

TEAM BEHAVIOR—Promoting Team Health or Sabotaging it  
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1. What attitudes and behaviors make a team work better?
2. What attitudes and behaviors will sabotage a team?

*Form small groups of ten for discussion purposes later on.*

Many groups and projects are carried on by teams. If we could identify these attitudes and encourage the good ones and avoid the bad ones, we would go a long ways toward having healthy teams. But it’s not that easy.

First, it is important to remember that our behavior, our attitudes, our words are all part of our witness. As one historian said about the early church, “...see how those Christians love one another!” So it isn’t just what we do that serves Christ; it is who we are. And most of us are projects in progress.

Secondly, let’s acknowledge some elements or realities of most mission teams:

\*\*Mission teams are most likely made up of many cultures and probably several languages.

\*\*Three or four generations may be present on the team.

\*\*Individuals bring differing competencies to team functioning.

\*\*And certainly there are personality differences.

\*\*Missionaries are usually strong people; this means they also have strong opinions. And holding to our strong opinions can cause friction when we interact with others and their strong opinions.

\*\*Team members also bring memories. “This happened to us on our last team...”

\*\*They bring expectations. “I’m the oldest, or the most educated or the most experienced; I should be the leader.” Or “surely there will be child care, and other kinds of care.” “Surely there will be Internet connectivity...”

\*\*They bring their experience and/or their information “I have heard about that person; I don’t know if I can work with him/her or not.” My experience with female leaders has not been good...”

\*\*Stress levels are almost always very high and team members have differing tolerance for stress.

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Before we can discuss team-building, we need to know what attitudes and behaviors are **essential** to a good team, and what are those behaviors and attitudes that **sabotage** a team.

Small Groups of ten: Listen to the case study and try to identify what the essential attitudes or behaviors are that would be helpful in this situation if they were present on the team.

A couple from your church have gone to Angola with their three small children. They are working on a project together with team made up of indigenous people, Australians, Latins, Koreans, and Canadians. In one of the letters back to the church, the couple tell you that relationships on the team are so strained that they are about to request another assignment. But they give no details. You don't even know how to pray, not having pertinent details.

Finally these workers ask your mission director if he can send a special couple from the church to Angola to give the group some training in team-building. No further details are forthcoming. What does this couple and the mission director need to think about as they prepare?

Prep Work:

1. They need to prepare for wide differences on the team in Angola—cultural differences, generational differences, authority struggles, competency comparisons, lack of conflict resolution skills, shortage of resources, struggling with climate and health issues, and high levels of stress.
2. They need to be aware that whenever missionaries enter a country and try to bring the gospel to these people, they will encounter their enemy in new ways. Of course Satan does not want the message of hope to be given out! Nor does he want the gospel message to be seen by the behavior of these workers! So they need to have training in spiritual warfare.
3. They need to know what a healthy team looks like—and this leads us to attitudes and behaviors that are essential. What are these? Discuss in your small groups.

*(these might be:*

1. *Respect*
2. *Humility*
3. *Trust*
4. *Clear Communication*
5. *Tolerance for Difference*
6. *Flexibility*
7. *Cross-Cultural Conflict Resolution Skills*
8. *Honoring one another*
9. *Other?*

4. Debrief.

5. Further, they need to know what attitudes and behaviors will sabotage a team. Discuss in small groups. What are these sabotaging behaviors?

These might be:

1. *Arrogance*
2. *Unrestrained talk—gossip, innuendo, slander, half truths*
3. *Passive aggressive behavior, non-verbal resistance, or fake acquiescence*
4. *Unforgiveness, bitterness from one's past, leading to distrust*
5. *Generational assumptions/Stereotypes*
6. *Cultural assumptions*
7. *Mistrust of authority or resistance to it*
8. *Avoidance*
9. *Other?*

6. Debrief.
7. Interestingly, just one person can bring a team down, and it takes everyone's contribution to craft a healthy team.

Group Discussion: How do we address these undesirable behaviors and attitudes? Note that these are generally not behaviors that can be disciplined.

Wrap up:

What should the church couple (or team) do when they arrive?

- Withhold judgment. You will almost never be told what the core problem is.
- Make friends
- Join them in their work, play, and worship
- Pray for insight and discernment
- Listen to non-verbal and verbal criticism
- Watch, elicit information
- Pray like mad!
- Follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit

Finally, we should examine ourselves. All of us are probably on some sort of team. Are we contributing to that team's health by our good attitudes, or are we adding to the ill health and slow demise of the team? Let's be aware that we are not the best evaluators of our own behavior. We may unconsciously be saying or doing things that hurt others. Ask for feedback. "How do you experience me in this group?"

And really finally, what is going on in our churches? How can we contribute to the health of our church, which is the Body of Christ? Let's pray that we are adding to and not detracting from the health of the Body.