**Teamwork Basics Summary**

**Ground Rules:**

Ground rules are really just the basics of interaction in the workplace. Everything from how to accomplish goals to getting past differences will be encompassed by these basic rules.

* **Work Norms:** The questions you want to answer with these rules are how work is divided up, the basics of how to handle workloads, who’s in charge of what, and what the consequences are for people not meeting their responsibilities. People in my past experiences can have very different ideas of the proper work ethics and practices which tends to lead to people slacking off or rushing ahead without group consensus. The best way to counter this is to get everyone together early and set a clear plan of action and a set of standards. In one group we didn’t have a clear set of standards but instead had an editing day where we went over the work as a group and put forth ideas for improvement on each aspect before giving it the seal of approval.
* **Facilitator Norms:** These rules are important because they involve getting the most from your group. You should make clear how the facilitator is chosen and what they should be doing. I really enjoy being a facilitator. In one instance I was able to get three very different people to work together mostly in sync just by making sure everyone was comfortable and contributing and this lead to really interesting ideas and a great final product.
* **Communication Norms:** The when and how of communication should be made clear by these rules so that communication can be effective. My group for a high school project couldn’t decide on when to communicate and this resulted in half of us communicating at one time of day and the other half communicating later. This was terribly inefficient because if there were questions there would be long delays before answers and confirmation. Working out the basic rules of communicating is essential to the workflow.
* **Consideration Norms:** These norms involve general comfort within the team. There can be some overlap with the other rules because of the amount of interaction these rules should cover. But their main responsibility is to make sure that each team member is made to feel comfortable so that they can work at their peak performance level. At work one of these norms is a no eating policy but I have a very high metabolism so after a short discussion the norms were changed to allow unobnoxious food that wasn’t messy or smelly. This sort of rule setting allows everyone to work comfortably.

**Hints for Handling Difficult Behavior:**

* **Overly Talkative Person:** This person is someone who either purposefully or inadvertently ends up dominating the conversation. This can be a problem because it can counter the benefits of working in a group, (multiple points of view). To rectify this you can direct the conversation to other people specifically so that they can’t assume it is up to them to speak but if they continue to overrun the discussion they should be privately informed that other people need to be given the chance to speak. The one time I was in a group where I would classify someone as over-talkative, they dominated the conversation to the point where the rest of the group members would have second meetings without the talkative one to have their own discussions. Yet even when doing this that person got to have most of their way with the project so clearly not addressing the issue directly doesn’t work.
* **Too Quiet:** The opposite of an overly talkative person but the negative impact of reducing the amount of viewpoints presented to the group is the same. In order to bring this person into they loop you should directly address them and give them encouragement as much as possible. I once was in a group where one member said hardly a word the entire time until about halfway through when we encountered a problem and they said “Yeah, I figured that would happen when I went over the instructions again.”. Because they didn’t voice their idea we lost valuable time and resources. This is a prime example of why you should do your best to get every member involved.
* **Argues:** While feedback both positive and negative is important, a person who provides more negative than positive can be hurtful to the group by discouraging ideas and impeding progress. This is especially true when they are negative about certain teammates. In order to correct this behavior it is best to address them in private about the effects their behavior is creating and try to guide them in a more positive direction. I really enjoy posing ideas to my teams and often like to try and think outside of the box. This often puts me at odds with people and we inevitably end up arguing. In the past, I have always sought the opinions of fellow group members and tried to press the arguer for other options and on the legitimacy of their arguments. This almost always results in the best decision being made since theoretically everyone voices their opinion and sound arguments are made.
* **Complains:** Everyone has things that bother them, and some people just love to whine. These complaints shouldn’t be dismissed out of hand and if they can be handled then they should be. It is best to do your best to resolve the complaints and make sure everyone is on the same page so that the team can work together at peak performance. I’m very guilty of ignoring complaints wherever possible because people often just seem to be whining to me. This tactic never works in getting the group to be working at its peak. Once it even lead to a teammate asking to be assigned to another group because he felt like he was being left out and was unable to work.

**Hints for Handling Group Problems**

* **Floundering:** This is a problem of inactivity. The key lies in providing a clear direction and plan of attack. Laying out a list of tasks is the simplest way to avoid floundering. In one group project we simply had no idea how to proceed because of how big the project seemed but after reading over the requirements and breaking it down on a whiteboard we were able to make good headway. All it took was a bit of structure to make the work manageable.
* **Going Off on Digressions and Tangents:** Chit chat or non-work related discussions can divert a lot of attention and slow progress. Or even work related minute details can cause work to grind to a painstaking pace if the course isn’t corrected. The easiest way to reign in these moments of loss of focus is to try and get everyone to backtrack to where they were before veering off course and to keep bringing up the core work so that everyone stays on topic. I often find myself being a perpetrator of this group problem and whenever someone has put me in place it’s by mentioning the upcoming deadline or by pressing me for answers to the problem at hand.
* **Making a Decision Too Quickly:** This can arise from people eager to move ahead for any number of reasons but the quickest way to nip this in the bud is to pose questions to other group members along the lines of “Does anyone have anything to mention on the subject?” or “Is everything ready to proceed to the next stage?”. Whenever a group member has tried to press ahead without full consensus I’ve just asked them questions about what they’re about to move past and that always succeeds in forcing them to stop and reconsider the process we are working on.
* **Not Making a Decision:** When people are having trouble making a decision and progress slows, the options to proceed are a simple vote with the highest voted item being the winner or a process of each person voting for the top picks and continuing this process to see what decisions people favor and then trying to find compromise before selecting the top voted decision. In the past whenever this has happened to me I’ve been forced to take matters into my own hands and pave the way so that my group was forced to follow me or I had to concede. This was usually decided by whoever was to shoulder the majority of the work and responsibility. I am eager to use these techniques to make the process much more fair.
* **Feuding Between Group Members:** The only sure way to resolve a fight between teammates is to have them meet either through a mediator or face to face and talk their way through the issue so that work may continue. The last time this happened to me in a group I was unable to get the two to meet together in person so we had to complete the project with me acting as a team leader distributing tasks to the two and making decisions so that they wouldn’t have to interact with each other. It was quite unpleasant and inefficient.
* **Ignoring or Ridiculing Others:** This sort of behavior often arises from social differences between members. The best way to combat this is trying to find common ground so that you can work with others who are different than you are. This should help prevent the creation of cliques or subgroups within the team. I’ve seen this happen in a previous class where a couple group members were athletic and another group member wasn’t. They didn’t know how to interact and friction led to a lack of cooperation. I personally played sports but was also very nerdy so I was able to act as a common ground between the members and get everyone on the same page.
* **The Group Member Who Does Not Do His/Her Share of the Work:** This problem tends to plague groups and is as old as time. The most efficient answer is to confront the slacker and alert them to the problem. Often the person behaves this way because they think they can get away with it or simply can’t find a purpose. Meeting with them and guiding them is often a sure way to get them moving. In my work experience we had an employee who was known to be lazy and sloppy but whenever I noticed his behavior negatively impacting the work environment I reminded him of the job he was supposed to be doing, (such as the nightly tasks), and pointing out that he hadn’t done them. He would promptly apologize and complete the task at the next opportunity.