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VOCAB for collaboration: How “work language” can help you win at teamwork

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Clair Canfield’s VOCAB Model

V = vulnerability
O = ownership
C = communication
A = acceptance
B = boundaries

Clair Canfield: 2016 TEDxUSU
VOCAB
Vulnerability
Willingness to Let Myself Be Seen

• Check ego at door
• Time to get to know one another
• Trust foundational to vulnerability
• Vulnerability allowed us to be powerful
• United in face of challenges
Vulnerability TIPS
Willingness to Let Myself Be Seen

• Recognize there will be many unknowns
• Sense of humor a must
• Build in time for group processing: get to know before you get to go!
• Safety bonds are applied to other work
Create group agreements

1. Discussion:
   - How do I do creative thinking?
   - How do I best express my thoughts?
   - How do I deal with disagreement?
   - How do I like communicate?
   - What skills could I contribute?
   - What ground rules are important to me?
Boundaries

Ground Rules for Acceptable Behavior

Create group agreements
1. Discussion
2. Set ground rules

Group Agreements

We will...

1. Be direct and respectful (open and honest)
2. Communicate any interactions concerning this project to the group
3. Come prepared to meetings
4. Be accountable for assigned tasks
5. Ask for help
6. Give help when needed
7. Be cognizant of time constraints
8. Stick to the agenda
Boundaries TIPS

Ground Rules for Acceptable Behavior

• Take time for reflection at the beginning of a project
• Use group agreements to be explicit about how you will work together
VOCAB
Communication

Ask, Listen, and Express

• Openness
  • Sharing ideas and thoughts
  • Openminded - Listening and hearing

• Recognizing our goal
  • Canfield's definition

• Multiple communication tools
  • Everyone's voice should be heard

• Communicating together as a group
  • Internally and externally
  • Debrief and process
  • Stay on the same page

• Sharing responsibilities
  • Kept people from getting stuck
  • Not necessarily equal
  • No one had more power
Communication TIPS

Ask, Listen, and Express

• Try to tone down authoritative communication and make things more discussion based
• Use a variety of communication tools and technologies
• Keep documentation throughout
Ownership
Taking Accountability for My Own Needs, Emotions, and Choices

- **Accountability for self in the context of the team**
  - Practicing ownership early on
- **Investment in a common goal**
  - Avoiding competing agendas
  - Being deliberately hierarchy-less
- **Reflection as a tool for accountability**
  - Making time
  - Not conflating accountability with perfection
- **Trust as enabler of agility**
  - Arriving at consensus
  - Not second-guessing others’ work
  - Stepping up
Ownership TIPS

Taking Accountability for My Own Needs, Emotions, and Choices

• Take ownership of your contributions to the team
• Keep an eye on the big picture to keep group investment in common goal
• Use reflection as a tool for accountability and trust
Acceptance
Embracing Reality and Letting Go of What We Can't Control
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Embracing Reality and Letting Go of What We Can't Control

- Accept yourself and others as part of the team
  - Utilize individual strengths and skillsets
  - Team “role” requirements
Acceptance
Embracing Reality and Letting Go of What We Can't Control

• Accept that the process should be fluid and adapt with change
  • Learn together
  • Take advice
  • Trial and error – change methods
  • Prioritize – it’s ok to let go
Acceptance
Embracing Reality and Letting Go of What We Can't Control

• Accept that you can’t please everyone
  • Re-evaluate, discuss, reach agreement, and move on
Acceptance TIPS
Embracing Reality and Letting Go of What We Can't Control

- Bridge the Gap
- All parties should use the same model = VOCAB
- Ask for help but be aware of agreements made with consultants and mentors
Breakout Discussion
Vulnerability / Ownership / Communication/ Acceptance / Boundaries

• Select element from Canfield’s model
• Join group
• Introductions
• Discuss why your selected concept resonates with each of you
  • How might it help address challenges in collaboration you’ve encountered in the workplace?
  • How might it help you approach new group work contexts?
  • What questions or ideas does the VOCAB model spark for you?

Re-Convene