

Grappling With Groups.

Andy, Barb, Carl and Dawn had been put together for group problem solving in their math class. They introduced themselves and Barb wrote down the name and phone number of each group member. Their first job was to put together a Team Performance Agreement. They went through the guidelines the teacher had provided, with Carl suggesting responses to each point and Barb writing them down. Once in a while Dawn or Andy would add a comment. They agreed that “disagreements would be handled by a discussion and a majority decision” and that “team members not participating in assignment would receive reduced credit.” By the end of the class they had a rough draft of a TPA and Carl suggest that Andy type it up. The finished assignment was due the next class period (Monday) and they agreed that Andy would bring the printed copy to class for everyone to sign. On Monday, however, Andy didn’t show up in class. Frantic calls and text messages to his phone went unanswered. Barb, Carl and Dawn were upset, but had no choice other than to type the report (Dawn did it) and turn it in late on Wednesday. Andy came to class on Wednesday claiming that he had tried to call Barb on Sunday night, but kept getting her voice-mail. He couldn’t remember Carl’s or Dawn’s last name, and therefore couldn’t call them. He had learned he would be unable to attend class on Monday and wanted to notify his other group members. When he wasn’t able to contact anyone, he “assumed they didn’t need him” and came to class on Wednesday ready to sign the TPA along with everyone else. Dawn was furious and wanted to exclude him from the assignment. Barb and Carl were also angry, but weren’t sure how to handle the “team” situation. They asked the teacher to resolve the conflict.

1. Should the teacher provide a resolution? If so, in what way?
2. If not, how do you think the team should resolve the situation?
3. In what ways could the problem have been avoided?
4. What could the group do to avoid or handle similar problems in the future?

Homework: Reflect upon the groups situation and answer these four questions. Submissions should be in short essay format (paragraphs, complete sentences, etc) with college level writing mechanics. Be sure to justify any conclusions you make. *Note:* A copy of the TPA guidelines is provided for reference on the following page.

Due: Monday, November 16, 2015.

Team Performance Agreement

We have noted that it makes sense to use a group approach in an academic setting. A group has the potential to achieve results far beyond the capability of any one member. What is the best way to accomplish effective team performance? The most fundamental requirement is for every member of the team to have a common vision of team goals and expectations. One way to establish this vision is to develop a **Team Performance Agreement** (TPA). The TPA can provide a framework for group efforts, outlining what is expected of each member, how decisions will be made and how conflicts will be resolved. As you prepare a TPA, keep in mind that projects will be graded on accuracy, presentation and creativity. Specific items that should be addressed in the TPA include the following:

1. What does the group consider an acceptable performance level? The bare minimum? The top mark on each assignment? Should every member obtain working knowledge of all the concepts involved in the project?
2. How are decisions to be made, especially when no consensus can be reached? Do team members accept the will of the majority? Will the team have a leader? The most effective agreements emphasize the importance of understanding all views in a dispute and seeking an alternative that is acceptable to all parties.
3. How will roles be identified for individual members? How will the group deal with inferior performance by team members (failure to show at meetings, contribute to project solutions, etc.)? Each individual brings unique talents to the group, talents that should be encouraged.
4. How will effective communication be promoted within the group? How will the group insure that all members contribute ideas? That all members listen carefully to others?