

TEAM OPERATING PRINCIPLES

Effective teams develop operating principles that describe the expectations of each team member in terms of their communication and interactions with one another. These are the daily “rules of the road” that help people understand how to navigate as they share information, engage in shared decision-making, and encounter challenges. We recommend that every team come up with its own operating principles. We also recommend that the team regularly review and refresh its operating principles, to make sure they remain relevant.

Executive Team Operating Principles: Example A

1. Once a decision is made, we speak as one.

Loyalty means giving your honest opinion when we are working through an issue, regardless of what other people think. Disagreement at that stage is great. But once the decision is made, the debate ends. From that point on, loyalty means executing that decision as though it were your own.

2. No surprises.

Bad news is not wine. It does not improve with age. If you do not want other people to jump in and you can handle it, that’s your call. But we never want to find out when it is too late for others to make a difference.

3. The burden of understanding is on us.

Don’t leave our meetings uncertain as to what is being conveyed. Keep asking questions until you are clear. Once you leave, however, the responsibility rests 100 percent with you to convey the information as clearly as you received it.

4. No triangulation.

If there are issues between team members, then go to each other and resolve it together. Don’t expect someone to referee. Only go to your boss if you can’t resolve it on your own after strenuous effort, and then come together. And bring at least one proposed solution or way forward.

5. Own the work

If you see a problem, own it. And own it until you’re satisfied that a process for solving it is well under way. At the same time, trust your managers; delegate to them; don’t get in their business.

Executive Team Operating Principles: Example B

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 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: Example C

1. We owe it to one another to communicate to each other first – good news and bad.
2. We have a right to expect good quality communication – recognizing our different styles.
3. We ask questions first, before we assert our point of view about a situation or issue.
4. We are careful about making assumptions about each other’s business.
5. We don’t intrude into each other’s business – when an item is shared with us for information, we don’t weigh in unless it directly affects us and our viewpoint hasn’t been considered.
6. We err on the side of over-communication.
7. We focus on big issues rather than on small issues.
8. We hold regular meetings, even if it’s just for information sharing.
9. We ask challenging questions because we need to understand each other’s point of view.
10. We speak positively about the work that each of us is doing. We don’t portray each other in a negative way.
11. We don’t assume that something is meant in a negative way – we check our assumptions.
12. It’s okay for us to say, “I don’t know – I’ll get back to you in 24 hours.”

Team Operating Principles: Example D

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 our investments of resources 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.