TEAM GROUND RULES

by Kenneth Crow
© 2001 DRM Associates  All rights reserved.

Ground rules are statements of values and guidelines, which a group establishes consciously to help individual members to decide how to act. To be effective, ground rules must be clear, consistent, agreed-to, and followed. Where articulated ground rules are missing, natural behavior patterns often emerge spontaneously. These are referred to as norms.

Team ground rules define a behavioral model, which addresses how individuals treat each other, communicate, participate, cooperate, support each other, and coordinate joint activity. They may be used to define and standardize team procedure, use of time, work assignments, meeting logistics, preparation, minutes, discussion, creativity, reporting, respect and courtesy.

A team should create and adopt written ground rules during the first few organizing sessions. The rules should be consulted and enforced through reminders and team process checks. They should be added to and revised as needed.

Example of Team Ground Rules

Our attitude and culture

• We treat each other with respect.
• We intend to develop personal relationships to enhance trust and open communication.
• We value constructive feedback. We will avoid being defensive and give feedback in a constructive manner.
• We treat subcontractor and customer team members in the same way as contractor team members.
• We strive to recognize and celebrate individual and team accomplishments.
• As team members, we will pitch in to help where necessary to help solve problems and catch-up on behind schedule work.

Team meetings

• We will hold a regular weekly meeting on Tuesday at 2PM in Conference Room D.
• Additional meetings can be scheduled to discuss critical issues or tabled items upon discussion and agreement with the team leader.
• All team members are expected to attend team meetings unless they are out of town, on vacation or sick. If a team member is unavailable, he or she should have a designated, empowered representative (another team member, a representative from their functional organization, etc.) attend in their place.
• The team leader can cancel or reschedule a team meeting if sufficient team members are unavailable or there is insufficient subject matter to meet about.
• The team leader will publish and distribute an agenda by email by Noon Monday. Team members are responsible for contacting the team leader or leaving a voice message or email with any agenda items they want to include by 9AM Monday. Agenda items can be added at the meeting with the concurrence of the team.
• Meetings will start promptly on time. All members are expected to be on-time. If, for extenuating circumstances a member is late, he/she must catch-up on their own.
• An action item list with responsibilities will be maintained, reviewed in meetings, and distributed with the meeting minutes.
• No responsibilities will be assigned unless the person be assigned the responsibility accepts it. If a person to be given a responsibility is not at meeting, the team leader must review that assignment or action item with the person before the responsibility is designated.
• The responsibility for taking and distributing meeting minutes will rotate monthly among core team members.
• Meeting minutes will be distributed within 24 hours after the meeting.
• We will emphasize full discussion and resolution of issues vs. sticking to a timetable.

Communication and Decision-Making
• One person talks at a time; there are no side discussions
• Each person is given a chance to speak their mind while at the same time respecting the group’s time and the meeting timetables. We will be brief and focus on facts, not opinions.
• We emphasize open and honest communication - there are no hidden agendas.
• We de-personalize discussion of issues - no attacks on people.
• We will listen, be non-judgmental and keep an open mind on issues until it is time to decide.
• We emphasize balanced participation of all team members.
• We will emphasize collaboration and use consensus for important decisions and issues. For less important issues, we will rely on the subject matter expert with input from others.

Planning and Management
• We will mutually commit to our team’s objectives as stated in the team charter or negotiate until we can make this mutual commitment.
• We accept the responsibility and accountability along with the authority given to us.
• We will maintain the team work plan and schedule each month.
• If a team member believes they are being asked to do a task outside the scope of the team’s charter, he/she will bring this to the attention of the team leader for resolution.
• We will maintain awareness of customer-contractor roles while being responsive to customer representative needs. Any suggestions or direction we believe will constitute a scope change will be handled through proper channels. We will avoid a constructive change without proper documentation and authorization.
• When we pose an issue or a problem, we will also try to present a solution.
• Team commitments shouldn’t be made lightly, but we will keep those that we do.

Other
• We will focus sufficient time on team process and conduct process checks when one member believes we are deviating from our ground rules.