

# What is a Team?

**Introduction:** As a Jobs for Montana’s Graduates student, you are also a member of the student organization called the Montana Career Association (MCA). MCA will afford you many opportunities to acquire team membership and leadership skills.

## What is a Team?

A team is a group of people who work together toward a common goal. A team has a leader, although the leader is not always the same person. For instance, when a team is working on budgets, the leader will probably be a person who is good at math. The artistic person may take the leadership when the project is to develop a poster. Team members have loyalty and commitment to a common goal and to each other. A team, as a whole, succeeds or fails together. Failures may happen when team members do not do their share of the tasks, do not get along with one another, or put individual goals ahead of team goals.

## Why Become a Team Member?

“A member,” as defined by the dictionary, “is a person who belongs to a group or organization.” Membership in the MCA will provide you with an opportunity to become part of a student-led organization that will help you determine your personal and career goals, take part in and conduct meetings, attain recognition as an individual and as a part of a team, and develop the ability to work effectively as a member of a team. You will also have the opportunity to develop your leadership abilities, serve your community through volunteer services, interact with others, and develop a feeling of pride in accomplishment.

When you join the working world, you will find that most people do not work alone. Workers are usually a part of a team. Teams are better at solving problems since each team member brings a wide variety of experiences to any given situation. Teams generally make higher quality decisions than individuals and divide tasks according to abilities. Teams increase the commitment, motivation and involvement of individuals and promote individual skills and leadership. Teams respond quickly and energetically and often solve problems more efficiently than individuals do.

## Skills of a Good Team Member

What skills do you need to be a good team member? Communication skills are a must. When you speak, organize your thoughts, speak clearly and loudly, begin with a general statement that lets people know what you are going to talk about, and allow others to respond and ask questions.

When you listen, listen effectively--concentrate on what the person is saying, give that person your undivided attention, don’t be afraid to ask questions. Give appropriate feedback to others. Use your problem solving skills to solve problems and/or conflicts. Conflicts are a natural part of teamwork and should occur over issues, not personalities. They can be resolved through openness and a willingness to work together toward the common goal of the team.

Two important skills needed for team members are trust and respect. Trust is the firm reliance on the integrity, ability and character of a person. Team members rely on one another to move toward the group goals and for each member to fulfill his or her obligations and commitments. No team can be successful without mutual trust among its members. Trust, when broken, is very difficult to regain. Respect means showing consideration or honor for another; being courteous. It means being tolerant and respecting the opinions of others. It is resolving differing viewpoints for the good of the team. Respect comes from treating others as you wish to be treated.

Another important team skill is the ability to use group consensus techniques to resolve differences. Team members show group consensus skills when they:

- Defend their individual opinions during discussions.
- Exchange information which is useful to the discussion.
- View differences of opinion as being helpful to the efforts of the team, compromise and/or support decisions made by others for the common goal.

### **Roles of a Team Member**

Just as the role of a leader can change in different situations, the role of a team member can also change. Some of the roles of a team member are:

- Coordinator--clarifies the goal of the team and helps match up tasks with abilities of members
- Contributor--gives ideas and suggests ways to solve problems
- Initiator--takes the lead in a task or solving a problem
- Recorder--writes down ideas, minutes, and keeps track of other team records
- Information Seeker--asks for clarification, facts, and details to help with the task at hand
- Information Giver--gives facts, information and details to help with the task at hand
- Energizer--helps to motivate the team
- Time Manager--keeps the team on schedule
- Monitor/Evaluator--helps the team members judge their work

### **Characteristics of a Successful Team**

A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.

Today, businesses rely more and more on teams of workers to get jobs done. Companies have found that teams tend to be more productive than the same number of individuals working separately. Team players are valued in social as well as business circles. Since very few of us live or work in isolation, the ability to get along with people who have different values, different life qualities, and different temperaments, is a valued quality in the working world. Membership in the career association will give you a friendly and supportive place to learn team membership skills.

A team is successful when there is a lot of discussion in which everyone participates; members listen to each other and every idea is given a fair hearing. Everyone is comfortable putting forth his/her ideas. Even though there is disagreement, the team is comfortable dealing with the differences and uses them to promote the health of the team. Successful teams value all of their members and use the experiences of the members to move the team toward its goals. Decisions are reached by consensus; there are no winners or losers in a true team decision. All team members and their opinions are respected. When action is taken, clear assignments are made and accepted by team members.

When a group is formed, it takes time for it to become an effective team. It takes time to begin to know one another, to know each person's strengths and weaknesses. Team goals have to be developed, bonds need to be formed. People have to know that they can rely on one another for respect, fairness, and for commitment to the common goal. Teams are like banks in some ways; you get back out what you put in.

Becoming a member of a team will help prepare you for a job. Today, businesses rely more and more on teams of workers to get jobs done. Team members share responsibilities and rewards for their efforts.

Many teams rotate tasks among members. This variety reduces boredom and allows each team member to develop an array of skills.