

The ABCs of Work: Team

Career Development



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Is there a formula for success at work? Are there simple rules that you can follow to increase your chances of getting what you want? Career Path columnist James Bellerjeau thinks the answer is yes. In this series of articles, *The ABCs of Work*, he shares the formula with you.

Greetings readers and congratulations! Simply by virtue of being here you are already on the path to increasing your odds of success. While luck plays a gigantic role in life, that does not mean you are helpless to control your fate. If you want to think of it this way, the tips we'll explore are ways to increase your odds that luck will find you.

Today we examine the many benefits that accrue to you when you are a **Team** player.

Last time we explored how Stress is necessary to strong performance, while too much stress is

counterproductive. Today we discuss how working well with your Team enhances everyone's performance.

From solo performer to team performer

This happens to all lawyers as their careers progress. They start out as individual performers. Then they begin working on projects in teams. With a little adjustment, they learn to work cooperatively.

Some lawyers then start to lead project teams, or go on to manage teams. Some stop here. The best find ways to strategically leverage teams for the teams' (and their) greater success.

Eventually, every great performer has found support from an army of teammates. To increase your odds, follow my simple rule: help your colleagues at every turn, even more than they help you.



A great leader is supportive and assists their teammates at any opportunity they can. Viktoria Kurpas / *Shutterstock.com*

If you're concerned about people taking advantage of your generosity, see Career Path: Can You Be Too Good at Your Job?

Question, comment? Contact Career Path columnist James Bellerjeau.

Sometimes the team holds you back

Although teams can be a great driver of performance, sometimes they'll make you miserable. Not only that, a misfiring team will make strong performance impossible. In such cases, you're better finding a way to stay away.

Here are team dynamics to avoid or fix (see next section):

- **Unclear purpose**. When team members understand the project goals differently, or worse, can't say what the goals are, the team cannot function. This is a failure of leadership communication.
- **Insufficient resources**. Team with clear purposes will fail if they lack resources. A low- or no-budget team is a nice-to-have that the business will let politely fail.
- **Backstabbing teammates**. We've all met them. Teammates who think progress is a zero-sum game. The least harmful are those who claim credit for themselves. The worst think this requires them to undermine their teammates.



Stay aware of colleagues that have low morale and are hard to trust. wei / *Shutterstock.com*

- **Glory-hounding boss**. If you can suffer a credit-claiming colleague, it is far more dangerous in a boss. Why? A boss who takes credit for the team's work kills everyone's motivation. The boss's temporary gain is undone by the team's sudden lack of forward progress.

Turning teamwork to your advantage

It behooves us to find ways to work well with teams that are underperforming. Let's face it. We're likely to be confronted in our careers with this particular nightmare. Here are some ways to turn those losing teams around.

Use your in-house right to ask questions to uncover purpose and build consensus around that purpose.

When budgets are scarce, find adjacent projects that are flush with cash and hitch your fortunes to theirs. For more on this, see Career Path: How to Implement a Project with Lackluster Management Support.

When teammates are cruel, call them on their bad behavior. Do it loudly and publicly, at least within the team. You may not cause their bad behavior to cease, but you'll isolate their effect.

Be careful with the greedy boss, because interfering with their glory-seeking can backfire. Take solace in that your boss's bosses likely know very well the team is behind the work. If appropriate, commend a colleague's extraordinary contribution (never your own) directly to senior management.

Honorable mentions

Leveraging a single tip to drive work success is a heavy lift, even a tip as important as knowing how to work well with teams. Our formula will necessarily be incomplete. But the formula has impact, and all the more so because we've kept things simple. Here to finish are some honorable mentions to serve as food for thought.

Temporary — There's a saying among Ironman athletes I like a lot: *pain is temporary, winning is forever*. An alternative: *tough times don't last, tough people do*. When we're neck deep in mud, it's hard to bring to mind the thought "This too shall pass." Get into the habit of recalling it – both good times and bad times will pass. Make sure to enjoy the fun times. And have faith that the bad times will also soon recede into memory.

Trust — After your judgment, the most valuable asset you possess as in-house counsel is others' trust. "Wait," you're wondering. "How can I possess something that's in someone else's hands?" You establish others' trust slowly, event-driven, on the back of shared hard times. To earn trust, be trustworthy. And you must also gain your team's trust. To gain trust, show trust.

Be well.

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Bellerjeau shares thoughts on how to live a good life at Klugne. You can also follow him on LinkedIn.