

Ten Commandments for Team Development

A Travel Free Learning Article

by

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My youngest son, Jacob, started high school this year, where he learned the importance of teamwork. His teachers introduced him to several projects he must complete with other students. Jacob shared with me that he is worried about this group work. His experience with group work has not been good to this point in his academic life. His declaration led to a long conversation about how important it is for everyone on the team to do their part.

As I later reflected on our conversation, I realized I need to do a better job of following my own advice. Much of the work I do with congregations and leaders involves teams and groups of people. How often do I try to make sure the people with whom I am working are connected and moving together as a team? How can I express the importance and value of team work in congregational life? That has led to the following list of Ten Commandments for my work with teams.

1. **You shall be clear about your purpose as a team.** High performance teams are able to keep a strong focus on the reason they are together. People come together with lots of gifts, abilities, and experiences. The purpose is what keeps them together. When a team gets misaligned, they lose energy and struggle with meetings. How do you clarify your team purpose when you gather as a team? How do you keep the purpose before the group?
2. **You shall remember that there is a difference between a group and a team.** According to the reading I do, we gather groups of people for different reasons. A group can be small or large. Teams function best when they are small—less than 10 people—and can be clearly focused on their reason for being. Teams are expected to perform specific results; groups are just happy to get together and hope they come to an outcome. Many of groups in church call themselves a team, but they do not spend the time and steps that it takes to become a team.
3. **You shall come up with a team covenant that acknowledges the expectations and ground rules for our work together as a team.** Some coaches who work with teams use words like “code of conduct” for their covenant. Effective teams develop these covenants together rather than having them imposed by the leader or organization. Make your covenant short and sweet, and then keep it before the team constantly. What covenant does your team have with each other? If your team does not have a covenant, how can you work on a covenant?
4. **You shall spend time getting to know the gifts and experiences of team members.** Every team member brings their uniqueness to the team. Also, personalities are diverse and respond to situations differently. How do you acknowledge the diverse gifts of each team member? How do you learn about the personalities and learning styles of each member?
5. **You shall discuss how you will handle disagreements and conflict.** Every team will have disagreements about how things will be done, or how a decision is made. Most teams do not take the time to think about how they will handle these disagreements. I have found when you are not proactive in your response to these disagreements; conflict can easily turn personal and unhealthy. How have you agreed to handle conflict in your team? What is in your team covenant about disagreements? How is going to call attention to these dynamics on your team?
6. **You shall make sure your team meetings begin with history sharing.** Take the time each meeting to find out something new about your colleagues. Maybe this sharing is as simple as what has happened in your personal lives since the last time you were together. Some teams take the time

to learn something about the history of the person and the journey. One of my favorite activities with a team when we first gather is to allow everyone to share how they got their name. Most people have some type of story around their name. Many books and resources have been written that share specific ways you can create this history sharing. How do you begin your meetings? How do you allow people to get to know each other and the stories they are living?

7. **You shall hold each other accountable for the work of the team.** What does accountability look like on your team? How do you help a team member who comes up short with the work they agreed to do?
8. **You shall spend a significant amount of time encouraging other members of the team.** Encouragement is a needed element in our lives today. When we gather to work together in our congregations, we should find ways to encourage each other. While we should make sure we follow commandment number 7 and hold each other accountable, encouragement should be a requirement for every member of the team. How do you encourage the other members of your team?
9. **You shall make sure everyone on the team participates in team meetings and has assignments to carry out for the team.** Some people are naturally quiet and may not say much during a meeting. Other people internalize their thoughts before they share them. Make sure everyone has the opportunity to share what they are thinking about a team decision, or has a chance to participate in the action of the team. When I am coaching a team, I keep a chart and mark how much people participate in the discussion. If I see someone has been left out, I intentionally make the effort to include them in the discussion. How can you address this participation in your team covenant? How do you make sure someone does not dominate your team discussions? What specific steps do you take to make sure that everyone has “buy-in” into the actions of the team?
10. **You shall celebrate the completion of your work as a team.** We have a difficult time celebrating our work in congregations. I encourage every team with whom I work to talk at the very beginning of their process as to how they will celebrate together when they complete their task. Some of our congregational teams seem never-ending. However, remember that every team has a clear purpose and expectation. What results are you expecting? How can you celebrate the completion of that task as a team? How can the congregation help with the celebration of your work?

The list is not complete. It is a start. What are commandments you would add to this list for team development? What responsibility do team leaders have for coming up with their own lists?

Jesus knew how to work with a team of disciples. He moved the disciples from a group of twelve to a team of people who, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, changed the world. He loved them, encouraged them, asked them hard questions, taught them, and sent them out to take care of their responsibilities. How can our teams help our congregations transition and change? How can you move some of your groups who call themselves teams to be highly effective teams that move the congregation forward?

Note: Join us Wednesday, September 22, at 2:00 p.m. EDT for the Travel Free Learning Dialogue as we discuss the *Ten Commandments for Team Development*. Maybe we can discover additional ways to make our groups more effective. If you miss this live dialogue, go to www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org and the Travel Free Learning Dialogues link to listen to the recording of this session.

Important Things to Know

Ken Kessler is a Ministry Colleague with The Columbia Partnership. He is also on staff with the Virginia Baptist Mission Board. The Columbia Partnership is a non-profit Christian ministry organization focused on transforming the capacity of the North American Church to pursue and sustain Christ-centered ministry. **Travel Free Learning** is a knowledge sharing emphasis. For more information about products and services check out the web site at www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org, send an e-mail to Client.Care@TheColumbiaPartnership.org, or call 803.622.0923.