



Collaborating with Employees

One of the major challenges of running any organization is effectively enlisting the input of employees to help achieve operational goals.

Managers are often uncomfortable with this across-the-board, rather than top-down, supervisory style, but when it's done correctly such a method can take what might have been a lackluster business

*"One of the tests of leadership is the ability to recognize a problem before it becomes an emergency."
- Arnold H. Glasow*

and turn it into a shining example of how the input of everyone on a team can improve performance and profitability.

The key is combining what you might already know as a manager with the ability to form networks of informal collaboration within your company or team.

Use What You Know –

Establish well-defined roles, formal accountability structures and best practice processes. Just because you're opening things up to collaboration doesn't mean all the old ways of doing things go out the window.

Adopt a More Informal

Process – Employee collaboration requires a more open and free-form dialog across all levels of the team. These informal interactions – by their very nature – take place outside the traditional business structure of prepared reports

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and scheduled meetings. This goes beyond the token “open door” policy to maintaining open lines of communication with employees and being receptive to unsolicited contact regarding the ongoing work of the team.

Everyone Has Something to Offer – For true collaboration your team will need to include representatives from a variety of levels within your organization. One of the key values of collaboration is getting to see your organization and its processes from different points of view.

Embrace Collaborative Technology – Modern computing and communication tools make this much easier for everyone, whether your organization is a centralized office

environment, is a national or global operation, or relies on remote workers in a “virtual” office. The key is to choose a venue that will work for everyone and establish guidelines regarding its use. For instance, set parameters for how the group collaborates within the chosen informal venue and decide on protocols for contacting superiors, which might best be done in a more formal manner.

It’s Still Business – However you and your employees choose to stay in touch, remember that “informal” doesn’t mean you’re allowed to abandon business protocols or common courtesy. If your group chooses a virtual venue like Skype, online messaging or chat windows, make sure everyone understands that a chat window displaying “Away” or “Do Not Disturb” means exactly that. Also, be respectful of team members’ time. A message asking, “Do you have a minute?” rather than just launching into a question can go a long way toward smoothing an interaction.

Remember, It’s the Internet – That means nothing really disappears and workflow tracking can bring to light everything your group has shared.

JEFF BLEACHER



“Collaboration can’t be ignored in today’s fast-paced business environment. A business that values the perspectives of employees at different levels of the organization is one that will build strength, maintain cohesiveness and speed decision making.”

KEN FALK (on the right)



“It’s sometimes during the most surprising moments that our clients work out solutions along with other team members. Employees are often thinking about better ways to do their jobs, so the value of collaborating with employees and encouraging them to share with each other can’t be overestimated.”

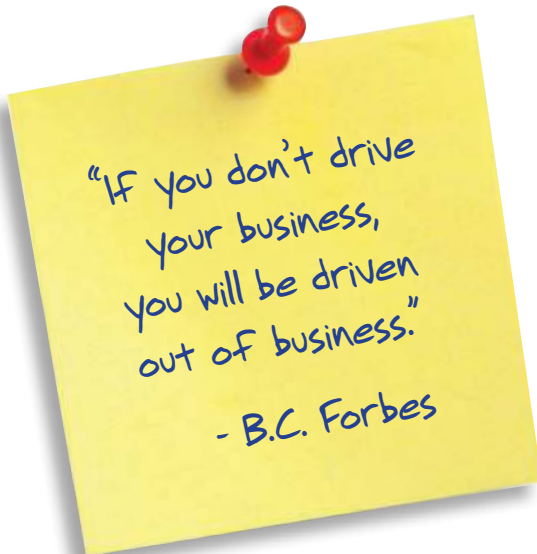
“The way to get things done is not to mind who gets the credit for doing them.”
- Benjamin Jowett



Collaborating with Employees

Stay professional and on-topic and there's less danger of your interactions somehow being used against you or your team.

Take the Opportunity to Mentor – Collaboration with different levels of your team can bring to light members who have exceptional potential and are looking for someone at a higher level to share expertise and help guide them toward their goals.



Recognizing these individuals can help you groom the organization's next rising star.

Don't Overcommunicate

– Not everyone on your team needs to be copied on every email or included in each interaction. Use good judgment in communicating without being exclusive.

Know Your Team's Culture

– Particularly with international teams, understand overseas members' schedules and views on communication outside of work hours. Keep communications straightforward and avoid online shorthand, region-specific slang or metaphors that won't carry over. The meaning of "step up to the plate" is lost on those who live in a country where they don't play baseball.

LARRY REICH



"A good team leader knows that he or she doesn't hold the power of the team. That power to effect change and come up with great ideas comes from the members of the team as a whole working together and sharing their thoughts outside of structured environments."

PATRICK GENDRUE (on the left)



"When employees know that their team leader values their input and wants to hear their ideas, it breeds creativity, positive energy and engagement among team members, which results in better business decisions and greater profitability."

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