

4 collaboration mistakes that can hurt your group's work

When you're collaborating with other people, it's not enough to work alongside them. To arrive at the best possible outcome, you need to work *with* them. That means being open to their ideas and willing to incorporate their feedback. And it means avoiding these common mistakes, which could lead to mediocre results—and hurt your reputation and relationships along the way.

1. Racing ahead without agreeing on what success looks like



Your team is assigned a big project and you figure, *I might as well get going on my part!* But does your idea of success match your teammates'? If you don't align with other people working on the project, it's hard to be sure that your approach is right. You could waste your time (and team resources) on something that's out of sync with the rest of the group—or even derail the project.

For example, your project team needs to create a proposal, and you volunteer to write two key sections. Your sections might turn out perfect ... according to you. But if you contradict what your teammates write in their sections or use a strategy or voice that's jarringly different from theirs, the proposal could fail.

What to do instead: Get together with your team at the start to talk about what success looks like and how you'll measure it. Be specific about what to do and what to avoid. In the case of a proposal, it's not enough to define success as “winning the bid.” Align on key details like the most important messages to highlight, which data to include, and what tone to use throughout.

Listen carefully to everyone's input and be open to changing the plan you had in mind for your part of the work. You want to help the team arrive at something that reflects your *collective* goals and intelligence—not just your individual brilliance.

For more, see [5 fundamental questions to answer before starting any project](#).

2. Considering only the needs and views of your immediate team members

By definition, a great team player focuses on *their team*. But whom do you consider to be on your team? If you count only the people immediately around you, you're thinking too small.

For example, a salesperson at a cell phone store might over-prioritize meeting their team's sales goal and ignore the needs of the people servicing the phones. The salesperson might promise a feature that's not available for some customers, leading to complaints and canceled orders later on. Or they might rush through explanations, leaving buyers with complicated questions they need to ask customer service.

What to do instead: Think through the effects your work may have on other teams and stakeholders, especially those who aren't around or who might stay quiet because of the power dynamics involved. That could mean asking about the consequences of what you and your team are doing (e.g., “*How might X affect the operations team—should we talk to them beforehand?*”). And make a habit of directly asking other colleagues involved with your work about its impacts and how to improve it. You'll do everyone a favor by avoiding potential misunderstandings, conflicts of interest, and subpar work.

3. Finalizing work without getting feedback on it first

Cutting out an internal review or another chance for feedback from your co-workers might seem like a great way to save time. But it rarely is. You'll have to backtrack if it turns out that what you're doing won't work for a key group.

What to do instead: Rather than try to get everything right, right away, follow a process of iteration. Say you're designing a page for your company's internal website. You might:

1. Design a mock-up of the page and test it with some of your colleagues. Can they navigate the page easily? Is it accessible for people with disabilities?
2. Incorporate their feedback into the design.
3. Ask key stakeholders, like the head of your department, to review the page. Does the page include all the information they expect?
4. Incorporate their feedback before you make the page available to the whole company.

While there may be time or budget reasons for cutting back on how much feedback you get, try to streamline that phase rather than skip it. For example, you can still get useful information from testing a new tool with five people who will be using it, rather than 25.

For more, see [4 ways to lead a project team that proactively seeks to improve your project](#).

4. Getting so attached to your ideas that you refuse to incorporate other people's perspectives

It's only human to fall in love with your own ideas from time to time. Or to keep pushing forward with your preferred approach, even if it's not working as well as it could.

But when you get overly attached to your idea, you close off hearing differing ideas or taking feedback. Doing so means [you're likely to miss out on the very best ideas](#)—next-level solutions nobody could have found on their own. Plus, refusing to compromise or change your mind could create conflict with your co-workers, damaging their trust in you and the whole group's creativity.

What to do instead: Adopt a mindset of openness and curiosity. Instead of hoping your ideas get accepted, hope they get challenged, elevated, revised, and maybe even rejected—that will mean you're learning. Look for ways to build on others' contributions and be willing to change your views or approach based on the feedback you gather. The point is not to be right—but to arrive at the best possible outcome.

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