

# Teaching Note: Previous Team Experience Discussion

Instructors can use the exercise and discussion described below to introduce concepts related to teamwork and to prepare students to launch their team projects in productive ways.

Before class, students are given the following assignment:

## Pre-class Assignment:

- Think of your worst team experience in an organizational setting (e.g., school, work, service project). List all of the things that went poorly.
- Now think of your best team experience in an organizational setting. List all of the things that went well.
- As you compare and contrast the two experiences, what do you think were the key factors that made the difference? Jot those factors down.
- Bring the two lists and your notes on the key factors to class for discussion.

## Facilitated Classroom Discussion

Instructors can begin the in-class discussion by asking students what went wrong in their worst team experiences. As various students explain the problems their teams experienced, the instructor can make a long list of challenges and issues on a whiteboard. Students typically describe problems such as team members who dominate, micromanage, freeride, and miss meetings and deadlines. Usually, bad team experiences are vivid in students' minds, and the discussion is lively.

The instructor can then lead a discussion of the best team experiences and ask students what went right. Students typically note that the team members got to know each other, developed trust, and liked and respected each other. They also typically talk about how team members had shared goals and objectives, made work plans and deadlines and stuck to them, listened to each other's ideas, had collaborative discussions, critiqued each other's work respectfully and honestly, and managed conflict productively. Again, the instructors can make a long list on the whiteboard.

Instructors can then ask students what they plan to do during their team projects to ensure that the team experience and the work go well. Students typically talk about relational factors such as taking time to get to know each other, making sure to listen respectfully to each other, agreeing not to take criticism of ideas personally, and making time to talk about the team process as the work progresses. They also talk about task-related factors such as agreeing in advance on goals and objectives, creating work plans for each week, and holding each other accountable for meeting deadlines. Instructors can talk about the predictable stages of development that teams typically go through (forming, norming, storming, performing) and help students understand that some conflict within a team is inevitable and even beneficial.

*Dr. Minette E. Drumwright developed this assignment and exercise.*