, our goal is to share data, assumptions, and our various perceptions, not attack each other’s positions.

Team Operating Principles: Second Example

1. We owe it to one another to communicate to each other first – good news and bad.
2. We have a right to expect that the information will come to us first about a new business.

¹ The GROW model of productive conversation was first described by John Whitmore, in “Coaching for Performance.”

3. We have a right to expect good quality communication – recognizing our different styles.
4. We are careful about making assumptions about each other's business.
5. We err on the side of over-communication.
6. We focus on big issues rather than on small issues.
7. We hold regular meetings, even if it's just for information sharing.
8. We make clear the decision-making roles of the group and individuals.
9. We ask challenging questions because we need to understand each other's business priorities and portray each other in the best light possible.
10. We don't assume that something is meant in a negative way – we check our assumptions.
11. It's okay for us to say "I don't know – I'll get back to you in 24 hours."

Team Operating Principles: Third Example

1. We communicate openly, honestly, and without prejudice.
 - We seek first to listen and understand, before seeking to be understood.
 - We build trust and view each other as supports.
 - We put issues in context, focus on the facts, and are not afraid to ask questions.
 - We respond promptly, and we provide consistent messages between business units.
2. We treat everyone, whether internal staff or external stakeholders, as our customer.
3. We are strategic in striving for our goals and embrace change to ensure progress
 - We prioritize and use our resources effectively
 - We continually improve the quality of our programs and services
 - We use a consultative process to obtain input on strategic directions, programs, and services
4. We are willing to sacrifice and share resources for the good of the organization.
 - We offer our best in terms of staff and information.
 - We are accountable for the organization's success.
5. We encourage creativity and innovation.
 - We make each person a part of the team by active employee participation.
 - We challenge the status quo.
 - We learn from our experiences.
 - We look for "out of the box" solutions.
6. We are committed to structured and well-run meetings.
 - We establish a clear agenda and scope and get the right people in the room.
 - We document action items and agreements, and we commit to follow through.