

Leadership Development Within Groups

Developing Trust and Cooperation

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Trust among members is essential for groups to work effectively. Little is accomplished in a group until individuals trust one another. Therefore, developing a climate of trust is one of the most important tasks groups must accomplish.

The result of a trusting and cooperative atmosphere is member satisfaction and maximum group productivity.

Feelings Are Fact

It may be difficult to become part of a group. If a new member does not "feel" welcome, there is a problem.

When we are trying to become a participant in an established group, we may have an identity problem. We sit back, waiting to see what others do. We don't know what others expect of us. It's uncomfortable. We have to discover how to become a successful member. Other members in the group may feel uncomfortable, too. They must discover the talents and assets we bring to this group.

A trusting, cooperative atmosphere doesn't happen automatically. Leaders and members of an organization must take steps to develop that atmosphere in their group.

Communication Develops Trust

Open communication promotes trust. Communication begins as we get to know one another. Trust grows as we talk and share information about ourselves.

There is a spirit of trust and cooperation when everyone has equal opportunity to participate in the group. The group will be most successful when members rely on one another. Group members must learn to recognize and pool their talents, energy and resources to accomplish goals together.

People need people. My daughter Laurie was about three when she requested my help to get ready for bedtime. I was downstairs and she was upstairs, and...well. "You know how to undress yourself," I reminded. "Yes," she explained, "but sometimes people need people anyway, even if they do know how to do things by themselves."
Bits & Pieces, December 1990

Climate of the Group

The group atmosphere or climate affects how members react to one another. The group atmosphere consists of the PHYSICAL climate and the SOCIAL climate. Both are important for developing group trust and cooperation.

Physical Climate

The physical environment is the setting where the group usually meets. A positive physical climate includes:

- Adequate space for all members to sit
- Tables and chairs that are arranged so members can see one another for direct, open discussion
- Comfortable room temperature so members stay alert
- Adequate lighting for seeing people and using resources
- Limited noise and distraction.

Social Climate

The social environment has to do with how people relate to one another. It affects their emotions.

Establish a positive social environment by:

- Getting to know one another
 - Asking members for their opinions and suggestions
 - Defining group goals and reasons for group activity
 - Orienting new members so they can become contributing members quickly
 - Discarding unnecessary activity.
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Ways to Develop Trust

Group leaders need to help members get acquainted. Group interaction helps members learn about interests and goals they have in common. This process helps members understand how each individual fits into the group and assets each has to contribute.

Get-acquainted activities planned early in a meeting or event establish a positive climate where everyone participates. This helps new members feel comfortable. When members are comfortable in a group they will begin to take the risks necessary to share personal ideas and ask challenging questions that will benefit the group.

Get-acquainted activities may also be called bonding exercises. These activities help members relate to one another which results in working together more effectively. A leader who takes the risk to entrust himself/herself to others goes far in creating a climate of trust in the group.

I can...

Learning is more complete when you apply and experience what you have just thought about. Consider the following questions on your own or with a friend.

Get to know yourself and learn more about developing trust and cooperation within a group.

- If you could choose one skill to do well, what would it be? Think about one skill you have that you want people to know about when you become part of a new group?
- How can you communicate your skill to a group? What would be inappropriate ways to communicate this information to a group?
- If you could choose, how would you like to use your skill in a group?

Leadership is like gardening. Gardeners use sunlight, water and fertilizer to turn seed into wonderful plants. Leaders use communication, esteem, vision and enthusiasm to grow wonderful people who achieve personal and organizational goals.
Shirley Harmon

Images

To be persuasive, we must be believable; to be believable, we must be credible; to be credible, we must be truthful.
Edward R. Murrow

People do not stay with a job (or group) because of a great operations manual but because they feel productive, satisfied, and committed.
Sue Vineyard

Little happens in a group situation until the individuals learn to trust each other. Because of this, forming a climate of trust is one of the most important tasks (a group can accomplish).
Oregon Family Community Leadership

Vision without action is merely a dream. Action without vision just passes the time. Vision and action can change the world.
Joel A. Barker

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Prepared by:

Marilyn Lesmeister

Leadership and Volunteer Development Specialist, NDSU Extension Service

In Cooperation with:

Ron Anderson, Center for Rural Revitalization

Paige Baker, NDSU Extension Special Programs

Becky Koch, NDSU Extension Communications

Carmen Richards, President, ND Association of Family and Community Education

Anita Rohde, NDSU Extension Home Economist

Carol Sellie, NDSU Extension Home Economist

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North Dakota State University Agriculture and University Extension
Dept. 7070, Morrill 7, P.O. Box 6050, Fargo, ND 58108-6050