

## Setting Team Norms

### What are team norms and why are they important?

Norms are a list of expected behaviors that create a set of shared values and boundaries that define a team's culture. They ensure that everyone on the team understands how they are expected to act. Norms also help teams navigate difficult situations by serving as a reminder of what the team values and by enabling team members to name and discuss actions that violate the norms.

### How can I set norms with my team?

While you may have your own norms in mind, to ensure your team's full commitment, it's best to engage the entire team in the process of establishing the norms – and if they miss something that is critical to you, you can still add it to the list with the team's agreement.

Since norms set the foundation for how the team will operate, it's best to set them during the first or second meeting. But it's also never too late to set norms – in fact, they can be a useful tool for course correction.

Begin by explaining what team norms are and why they are important so that team members understand what you are looking for. Then simply ask participants to throw out any norms that they feel are critical to the team's effectiveness. For each norm offered, ask the other team members if they agree and/or if they would improve upon the norm in any way. While it can be hard to draw out a conversation with a new team, this step is critical to ensuring that all team members are committed to the norms. Record the norms somewhere visible.

Once the team has exhausted its ideas, review the list as a team and look for opportunities to consolidate repetitive concepts – ideally, the list should include **between five and seven (and no more than 10) norms**. Edit them for brevity and clarity – the best norms are often short, pithy phrases. Ask for final agreement from all members that they will do their best to abide by these norms and to hold one another accountable for doing so.

**Once the norms are established, you should display them prominently** so that team members do not forget their commitments. For example, you can post them during every meeting and add them to the team's collaboration site. If the team finds that members are consistently violating a norm, it's a good idea to stop and examine why that might be and whether the team wants to keep or modify the norm.

### What are some common team norms to get us started?

As stated above, teams should create their own norms together and should use the words that have the most meaning to them. That said, to provide food for thought, some common norms include:

- Let one person speak at a time
- Listen with an open mind
- Hold all team members as equals
- Explain your reasoning and intent
- Focus on interests, not positions
- Discuss difficult issues
- Test assumptions and inferences
- Embrace constructive debate and disagreement
- Keep your commitments
- Participate fully
- Seek to learn from one another
- Provide candid and constructive feedback