



'Fresh Start' Meetings

- Do you find yourself in a new position as a team leader?
- Are you an experienced team leader working with a new team?
- Have you been with the same team for a while, but find that more conflicts are occurring within the team?
- Do you feel that you are not "connecting" with the team?

If any of the above applies to you, you may want to have a 'Fresh Start' meeting.

A 'Fresh Start' meeting is an opportunity to share and define specific topics and expectations that are important to you.

The goal is to set a foundation of understanding for you and the team.

The meeting can take place with the entire team as a group or on an individual basis.

Getting to Know You...

A lot of research says to meet with your manager, fellow team leaders and the team when you first start in a leadership position.

In addition to what leadership experts suggest you know (Team leader responsibilities, performance expectations, employee

roles, hours of work, etc.), I recommend you do some homework and think about what is important to you...

“What behaviours do you feel demonstrate respect, cooperation, integrity and professionalism?”

Since our values play such an integral part in our day-to-day interactions with others, it is important to take the time to consider your thoughts on the following 'values' related topics:

- Dependability
- Distribution of work
- Project opportunities
- New work procedures
- Team lunches, food days
- Recognition
- Conflict situations
- Open Door policy

Focusing on these specific situations will help define your values and the approach you take with others.

Questions to consider should include...

- What does dependability mean to me?
 - Is it only that people are at their desk at their assigned hours or is it also that I can count on a person when a priority project comes up?
- What does fair work distribution mean to me?
- What criteria will I use to assign projects?
- How would I like the team to approach new ideas or work procedures?
- What benefits do team lunches or food days add to the team?
- How do I like to recognize the achievements of others?

- How do I like to be approached when people are upset?
 - Do I like them coming to my desk to discuss the situation, or would I rather meet them in a more private area?
 - Would I like them to email me first with some of the details of why they are upset so that I can feel prepared?
 - Do I want the employee to work at solving the conflict themselves first?
- What does open-door policy mean to me?
 - I like to be accessible all the time.
 - I will have a system for letting others know when I am available.
 - I would like people to approach me in the mornings only.

Initially, you may want to ask your manager, fellow team leaders and the team to share their thoughts on the above topics. You may find that knowing the various approaches within the work area helps to shape your own perspective.

Benefits of Sharing

Once you are comfortable with your answers to the above, you need to share them with the team. This ensures that the team is aware of your priorities and how you "operate".

There are at least two benefits of sharing this specific info with the team:

- They will know your motives. Since the team will know what's important to you in certain situations, the odds are reduced that they will make assumptions about why you made certain work assignment decisions, why you have concerns about dependability, etc.
- You can establish a framework for effective future communication.
 - "How will we discuss issues in the future when we don't see eye to eye?"

It's for Everyone

The 'Fresh Start' meeting is not only for team leaders to initiate. Employees should also be encouraged to discuss what values are important to them and what they look like in day to day interactions. After all, the more you know about what is important to others, the more you can understand their behaviours.

And that understanding will have a positive influence on how we approach others in a conflict situation.

I know that team leaders may feel that there is not enough time to focus on this type of information sharing, but the 'Fresh Start' meeting is one way to ensure that future conflicts are reduced which, in the end, will actually save time and energy.

Mike Lund
Conflict Resolution Practitioner