

# Are the Lack of Team Norms Sabotaging Your Team's Success?

Key Point: Norms enable high performing teams to discuss behaviours that help/hinder their success

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Are there undercurrents of tension in your team?

No-one in particular is breaking any rules. But there's some on-going niggling, people clashes. There are behaviors and actions that prevent your team from being all that it could be? If you so, one of the causes may be you haven't clearly documented team norms.

## What Exactly Are Team Norms?

Norms are the bridge between principles and rules. Let's start with a couple of definitions.

Rules state exactly what must occur, when and how. Rules are prescriptive and you shouldn't deviate from what it says to do.

**Principles** are more general than rules. They guide people to what should occur, but don't provided the 'how' to do it. (Read here [how to develop principles](#)).

To bridge the gap between the closely defined 'how' to do it of rules, and the more loosely defined 'guide', of principles we use norms. Norms can sound like rules. But the difference between a rule and a norm is in how you apply the norm.

In effect with norms you are saying, "This is what we normally expect to see happen, but we do understand that occasionally circumstances may cause you to perform outside the norm".

For example, you may have a team norm that states "Team members will be at their machine ready for a shift handover 10 minutes before the start of their shift".

Normally this is what occurs. However, one team member may well have a partner sick in hospital and for a period of several weeks the team is more than happy for this team member to come in at a different time.

### Hot Tip

If you haven't previously articulated team norms, rest assured your team already has in place a set of informal norms.

The challenge you face is, is that some of these norms may well not be the type that encourage high performance.

For example, maybe you have these types of informal team norms that could be creating problems:

- ✓ Team members avoid giving each other direct feedback at all costs, preferring to talk about each other behind their backs
- ✓ If the meeting start time is 10.30 everyone will show up sometime between then and 10.45
- ✓ If you finish your work then rest. Do not do anymore work, as that puts too much pressure on your team mates to perform at high levels

# Advantages of Creating Team Norms

## 1. Reduces Conflict & Stress within the Team

Team member conflict is reduced when people know what's expected. Team members arrive in organizations with their own rules, attitudes, values, beliefs and personality styles.

For example, for one team member (Ted) being a couple of minutes late to a meeting for a meeting is no big deal. For another, (John) latecomers to meetings are disrespectful. And these types of personal beliefs and attitudes are the small beginnings to what can become major conflict.

Having a team norm such as "Be on Time", that is accepted by all, will reduce conflict and stress between these two team members.

If, Ted is being consistently late, then John can say, "Hey we have a team norm that says, 'Be On Time'. I've noticed the last few meetings you haven't been - can we talk about what it is going to take, for you to get to the meetings on time".

## 2. Enables Team Members to Hold Each Other Responsible Without Having to Third Wheel the Team Leader

Sticking with our 'late to meetings' scenario: because the team



norm is in place it stops Ted saying, "And who died and left you in charge!" when the issue is raised with him by John.

Without the norm, John would be left with little place else to go but, "*Well that's the right thing to do according to me*".

With norms in place John can respond with "*This is one of the team norms that we all agreed to. If you think the norm needs changing or don't want to work within its framework, or if you think I'm misinterpreting it, then let's raise it with the team*".

Norms enable team members to quickly provide each other with feedback when they see performance is going off the rails. And more importantly, without having to resort to the Team Leader to

run interference. This is one of the hallmarks of high performance teams.

Having said that, team members providing each other with feedback is often one of the most challenging (and often the last to get done well) aspects of high performance teams. To further enhance your understanding of team development you may like to read about [team pillars](#). In particular access the “Managing Individual Performance” team pillar which illustrates the behaviors you can expect as team members progress from relying on the Team Leader to give performance feedback through to doing it themselves.

### **3. Enables Team Members to Focus On their Goals & Objectives**

Teams come together to achieve some type of goal or objective ... BUT how much time do you (and others) lose every day because of team conflicts? When there are niggling issues and conflicts going on, team members spend an inordinate amount of time on the niggles rather than on the business at hand - which is to achieve their strategic purpose.

Teams know the behaviors which are holding them back from achieving their individual and team goals and the behaviors that are needed in order to succeed.

Team norms are best developed by team members. And, because 97% of people want to feel that what they do at work is important ... you can guarantee that they will want to develop norms around those behaviors that have slipped into the team (or could slip into the team) that will hold them back from feeling successful.

## How To Develop Team Norms

1. Make sure every single team member is there. (It is best that if someone is missing, you postpone the meeting. You want every single team member committed to these norms. If they aren't a part of developing them, you may later find resistance)
2. Brainstorm all the issues that are creating tension in the team.
3. Agree to the top 10 (you can add more later, but getting started with fewer is more effective)
4. Brainstorm the opposite of the problem. For example, if unproductive meetings is an issue then the opposite would be productive meetings, where action items are clearly assigned and what we decide makes a difference.

Articulate the norms using the following framework:

If we are to (state the positive outcome desired) then we (state the expected behavior/s). For example: If we are to have productive team meetings then we

- ✓ Start and finish on time,
- ✓ Use an outcome oriented agenda and action list and
- ✓ Only one person speaks at a time.

## Tips To Make Sure You Team Norms Are Successfully Implemented

- ✓ At your initial brainstorming session, use an external facilitator who is not caught up in the personality issues.
- ✓ Make sure the norms are written down and each team member signs off that they are committed to using the norms. Committed to providing each other with prompt constructive feedback when a norm is not being upheld.
- ✓ Post them somewhere prominent.
- ✓ At least once a month, review at a team meeting, how effectively the norms are being applied. Whether they are still relevant or if others need to be included.
- ✓ Be wary of using the norms as a rule book. They are simply how you normally expect people to perform. Don't try to

legislate every single conflict - keep to the more important issues.

- ✓ Applying team norms calls for good judgment. Have you ever encountered a couple of misbehaving children and you had to sort out their behavior? One child you simply look at sternly and a torrent of tears ensues? Yet their sibling requires the strongest hauling over the coals in order to get them to change their behavior.

Correcting the misbehavior is the norm.

How you do it, calls for your good judgment.

The same with team norms. If someone is going off the rails you must call attention to their behavior. How this is done ... that calls for good judgment. Developing the skills of [providing others with feedback](#) is critical to any high performance team.

- ✓ When new team members join, as part of their induction process, have a team member take them through the norms and explain why each one is important and how to apply it for best effect.

## Sample Team Norms

- ✓ We show respect when we listen without being defensive and speak without being offensive

- ✓ We have a tidy workplace when we put everything in its place and clean up after ourselves
- ✓ If you are going to be absent from work, you organize an alternative to cover your duties
- ✓ We improve our productivity when we have running shift handovers, all logs are read before the start of the shift and the new team member coming on is adequately briefed by the handover person
- ✓ We adhere to meeting and agenda times
- ✓ Only one person speaks at a time
- ✓ Every meeting has a designated facilitator and minute taker
- ✓ You organize an alternative to take your role if you are going to be absent
- ✓ We voice our opinion during the meeting, not after
- ✓ If a person is late to a meeting they are responsible for discovering what they have missed after the meeting. The meeting should not be disrupted to go over information that has been previously discussed
- ✓ A person who is regularly late or misses meetings, will be asked to leave the group. (We will assume they are not committed to the objectives of the meeting)
- ✓ Absences are notified before the meeting commences

- ✓ All team members are involved and encourage quieter team members to have their say
- ✓ Minutes are typed up and posted within 24 hours
- ✓ Action lists are generated and published for every meeting. Actions are completed by their due date

High Performance Teams take the time to clearly articulate and agree the norms that will enable them to function effectively, efficiently and cohesively.

Diminish stress and conflict in your team by giving them the tools to sort through and minimize the number of divisive issues they are confronted with.

Team Norms are just one of the tools in your tool bag to setting your team well along the path of high performance.

## About Shelley Holmes

Using tools, tips, ideas and strategies that help them to be really clear about what is 'success critical' and how to get there fast, **Shelley guides leaders to flourish as they live, love and lead at a remarkable level** .... making the dent in the universe they are destined to.

For several years, Shelley was a key leader in a High-performance Organization (that had national and international recognition). It is this real-world experience that underpins and brings to life the theory and insights gained, from her deep study of high-performance leadership.

Around the globe, she has worked with organizations (with total revenues in excess of \$116 billion) and supports thousands of individual leaders through, coaching, consulting, workshops, webinars, audio programs and the Make A Dent Leadership website (which has over 5,000 visitors per day).

### **Shelley's Philosophy...**

**Whether you like it or not, the way that you show up at work defines you as a human being.**

On grand and small scales, the way you interact with others, the products and services you are a part of delivering, all roll together to become a part of the legacy that you leave behind. The way you deal with others, the things you teach them, that cause them to grow, and become a better version of themselves .... as individuals, work colleagues, leaders, and parents ... now that defines who you are!

There are hundreds of resources like this at [Make A Dent Leadership](#) where you can join our community of leaders who are focusing on being inspired and inspiring and making their dent in the universe.

If you are ready to be the best possible version of yourself, to lead with more energy and passion than you thought possible... if you are ready to make a dent in the universe ... then visit:

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