

TEAM OPERATING PRINCIPLES

Effective teams develop operating principles that describe the expectations of each team member in terms of communication. We recommend that your team review these examples and come up with their own operating principles. The team can then use these principles as a basis to ensure team members work 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 **Goal** (both of the current discussion and the long-range goal), the current **Reality**, the **Options**, and what we **Will** 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.
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.

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

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. Communication
 - Knowledge and information should be shared, not hoarded.
 - Bad news isn't like wine. It gets worse with age. The sooner we know the sooner we can react and address the issues.
 - If you don't understand something, ask questions. If you have a concern, communicate it right away.
2. Ownership
 - Challenge yourself to be an expert in your field.
 - Be willing to take on more responsibility when called upon.
 - Be constantly thinking about how we can do things better in our units, divisions and office. Share these ideas and work to make it happen.
3. Respect
 - Maintain an attitude of respect with your colleagues and stakeholders.
 - Know your role as a team member. Work collaboratively with others in the office and understand there are policies and procedures in place that should be followed.

Team Operating Principles: Fourth 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.