**Why Collaboration Often Fails (and How to Deal With It)**

Collaboration is a great way to solve certain problems, but we’ve all hit that wall when we’re told to “work together.”

You know what I mean – that point where, no matter what you try, you are not able to get traction or hit your stride.

When we get stuck in situations like these, it’s often because we’re practicing certain behaviors that make collaboration much harder. Worse still, it makes it much easier for your team to fail.

This post is going to explore some of these dangerous behaviors and explain how you can beat them.

**1. When Collaboration Becomes Groupthink**

Collaboration happens when people come together in groups to solve problems.

One common belief about effective collaboration is that people will contribute more when they are free of the fear associated with criticism.

However, the [complete absence of criticism results in groupthink, and this reduces your team’s overall creativity](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2012/01/30/120130fa_fact_lehrer?currentPage=2).

According to studies performed by Charlan Nemeth, a professor of psychology at the University of California at Berkeley, “While the instruction ‘Do not criticize’ is often cited as the important instruction in brainstorming, this appears to be a counterproductive strategy.”

It appears that debate and criticism don’t inhibit ideas, but rather, stimulate them.

The solution to avoiding groupthink when collaborating in business is to [foster debate within your groups](http://www.proformative.com/articles/constructive-debate-can-positively-affect-workforce), not to stifle it.

**2. When People Confuse Collaboration with Teamwork**

Did you know that [there’s a difference between collaboration and teamwork](http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2011/09/collaboration_is_misunderstood.html)? For the longest time, I sure didn’t.

I always thought they were the same thing. Let’s look at it a little more closely:

* Teamwork happens when a group of people are put together by a manager with a common goal. They have different skills and knowledge, and are kept on track by a leader.
* Collaboration happens when a group of people work together for individual goals. They may use each other’s skills and knowledge to move their own goals forward, but since they don’t have a common goal, it’s not necessary for them to help each other.

Knowing this difference can make it easier to collaborate. Simply provide the group with [clear rules](http://hbr.org/2007/11/eight-ways-to-build-collaborative-teams/) and [foster trust](http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2011/07/one_thing_that_makes_collaboration.html) between the individuals.

**3. When People Get Lost in Departments and Silos**

Part of what people have to do when they collaborate is answer the question, [“What can we do together that we cannot achieve apart](http://contactzilla.wpengine.com/blog/10-things-every-manager-should-know-about-team-collaboration/#more-505)?”

It’s an important question and one that, if not answered and understood, can stop your collaborative endeavor in its tracks.

All collaborative work requires some time apart – it helps to clarify ideas and goals. It is, however, important to come together to share them.

This lets you:

* See things from a different perspective
* Spur your own work into new areas
* Move the entire organization forward more quickly than you would otherwise

**4. When Making a One Person Decision**

As collaboration often involves bringing together people with conflicting priorities, you’ve got to make sure that the project needs to be handled collaboratively.

Remember, not everything is solved by bringing people together. Ensuring that [the right conditions for success](http://www.businessweek.com/management/collaboration-is-misunderstood-and-overused-09022011.html) are there before deciding to collaborating is key.

[Assess each project](http://www.businessweek.com/management/collaboration-is-misunderstood-and-overused-09022011.html) before you decide to bring people together.

**5. When We Confuse Delegation with Collaboration**

Just like there’s a difference between teamwork and collaboration, there’s also a difference between delegation and collaboration.

The other people in the group aren’t there to complete your work, they’re there to work on their own projects, while helping the other members of the group complete their projects.

Each individual’s work contributes to the whole, but it doesn’t mean you can pawn your work off on others. Knowing the difference between [collaboration](http://contactzilla.wpengine.com/blog/10-things-every-manager-should-know-about-team-collaboration/#more-505) and [delegation](http://contactzilla.wpengine.com/blog/5-ways-to-use-your-connections-to-outsource-tasks/) can help keep your project on target.

Collaboration is one of those buzzwords in business that can really stop people in their tracks.

We think that by proactively addressing some of these factors that can cause collaboration to fail, you’ll be more likely to succeed.

How has your organization used collaboration? Did it work for you, or fail miserably?

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