



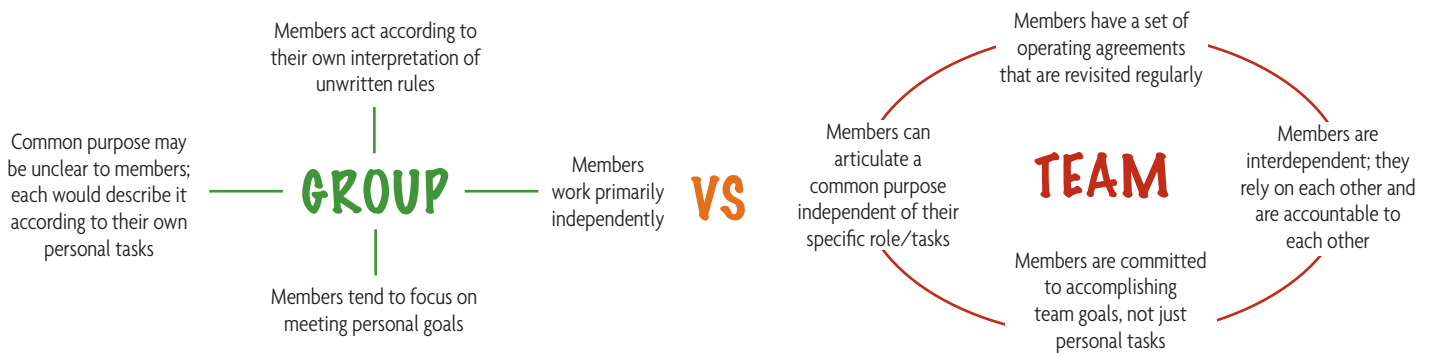
CREATING A HIGH PERFORMING TEAM

In the *Whole School, Whole Community Whole Child* model, teamwork is fundamental.

Members work together to define a common purpose and priority (School Health Improvement Plan), and the work is shared among many. Team members rely on each other to bring their “component perspective” to team decisions, and to collectively complete action steps and meet timelines. The team model supports the belief that “it takes a village”



There’s a big difference between a “group” of people working together and a “team” working together. Following are some defining characteristics of a group and a team:



But even tight-knit teams have their struggles. There are always conflicting demands on time in a school building. Members get pulled in all directions; team meetings may be rushed; and the team may feel like it’s been relegated to back-burner status. There are two basic strategies that every team should utilize: 1) Create operating agreements, and 2) Conduct effective meetings.

1. Create Operating Agreements

Operating agreements are the team’s collective agreements about how the team will function together over time. It’s best to create them early in the team’s development.

Characteristics of operating agreements:

- Written as observable behaviors (for example, “We will rotate the job of taking notes.”)
- Created and monitored by all team members
- Posted at team meetings
- Revisited and revised as needed

Sample operating agreements look like this:

- ▶ We will create a task list at every meeting.
- ▶ We will address conflict by talking directly and privately with the other person involved.
- ▶ We will make every effort to attend all team meetings. If we are absent, we will take responsibility to get caught up with team decisions within 48 hours.

2. Conduct Effective Meetings

Team meetings can propel the group forward or hinder the group’s progress, depending on how well they are managed. See the *Travel Guide: Making Meetings Matter* for ways to improve your meetings. In addition to incorporating the two basic strategies, the highest performing teams also demonstrate the following characteristics:

- Are fully accountable to each other
- Find ways to achieve buy-in, even when complete agreement is impossible
- Truly view mistakes as learning opportunities
- Creatively solve problems
- Are solution-driven
- Engage respectfully in unfiltered conflict around issues
- Trust each other
- Are willing to be vulnerable with each other
- Find the balance between content and process issues
- Value interdependence
- Forego personal credit to acknowledge team success
- Make decisions and follow through with confidence
- Change direction when needed and do it with confidence, not guilt or remorse
- Have a light-hearted side
- Reflect often on how they work as a team

CREATING A HIGH PERFORMING TEAM

TEN COMMON TEAM DILEMMAS and possible solutions

1. *Our team meetings seem disorganized and a bit haphazard.*

Develop a meeting agenda before each meeting and send it out. Only include items that are important at this time. Plan on discussion time for each item, which means you'll need to put less on the agenda overall.

2. *We keep bringing up the same issues at every meeting.*

Be sure to have someone responsible for taking notes at each meeting. Clearly document team decisions. Have these notes distributed and also available at subsequent meetings. Don't revisit decisions for which there has already been agreement.

3. *Some members agree to do a task, but they don't complete it, or they complete it late. It impacts everyone else.*

At every meeting, create a task list on chart paper. Write three columns: Task, Timeline, and Person Responsible. Write on this chart as tasks are identified during the meeting. Leave time at the end of the meeting to revisit and confirm tasks. Create an operating agreement like: "We agree to complete tasks on time. If we are unable to complete the task, we will renegotiate the timeline in advance and get team approval."

4. *Some of our team members regularly show up late to meetings or leave early.*

You may need to adjust your meeting length, frequency, or time of day. Ask members what would work better. Create an operating agreement that members will arrive on time and stay for the whole meeting.

5. *Team members started out enthusiastic and motivated, but seem to have little interest now.*

Most of us join teams because we are passionate about the team purpose and want to contribute. However, if a handful of people are making all the decisions and doing most of the work, others may lose interest and withdraw. Be intentional about identifying the individual strengths of team members and having them take on tasks that utilize their strengths and interests. A helpful operating agreement might be: "Each of us will commit to sharing the work by volunteering to take leadership on specific tasks."

6. *We never get through our agendas. Things are left hanging and we don't get around to the important items.*

There is simply too much on the agenda. Packed agendas don't leave enough time for group discussion and processing—both of which are critical for making good decisions. If there are items that can be shared in other ways (e.g., simple updates can be shared by email), don't put them on the agenda. One rule of thumb is to create an agenda and then cut it in half!

7. *We are working hard as a team, and moving through our activities, but we aren't really working well together. People are often frustrated with each other.*

Teams can get so caught up in tasks that they forget to pay attention to team dynamics and processes. Step back and talk about how the team is working together. At the end of every meeting, save five minutes for closure and have the team answer these two questions: 1) How did we work together today? and 2) What can we do differently to work more effectively as a team? You may need to create new operating agreements based on ideas for working better together.

8. *There's lots of grumbling about how much we are expected to do for this team.*

First, revisit the team member job description. Make sure everyone has a copy and agrees to the requirements. Some team members may choose to leave the team. That's okay. When you recruit new members, be sure they have the job description in advance and are in agreement with the work commitment (refer to Mile Marker 3 Travel Log in the School-level Roadmap for job description). Second, have a team discussion about how the work can be managed better. Perhaps there are tasks that could be done by a parent group, a community partner, or students. Third, it's possible the team took on too much this year. Revisit your School Health Improvement Plan and make adjustments.

9. *Oh no, our co-leaders are leaving!*

Be clear about the length of the term that the co-leaders will serve, and have a process in place to assign new co-leaders. A helpful structure is to have one co-leader stay on for another year and bring on a new co-leader to join him/her. That provides consistency from year to year. At the end of each school year, the team should decide on co-leaders for the following year.

10. *We did it! We made it through another school year. Now what?*

CELEBRATE! Plan a celebration for the team and the school. Let others know how much you've accomplished and how it impacts the school, staff, and students. This is the time to be visible and vocal about your successes. Plan a team retreat to debrief successes and challenges from the year. Talk about your SMART objective, how you accomplished it and how the team worked together; consider changes you might make in your operating agreements. Revisit team membership; you may have some members leaving and need to have a plan to replace them. Confirm your co-leaders for next year. Then enjoy summer!

TRAVEL LOG: TEAM TALK

Have your team members complete this worksheet individually. Schedule team time to explore responses and discuss implications.

I do my best work when:

Barriers for me in getting my work done and/or doing my best are:

The best way to communicate with me in our work environment is to:

Major stressors for me:

When I'm stressed, my behavior looks like:

Specific skills I bring to our team:

Other things I want my team to know:

TRAVEL LOG: IS YOUR TEAM REALLY READY TO WORK?

Answer the following questions about your School Health Team. You could use this mini-assessment as a springboard for discussion with your team. Ideally, you'd be able to answer YES to all questions.

1. Does your team have a written mission statement? <i>A mission statement would relate the work of your team to school priorities, e.g., "The school health team will support academic achievement by improving student health behaviors."</i>	Yes	No
2. Has your team clearly written its purpose? <i>e.g., implement the requirements of a specific grant, or implement a specific health initiative.</i>	Yes	No
3. If we interviewed your team members individually, would all of them be able to accurately articulate the team mission and purpose?	Yes	No
4. Have you written a "job description" for team members, including their roles, responsibilities, and length of service?	Yes	No
5. Have you written a "job description" of co-leaders, including their roles, responsibilities, and length of service?	Yes	No
6. Do you have a process in place to replace co-leaders?	Yes	No
7. If we interviewed your team members individually, would all of them describe their roles, responsibilities, and length of service similarly?	Yes	No
8. Does your team regularly re-visit team membership and make additions as needed?	Yes	No
9. Do you use the job description, purpose, and mission to recruit new members?	Yes	No
10. The team is clear about their level of authority and accountability. <i>Does everyone know to whom the team reports? Is everyone clear about the team's level of authority (e.g., what decisions the team can make alone, and what decisions need approval from someone else)</i>	Yes	No
11. Are meeting agendas sent out prior to meetings?	Yes	No
12. Are notes taken at every meeting and distributed to team members and others to whom the team is accountable?	Yes	No
13. Has your team created a set of team operating agreements? Are they available at every meeting and revisited occasionally?	Yes	No
14. Does the team create a task list at every meeting and include it in the notes?	Yes	No

TRAVEL LOG: IS YOUR TEAM REALLY READY TO WORK?, CONT.

Our team needs to work on the following:

- Team Mission

- Team Purpose

- Team member “job description”

- Co-leader “job description”

- Designated process to replace co-leaders

- Team membership

- Understanding our level of authority and accountability

- Creating and distributing meeting agendas in advance

- Taking and distributing meeting notes

- Creating and following through with task lists

- Creating team operating agreements

Other Notes:

