

## Member's Quarterly

Fall 2022 Edition

## Feature

## When Workplace Collaboration Goes Sideways

*- Keep your star performers from leaving*



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**W**e've all been there - a collaboration or project committee that worked well until a key player left, the purpose became blurry or things went sideways and off track. Collaboration and communication breakdowns happen often. In fact, Salesforce reported that in one survey, 86% of employees and executives cited lack of workplace collaboration or ineffective communication for failures in the workplace. The cost of ineffective collaborations and communication breakdowns can be excessive for tangible expenses as well as workplace relationships.

Most organizations that I have worked for believe that communication and collaboration are essential for business success. Queens University of Charlotte reported that approximately 75% of employers ranked collaboration and teamwork as being "very important", yet pointed out that only 18% of employees get communication evaluations at their performance reviews. It is important that employers strive to not only review an employee's collaboration and communication skills, but that they also provide training opportunities to support the advancement of these skills across teams. This will help keep collaborations from falling off the tracks.

There are many reasons that collaborations go sideways. Some of the common challenges include:

- Choosing the wrong partners (wrong fit) to collaborate with, the wrong timing to pursue the collaboration and not taking the time to build relationships and clarity around the purpose of the collaboration.
- Personality and working style differences between the collaboration partners.
- Lack of agreement or clarity on the vision, purpose and reason for collaboration.
- Expectations that have not been voiced, clarified or met, and too many unchecked assumptions.
- Finances (disagreement related to finances) or lack of finances to effectively support the collaboration.
- Communication, miscommunication or lack of communication.
- Conflict that is not addressed or that is poorly managed.

There is good news. The majority of these challenges can be avoided and planned for. Teams that take time to effectively plan, build trust and relationships and address issues promptly will be able to focus on the goals and project instead of the list of collaboration challenges.

Here are a few tips to ensure collaborations remain healthy, respectful and on track:

- **Put collaboration agreements in writing**- Develop terms of references, working agreements, team charters or collaboration agreements in writing. Review and modify these agreements regularly.
- **Communicate... communicate... communicate.** Resolve communication issues and conflict promptly and effectively to ensure that the collaboration is not impacted.
- **Avoid assumptions**- If assumptions are made, take the time to clarify, understand and correct them.
- **Track agreements in meeting minutes or through a decision tracker.** This helps the partners stay up to date and prevents old issues from resurfacing.
- **Complete Review and Learns** (What went well? What was a challenge? What did you learn? What will you do differently next time?)

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When you take time to effectively create collaborations, nurture relationships and manage issues that arise, these can also positively impact employee retention. Reports indicate that organizations that communicate effectively are 4 times more likely to retain their best employees.

The biggest asset for any organization is its workforce. When employees collaborate, combine their knowledge and skills and share their talents, positive results are bound to happen. To achieve success, retain employees and stay ahead of the competition, ensure that your workplace fosters, models and supports a healthy culture of collaboration, teamwork and resilience.

*Charmaine Hammond, CSP is a business keynote and workshop speaker, entrepreneur, author and educator who teaches and advocates the importance of developing trust, healthy relationships and collaboration in the workplace.*

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