



Activities

**FOR PROMOTING ETHICS
IN THE ORGANIZATION**

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Part E.

Ethical Teamwork

Introduction: Kristin Arnold

Frank Bucaro, a professional speaker on ethics and values, defines ethics as “what you do when no one is looking.” Ethics at the personal level is a conscious decision to do the “right thing”; however, on a team level, various team members may have different interpretations of what the right thing to do really is. Frank says, “Everybody speaks *their* truth, but it may not be *the* truth.” I believe the very essence of teams and teamwork is to seek common ground and search for “the truth.”

Gone unstated, individual team members create their own definitions of “the truth,” what’s right and wrong, as well as their own interpretations of proper standards of behavior. When operating from different truths, assumptions, and values, teams invariably are rife with conflict, behave badly, and are simply non-productive.

When team members are in alignment with the same values and standards, you don’t have these kinds of problems. They are “open to each other’s truths,” as Frank says. Extraordinary teams work together to discover the truth, searching for common ground and building a consensus.

More importantly, they invest time to discuss and explicitly define their standards—or how they will work together to achieve “the truth.” Some call these standards “ground rules,” “guiding principles,” or “team norms.” They are explicit agreements on how the team will function. They clearly articulate boundaries of appropriate behavior. Effective ground rules *prevent* undesirable behaviors from happening in the first place. They also create a space to *intervene* gracefully—reminding each other of the prior agreements made.

As you formulate your ground rules, consider how your team will deal with common concerns such as:

- **Interruptions.** What to do when team members are called out of the meeting. How will you deal with phone calls and messages? Will pager and cellular phones be tolerated?
- **Assignments.** If team members cannot fulfill their obligations, who should they notify and by when?

- **Substitutions.** In the event a team member can't make it to the meeting, are "substitutions" allowed? How will the team's work be communicated to the missing team member?
- **Decisions.** How will the team make decisions? Are team members aiming for consensus? Is there a "fallback" in case the team can't come to a consensus? Is the team leader ultimately responsible for making the decision?
- **Confidentiality.** Are there topics or kinds of information that should not be discussed outside the team?
- **Penalties.** How will the team deal with minor and chronic violations to the ground rules?

Ground rules are simply the glue that holds the team together. Here's an example of one extraordinary team's ground rules:

- **Honor time limits.** Be on time. Start on time. End on time. Set a time frame for each deliverable. Do your part to meet individual and team commitments.
- **All participate... no one dominates.** Ask for ideas from everyone. Recognize and consider others' ideas. Accept all suggestions as valid for consideration.
- **Work together.** Team members communicate and work closely together and make every effort to support one another. Keep one another informed. Work together to solve problems. Offer help without being asked.
- **Listen as allies.** Give your undivided attention to the person speaking. Try to understand others first; second, try to be understood. Respect each other by not interrupting. Stay on track. Stick to the subject at hand. Minimize distractions and needless debate.
- **Be considerate.** Consider the background, motivations, and skills of other members when offering help or advice. Be open to constructive feedback.
- **Celebrate small successes.** Recognize team and individual effort.
- **Aim for consensus.** But if we cannot agree, we will park the issue on a "logjam" lot for a specified period of time.
- **Knock three times.** Simply knock your knuckle or a pen on the table three times if the discussion starts to wander or there is another minor violation of the ground rules. Whoever is speaking should stop and refocus on the topic.
- **Respect time and each other.**

It all boils down to this one last ground rule: respect each other. When you respect each other, it is much easier to discover the truth.

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Kristin J. Arnold, CPCM, helps corporations, government, and nonprofit organizations achieve extraordinary results. With years of teambuilding and facilitation experience, Kristin specializes in coaching executives and their leadership, management, and employee teams, particularly in the areas of strategic, business and project planning, process improvement, decision-making, and collaborative problem-solving.

In addition to facilitation services, QPC, Inc., offers diversified programs around the team concept to meet the needs of CEOs, COOs, executives, managers, and team members. Her highly customized speeches and seminars are instrumental in achieving higher performance and results within the workplace.