Plan the Work, Work the Plan

Some tips and strategies for working with others on shared projects.

Tip #1: Meet Early, Develop Shared Expectations

Organizing and completing teamwork takes more time than individual projects. In your early meeting, take time to get to know each other and develop a detailed framework for working together. This framework should include practical and tailored agreements for working together. Agreeing to "respect" each other is great, but what does this actually look like, on the ground, in the middle of a project?

Tip #2: Treat the Whole Term as One Team Project

If you and your team are working on concurrent projects, then plan them all together. Sharing work across multiple projects is often easier than sharing work within a single project.

Tip #3: Plan Backwards, Agree on Decision Points

Start by confirming deadlines, and working backward to identify and define key steps/phases of your projects. In many projects, there are key decision points along the way. Agree on these key decisions, and when they need to be made. Do not move past these decision points without reaching real agreement.

Tip #4: Use at least Three Levels of Granularity When Planning

Take the time to plan key phases, activities, and decisions through macro (months/weeks), meso (weeks/days), and micro time scales (days/hours). At the start of a project, macro-level planning is likes sufficient, and as you move forward into the plan, meso, and micro-level planning can be added.

Tip#5: Make Everything Visible

The plan, communication, and the work should all be visible to everyone on the team. That way everyone is acting on the same information. Consider using collaborative and planning technologies, even for face-to-face teamwork.

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Tip #6: Beware the Tyranny of Meetings

Meetings can take up a lot of time. Everyone should know why the team is meeting, what individuals need to do to prepare for the meeting, and what decisions are going to be taken at the meeting. A lot of teamwork can be done asynchronously. In general, meetings serve four functions: sharing information, solving problems, planning, and making decisions.

Tip #7: Test the Plan

Once the plan has been developed, take it for a test drive by running through a simple activity such as writing a paragraph, or developing an oral presentation with visual aids. Based on the test, you can revise/update your plan.

Tip #8: Strive for Fairness, Not Equality

Everyone on the team has strengths and weaknesses. It is unrealistic to expect everyone to do the same work at the same standard. Accept the reality that some folks will work harder than others on specific projects. If you've had an easy go on one project, be sure to work hard on the next.

Tip #9: Be Kind to Each Other

In a team, you are dependent on others. This presents many challenges and rewards. Controversy is a normal feature of groups, even while it can be upsetting.

Remember these lessons from kinder garden.

- Share everything.
- Play fair.
- Don't hit people verbally or physically.
- Put things back where you found them.
- Clean up your own mess.
- Don't take things that aren't yours.
- Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.
- Live a balanced life - learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some.
- When you go out in the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands and stick together.
- Be aware of wonder.

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