

A New Year – New Rules

Start the New Year as you mean to go on – agree a team contract that everybody signs up to

January is a great time to wipe the slate clean, put last year's issues and challenges behind you and start afresh.

If your team didn't work as well or as effectively as it could have done last year, why not start 2012 by drawing up a team contract?

A team contract is a set of agreed guidelines or ground rules that each team member agrees to live by. It determines in advance how meetings, inter-personal conflicts, team decisions, etc., will be handled.

Using a team contract that everyone has developed and signed up to helps to make problems that arise easier to resolve.

How to do it

Setting up a team contract is very straightforward. Follow the 4 simple steps below:

- Schedule a team meeting that all team members are able to attend
- Hold a discussion to draw out the ground rules that the team are in agreement to. Note that as much input and contribution as possible should be drawn from the team.
- Type up the agreed ground rules in the form of a contract
- All team members to sign the contract to confirm their acceptance of it and their adherence to it

It might be useful to distribute a copy of the contract to all team members, or alternatively display one prominently on the team notice board.

Re-visit the contract from time to time to ensure that it remains fit for purpose.

An example of a team contract is attached. You might want to use this as a starting point for a discussion with your team.

A. Commitments:	
As a team we will:	
1	Operate in a proactive manner, anticipating potential problems and working to prevent them before they happen.
2	Promptly notify our customer(s) and sponsor of any change that could affect them.
3	Keep stakeholders informed of our results and progress
4	Keep proprietary information about our customers in strict confidence.
5	Focus on what is best for the organisation as a whole.
6	See work through to completion.
B. Team Meeting Ground Rules: Participation	
As a team we will:	
1	Keep issues that arise in meetings in confidence within the team unless otherwise indicated.
2	Be honest and open during meetings.
3	Encourage a diversity of opinions on all topics.
4	Give everyone the opportunity for equal participation.
5	Be open to new approaches and listen to new ideas.
6	Avoid placing blame when things go wrong. Instead, we will discuss the process and explore how it can be improved.
C. Team Meeting Ground Rules: Communication	
As a team we will:	
1	Seek first to understand, and then to be understood.
2	Be clear and to the point.
3	Practice active, effective listening skills.
4	Keep discussions on track.
5	Use visual means such as drawings, charts, and tables to facilitate discussion.
D. Team Meeting Ground Rules: Problem Solving	
As a team we will:	
1	Encourage everyone to participate.
2	Encourage all ideas without criticism.
3	Build on each other's ideas.
4	Use team tools when appropriate to facilitate problem solving.
5	Whenever possible, use data to assist in problem solving.
E. Team Meeting Ground Rules: Decision Making	
As a team we will:	
1	Discuss criteria (cost, time, impact, etc.) for making a decision before choosing an option.
2	Encourage and explore different interpretations of data.
3	Get input from the entire team before a decision is made.
4	Discuss concerns with other team members during the team meetings or privately rather than with non-team members in inappropriate ways.
5	Ask all team members if they can support a decision before the decision is made.

F. Handling Conflict

As a team we will:

1	Regard conflict as normal and as an opportunity for growth.
2	Seek to understand the interests and desires of each party involved before arriving at answers or solutions.
3	Choose an appropriate time and place to discuss and explore the conflict.
4	Listen openly to other points of view.
5	Repeat back to the other person what we understand and ask if it is correct.
6	Acknowledge valid points that the other person has made.
7	State our points of view and our interests in a non-judgmental and non-attacking manner.
8	Seek to find some common ground for agreement.

G. Meeting Procedures:

1	Meetings will begin and end on time.
2	Team members will come to the meetings prepared.
3	Agenda items for the next meeting will be discussed at the end of each meeting.
4	An 'Icebox' will be used to park off-the-subject ideas and concerns.
5	Unresolved issues will be added to the issues list.
6	If a team member can not attend a meeting, we will nominate a representative to ensure they receive the relevant updates.
7	Meeting tasks will be rotated among members.

We the undersigned agree and commit to adhere to the ground rules outlined above.