

Member Communication Experience

Developing Collaboration Skills for Better Performance

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Collaboration in the workplace is like the foundation of a well-built structure. Just like a construction project requires seamless coordination between architects, engineers, and trades, your own business should focus on a blend of talent, ideas, and effort from all employees. Unfortunately, most CEOs who are asked about the status of collaboration in their organizations say it is aspirational rather than a reality.

Perhaps that's because we fail to recognize that collaboration skills don't come naturally - they must be taught. And collaboration isn't really one skill, it is a combination of skills.

Based on this 2019 Harvard Business Review (HBR) research [article](#), here are four ways to develop collaboration skills in your employees and most critically, the leaders of your organization.

Teach People to Listen

Listening seems simple enough, right? But it's not. Too often we listen so that we can position our response, rather than to gather more information or seek to understand.

Interestingly, listening skills actually begin with questioning skills. It is important to ask the right kinds of questions in order to ensure all parties have a thorough understanding of the situation at hand. What and how questions naturally lead to gathering more data. Consider the difference between: Did you try using the hydraulic jack vs. What solutions have you tried so far? The first question will elicit a yes/no response whereas the second question will result in more details and explanation.



Train People to Understand Differing Perspectives

When you seek to understand why others have differing views, you have more constructive conversations. For example, group members can help one another solve issues they are experiencing in their business. The first 15 minutes of the "issue processing" method is devoted to asking open-ended/clarifying questions. Fellow CEOs cannot jump to solutions or provide advice until the problem is clearly defined and understood by all.

When people are truly heard and collaborators have a full understanding (not only of the facts, but also feelings, reasoning, what's been tried before, etc.), better solutions can be generated.

Make People More Comfortable With Feedback

Most of us are afraid of feedback – both giving it and receiving it. But why? According to the HBR research, as givers of feedback, we are afraid of hurting others feelings so we often backpedal, soften the points, or sugarcoat the reason for giving the feedback in the first place. For example, what is this sentence really saying? And would you feel compelled to take corrective action if your manager said this to you? *I know you have a long commute and with the road construction it's hard to plan ... but the team is counting on you to be there first thing, OK?* This sounds more like a pep talk than corrective feedback, doesn't it?


As receivers we often take feedback as a personal affront to our “character” rather than really hearing the behavior or performance that is being addressed.

One great way to teach people to be more comfortable with feedback is to model the process after the principles of improv comedy:

- » **First**, accept whatever is said to you and continue the dialog.
- » **Second**, say yes and build from there (yes and, not yes, but).
- » **Third**, make the other person look good.

Teach Leaders That Following is OK Too

In companies that make lightning-fast progress there is less emphasis on “who is the leader” and more emphasis on “how do we get to the end goal?” For example, on the jobsite, when a trade partner or vendor comes to you with a problem, ask them for their thoughts on possible solutions. They might have a faster, cheaper, or more quality approach than what you had thought of. When they experience your company as collaborative and allowing them to lead when appropriate, you'll find you have a trade partner who follows the rules and enjoys doing business with you.

Collaboration isn't just about the skills discussed or combining those skills, it's about embedding collaboration as an organization-wide practice in order to achieve faster and greater outcomes. But collaboration does start with teaching these critical and complementary skills. Why not set a goal for 2024 to dedicate a full month to developing collaboration skills in your employees? Plan to offer training, provide opportunities for practice, and have expert facilitators on hand to provide feedback and skill refinement. You will definitely see a change in culture and performance before the year is out. 



About the Author

Dr. Nanette Miner is a leadership development and workplace-learning strategy consultant. Through her firm, [The Training Doctor](#), she has revolutionized the way that individuals are prepared for leadership roles in their organizations. Rather than a chosen few, her process is aimed at ensuring everyone in the company has the skills and business acumen of a leader. This approach ensures both immediate and long-term return-on-investment (ROI) for an organization.

She has written articles for Chief Learning Office magazine, Forbes, and MBA World and is a frequent guest on workplace training and career podcasts and talk radio such as Inc. Radio and America's Workforce Radio.

Nanette regularly speaks at industry conferences and corporate learning events on how to integrate leadership capabilities throughout an organization. An author of eight books, her most recent is Future-Proofing Your Organization.

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