

TEAM WORKING

Successful teams have common goals and objectives. They also often have other things in common: they're clear about what they're doing and why, they understand their individual roles and responsibilities, and have a balance of skills and strengths which combine to achieve results.

So, how can we each contribute to team success?

Clearly we need to work for the good of the *whole* team - we need to understand what we have to offer and how we contribute not just to our own success, but to the bigger picture.

The idea of flying geese is often used to describe this:

When geese are flying in **formation**, they succeed in a way that would be impossible in isolation. They have to be in agreement about where they need to go.

As each goose moves its wings, it creates a support stream for the birds that follow. By flying in a 'V' formation the geese add 71 percent extra to the distances they can fly.

When a goose is tired of flying at the front, it moves back to take advantage of the lifting power of the birds in front, and someone else takes up the leading position.

*So it pays to **take turns** doing the harder tasks, or the less attractive ones.*

When a goose gets sick, the other geese drop out of formation and follow it down to the ground to help and protect it.

So they look after each other and offer support in difficult times.

They cry out to each other to encourage them to keep up -

*They use active, audible encouragement. They **praise** and feedback.*

How can we apply this in our own work?

We can understand how our tasks fit in with what other people are working on, and make sure we all see how they fit together, within a clear plan. Work out what your greatest strengths are in the team and make sure you use them. Know your strongest place in the formation of the team and stay open to that changing as you develop.

There are lots of simple things we can do to support each other and have better communication and an easier day together. Let's apply this to a team meeting.

1. Listen to other people's points of view, try and understand them (step into their shoes for a while), and don't assume you know what someone is thinking without asking them.

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2. If you need to interrupt, find a way of adding value to what is being said, so that the other person speaking won't be offended.
3. Understand that people have different preferred styles: it's easy to forget that not everyone thinks, feels, or sees the world like us.

Whatever their – or our - preferences, obviously we need to be respectful and diplomatic. It might make me feel better to express bad feelings or moods in the short term, but it probably won't make my colleagues happy and it might mean that they don't share difficult issues with me in the future. It's important that different kinds of personality and approach are respected and appreciated, as a strong team needs a range of types who are able to pull together.

Above all, remember the geese: flying in formation, they achieve things that wouldn't be possible on their own. That's what team members are for.