



Anyone who has worked on a team knows: your satisfaction at work is often linked to how well you work with your team and how engaged you are with the team's overall mission. Especially when you are in diverse working environment, where job duties may vary widely from position to position, teamwork can be the key to building a positive, respectful environment. This month, we spoke with Mike Cardus, a local expert in leadership and organizational development, to talk about some of the opportunities that teams can provide, not just for your career, but also for your overall satisfaction.

Turning Potential Pitfalls...

Teamwork can get a bad rap when it doesn't work the way that it should. There are many pitfalls that can get in the way of team success, including:

- 1) **Not understanding why your skills or job functions are necessary for the team.** "If you don't understand why you've been invited to a team or how being on a team fits in with your personal goals, it can really impact your satisfaction," Cardus says. You may feel frustrated because you don't feel your skills are being utilized enough, or you may just feel unnecessary to the team as a whole and disengaged.
- 2) **Volunteering for too many teams.** "Oftentimes folks will over-volunteer and be spread far too thin over many committees and working groups," notes Cardus. "When that happens, the quality of work and communication is impacted."
- 3) **Lack of preparation.** If you go to team meetings without preparing some ideas or questions ahead of time, you may find yourself unprepared for important conversations or unable to add to the discussion. You could also miss opportunities to bring creative and new ideas to your colleagues and show your leadership potential.

...Into Opportunities

- 1) **Understand why you're there.** Cardus emphasizes that if you regularly work with a team of colleagues, it's your responsibility to identify why you are an important member of that team, and what skills and strengths you have to offer. The more you understand your role and why you are necessary, the more effective you can be as a team member (and the more you'll want to participate).

The same is true if you are invited to be part of a team or committee outside of your regular job duties. "Working on a team can take time that would normally go into doing your job, so make sure that you understand why you're being asked to be a member," Cardus advises. If you don't understand why or how team participation fits into your goals, reach out to your direct manager and ask them for their perspective on why you are necessary or how participation will help you achieve your goals. "Having those conversations is essential," he emphasizes. "Once you have a better idea of why you are necessary, you'll feel more connected to the team and its goals."

- 2) **Learn how to say no.** While it may be tempting to say yes to projects that you are interested in, or you may feel pressure to join committees for professional reasons, it is important to only do so when you have the time to truly commit. Part of being a good team member consists in being thoughtful about what you can realistically take on.
- 3) **Be prepared.** Make sure that, whether you are meeting with your team of colleagues or an external team, you spend some time beforehand brainstorming about how you may contribute to the conversation. One of the most important (though simple) tasks: make sure you read the agenda prior to the meeting and decide if there are any issues you want to bring to the table.

If you are looking for help on developing strategies to better fit into your team or to better communicate with your team, we're here to help! Call (716)681-4300 to meet with a Masters Level Clinician and start turning your pitfalls into opportunities.