FASTER TOGETHER

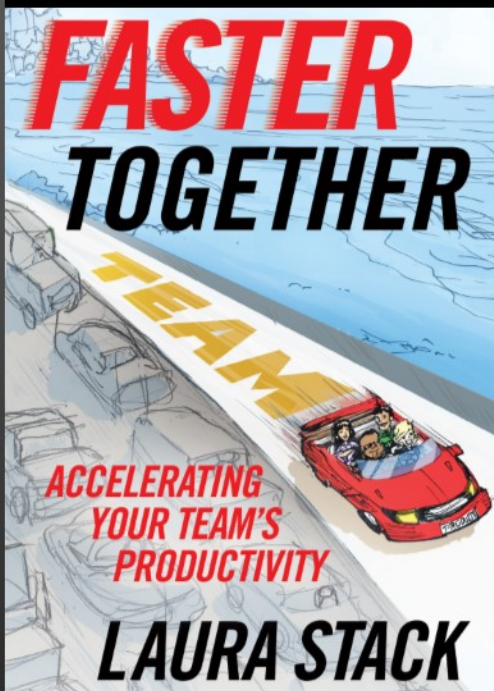## ACCELERATING YOUR TEAM'S PRODUCTIVITY

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ACCELERATING YOUR TEAM'S PRODUCTIVITY

LAURA STACK

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The Productivity Pro®

Speed Bump #1: The Same Standards Aren't Applied to Everyone

Key Points

When discussing how teams can best make use of peer accountability, make the following points:

- Great teams allow teammates work together and keep each other accountable.
- Staying accountable to peers can free up leaders for other decisions.
- Some leaders may be more receptive to peer accountability than others.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. Why is peer accountability a good method to develop for your team?

2. How can peer accountability benefit the entire group?

3. Are there actions you can take to develop peer accountability?

Interactive Exercise

Give your attendees a few minutes to write down responses to the following questions:

1. How have you experienced peer accountability in the past?
2. How could peer accountability improve productivity on our team?
3. What steps should we take to encourage peer accountability for our team members?

Conduct a brief discussion in which you and your attendees discuss why peer accountability may benefit the larger team. See if you can pinpoint activities to improve accountability for the group.

Speed Bump #2: Dealing with Negative People

Key Points

When discussing how to handle people who form opinions without giving ideas a chance, make the following points:

- Every business may have people who judge first without considering new ideas.
- It can be challenging to deal with one of these "autonegative" types in the office.
- There are strategies you can take to avoid autonegatives.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. Why can it be frustrating to work with people who judge first and don't seem to think through new ideas?

2. How can you be on the lookout and avoid this type of behavior?

3. What is the best way to distinguish an autonegative from someone genuinely trying to help?

Interactive Exercise

Ask for pairs of volunteers to role-play the following scenes. Give each pair one to two minutes to construct a scene based on these situations:

1. A team member needs to pitch a new idea in a meeting and knows one of the attendees always says no. How can she help the presentation run smoothly?
2. A team member suggested several ways to complete a project, but his colleague does not want to try anything new. How can he address this situation?

After each scene, allow the other attendees to briefly discuss what went well or poorly in the scene. At the end of the exercise, give everyone a chance to discuss different ways of dealing with autonegatives. Try to get the group to pinpoint specific phrases or actions that could be taken in order to work productively despite these autonegatives.

Speed Bump #3: Poor Team Morale

Key Points

When discussing how to build a better working environment, make the following points:

- A positive environment may help the whole team work better.
- A great way to boost your own attitude is to decide to love your work.
- Happy people enjoy work more, and people who enjoy work are more engaged.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. Why should you focus on the overall team morale?

2. How can you take steps to improve your personal attitude?

3. How can you work to improve the team environment and attitude?

Interactive Exercise

Divide your attendees into small groups. Ask the groups to discuss the following questions:

1. How can we make sure everyone is cultivating a good attitude?
2. In what ways do individual attitudes affect our entire team?
3. What steps should we take to address morale on the team?

Bring the groups back together for a larger discussion. Ask a spokesperson from each group to share key points that the group discussed. After each group has shared ideas, open the discussion up to individuals for comments about ways to improve overall team morale.

Speed Bump #4: Failure to Take the Lead

Key Points

When discussing how individuals can prepare for promotions, make the following points:

- Even when you're not in charge, you can take leadership at some level to help your team move forward.
- Lead by example, modeling what you expect of others. We must all act like leaders, because team members take their cues from both formal and informal leaders.
- Instead of keeping your head down and languishing at your job, look for opportunities to jump out front and help the formal leader pick up speed.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. Why should you exhibit leadership qualities at any level, even when you aren't a formal leader?

2. Why should you, as a team member, be partners with the leader and vice versa?

3. What are three characteristics of good leaders at any level of the hierarchy?

Interactive Exercise

Divide your attendees into small groups. Ask the groups to discuss the following questions:

1. How and why should you prepare for leadership qualities, even when you aren't a formal leader?
2. In what ways can you show leadership qualities without threatening your formal leaders?
3. How can we help others and make the team run more smoothly?

Bring the groups back together for a larger discussion. Ask a spokesperson from each group to share key points that the group discussed. After each group has shared ideas, open the discussion up to individuals for comments about how to plan for injecting leadership into all levels of the team.

Speed Bump #5: Poor Productivity Practices

Key Points

When discussing teamwork and the best ways for coworkers to work together, make the following points:

- Friction within teams is normal and will happen.
- You are a team role model, whether you intend to be or not.
- Your team members depend on your to get your work accurately and on time.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. What positive and negative experiences have you had while working in a team?

2. Which of the common issues do you think would affect a team like yours?

3. What can you personally do to speed up your team?

Interactive Exercise

Allow a few minutes for each person to write down one of the common issues they have worked through personally. In addition, ask them to write down how they became aware of and addressed the issue.

Bring the wider group back together and ask people to share the issue they recognized in the past. They should also explain how they took steps to resolve the issue.

Note any common themes that occur (e.g. attitude, working habits). Encourage discussion on how those particular issues could be addressed in the larger group if they occur.

Speed Bump #6: Team Members Never Disagree

Key Points

When discussing how teams should maintain their ability to disagree, make the following points:

- It is natural for teams to have conflict occasionally.
- Team members should be free to disagree or suggest other ideas.
- Avoiding groupthink is key to a successful team.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. What kinds of problems can occur when your team always agrees?

2. How can you use team conflict beneficially?

3. What are the biggest barriers to creative disagreement on your team?

Interactive Exercise

Give your attendees a few minutes to write down responses to the following questions:

1. What kinds of conflict have occurred in your team in the past?
2. How did the conflict help or hurt your team?
3. In what ways could you better use creative disagreement to benefit the team?

Conduct a brief discussion in which you and your attendees discuss why disagreement and conflict can be useful for teams. See if you can pinpoint specific kinds of conflict that may help or hurt the larger team.

Speed Bump #7: Not Agreeing on Ground Rules

Key Points

When discussing how team members should address conflicts, make the following points:

- It is natural, and even preferable, for some teams to have conflicts from time to time.
- Teams should agree on ground rules for addressing conflicts.
- Addressing conflicts quickly and professionally can help teams flourish.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. Why is it crucial for your team to have a system for addressing conflicts?

2. How can unaddressed conflict interfere with your team's regular operations?

3. What steps can you take to minimize conflict, e.g. through establishing ground rules?

Interactive Exercise

Ask for pairs of volunteers to role-play the following scenes. Give each pair one to two minutes to construct a scene based on these situations:

1. A team member feels overworked compared to someone else on the team and has a respectful conversation with the project leader.
2. A team member disagrees with the approach on a project and needs to discuss these feelings with a coworker.
3. A leader and team member never see eye to eye, but they agree to approach their new task as a team.

After each scene, allow the other attendees to briefly discuss what went well or poorly in the scene. At the end of the exercise, give everyone a chance to discuss different ways of dealing with team conflict. Try to get the group to pinpoint specific phrases or actions that should be taken when addressing conflict with a team.

Speed Bump #8: Not Working Well Remotely

Key Points

When discussing how to work with remote team members, make the following points:

- Remote team members are just as capable as those you work with in your office.
- You may sometimes have to make sacrifices to conference live with a remote team member, if they live in a distant time zone.
- Specific communication methods such as email may be best for working remotely.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. How have you effectively worked with remote team members in the past?

2. What are the greatest difficulties you may face with working with remote team members?

3. What are the most appropriate and inappropriate ways to communicate with a remote team member?

Interactive Exercise

Divide your teams into small groups for this exercise. Once they are in their groups, ask each person to write down their answers to the following questions. They should work alone while writing, and then share.

1. Have there been times when you have worked with a remote team member?
2. In what ways is working with a remote team member different from working face-to-face?
3. What steps should you take to overcome any difficulties when working with remote team members?

Everyone in the group should share their answers to the questions one at a time. Later, bring the groups together and allow individuals to share their strategies for working well with remote team members.

Speed Bump #9: No Collective Identity

Key Points

When discussing how to improve team strength through working collectively, make the following points:

- A great team should be able to put group goals before individual goals.
- A unified team can value individual members and still focus on the group as a whole.
- Key points from the battle trance concept can help teams heighten morale and work more effectively.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. What is the battle trance concept, and how can it apply to your team?

2. In which ways can your team work to build up team psychology?

3. How can you balance your needs within a team without overwhelming the team's larger goals?

Interactive Exercise

Divide your attendees into small groups. Ask the groups to discuss the following questions:

1. How does the battle trance concept relate to your experience on the team?
2. Are there particular ways in which you could help the team act more collectively?
3. How should you balance individual skills with a focus on the team as a whole?

Bring the groups back together for a larger discussion. Ask a spokesperson from each group to share key points that the group discussed. After each group has shared ideas, open the discussion up to individuals for comments about ways to improve team dynamics.

Speed Bump #10: Too Much Consensus

Key Points

When discussing teamwork and when it may be most useful for a group, make the following points:

- Consensus-driven teamwork can be too slow to be effective.
- Sometimes teamwork can improve outcomes, and other times it may slow you down.
- Nearly every business requires teamwork at certain times, and unilateral action at others.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. In what situations might your team require teamwork, and when would it slow down the group?

2. How can you decide whether to progress on your own or seek permission first?

3. What kinds of actions are best taken in a team? Individually?

Interactive Exercise

Divide your attendees into small groups. Ask the groups to discuss the following questions:

1. Does our team apply and use teamwork appropriately?
2. Are there ways we could save time by addressing some items without input from the larger group?
3. How can team members choose whether to seek permission or progress a task individually?

Bring the groups back together for a larger discussion. Ask a spokesperson from each group to share key points that the group discussed. After each group has shared ideas, open the discussion up to individuals for comments about when teamwork may help or hurt the larger group.

Speed Bump #11: Uncooperative Team Members

Key Points

When discussing how coworkers may be dependent on each other, make the following points:

- You and your coworkers may be highly dependent on each other, but that's not necessarily a problem.
- Teams perform at their best when all members are interdependent and focused on the same goal.
- Teams and teamwork can be a necessary and crucial part of completing some tasks.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. In what ways can uncooperative team members damage an entire business?

2. When may teams and teamwork be necessary for getting the job done?

3. Are there particular kinds of teams or teamwork styles best suited for certain situations?

Interactive Exercise

You can divide your teams into small groups for this exercise. Once in their groups, ask each person to write down their answers to the following questions. They should work alone while writing and then share.

1. How does coworker interdependency help or strengthen teams?
2. What types of teams tend to run well, and what teams may face more challenges?
3. When have I worked well in teams in the past, and what key factors helped the team run smoothly?

Everyone in the group should share their answers to the questions one at a time. Bring the groups together and allow individuals to share their strategies for depending on teammates and working more effectively.

Speed Bump #12: An Inability to Work Well With Other Teams

Key Points

When discussing how individuals can encourage inter-team teamwork, make the following points:

- You should be prepared to work with other teams from time to time.
- You may need additional teamwork skills when several teams work together.
- You should establish common ground to work with other teams.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. When and why should your team develop inter-team skills?

2. How can you practice or develop these necessary skills?

3. In what ways can you help develop a culture of inter-team teamwork?

Interactive Exercise

Divide your attendees into small groups. Ask the groups to discuss the following questions:

1. Why is it crucial for team members to work together and work with other teams effectively?
2. What kinds of habits might be useful for people working with several teams?
3. How can we work together to develop better inter-team skills?

Bring the groups back together for a larger discussion. Ask a spokesperson from each group to share key points that the group discussed. After each group has shared ideas, open the discussion up to individuals for suggestions on developing and growing inter-team skills.

Speed Bump #13: Always Following the Status Quo

Key Points

When discussing how to develop a culture that questions the status quo, make the following points:

- Your team can do well when you constructively question the status quo.
- There are some approaches you can make to change the status quo in the office.
- Leaders may have different reactions to new ideas and change—not always negative.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. What benefits can your team realize when you question the status quo?

2. Are there particular areas in your business where your "best practices" no longer are?

3. How can you bring up new ideas in a productive way?

Interactive Exercise

Divide your attendees into small groups. Ask the groups to discuss the following questions:

1. Does our team do a good job of responding to new ideas? How can we improve?
2. What are some key ways for team members to raise ideas and challenge our typical process?
3. How can we help individuals feel empowered to question the status quo?

Bring the groups back together for a larger discussion. Ask a spokesperson from each group to share key points that the group discussed. After each group has shared ideas, open the discussion up to individuals for comments about ways to effectively introduce new ideas and question the status quo.

Speed Bump #14: A Lack of Shared Values

Key Points

When discussing how team members can develop a group code of conduct and principles, make the following points:

- Successful teams share a strong foundation.
- You should take the initiative and help your team members create Core Values for the group.
- Using shared values as a base can help the whole team operate better.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. Why should you and your team members share common goals and values?

2. How can you help build this foundation?

3. Are there types of Core Values teams should or should not focus on?

Interactive Exercise

Divide your attendees into small groups. Ask the groups to discuss the following questions:

1. Is it crucial for teams to share Core Values? Why?
2. What kinds of Core Values might be appropriate for our team?
3. How can we work together to develop a strong foundation for our group?

Bring the groups back together for a larger discussion. Ask a spokesperson from each group to share key points that the group discussed. After each group has shared ideas, open the discussion up to individuals for comments about how the team can make sure everyone is on the same foundation.

Speed Bump #15: A Refusal to Take Initiative

Key Points

When discussing taking the initiative and being productive, make the following points:

- Lack of initiative can hold up opportunities for new growth and development.
- If you have strong initiative, you can make your whole team more productive.
- It's important to cultivate welcome environments for motivated team members.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. Why is initiative so crucial for you to develop?

2. What kinds of behaviors or attitudes can stand in the way of strong initiative?

3. How should you better encourage initiative among team members?

Interactive Exercise

Ask for pairs of volunteers to role-play the following scenes. Give each pair one to two minutes to construct a scene based on these situations:

1. A team member wants to start a new project, but isn't sure how to proceed. The team member speaks to a colleague and is encouraged.
2. A team member wants to introduce something new and speaks to the leader. The leader is supportive and helps the team member get started.

After each scene, allow the other attendees to briefly discuss what went well or poorly in the scene. At the end of the exercise, give everyone a chance to discuss different ways to develop initiative. Try to get the group to pinpoint specific phrases or actions that should be taken when a team member wants to start something new.

Speed Bump #16: Micromanaging and a Refusal to Share Responsibility

Key Points

When discussing responsibilities and how sharing can improve outcomes for the team, make the following points:

- Sharing responsibility brings benefits to your and to your team.
- It can take practice to start sharing responsibility, but you have to learn to "share your toys" to be efficient.
- Sharing responsibilities and engaging with work can help you and your team ace your tasks.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. Why is it important to share responsibility?

2. What positive outcomes can sharing responsibility bring to teams?

3. How does micromanaging affect team productivity?

Interactive Exercise

You can divide your teams into small groups for this exercise. Once in their groups, ask each person to write down answers to the following three questions. They should work alone while writing and then share.

1. What experiences have you had with shared responsibilities?
2. What benefits or consequences can follow shared responsibilities, and how can these be addressed?
3. Where do you see opportunities for our team to share responsibilities?

Everyone in the group should share their answers to the questions one at a time. Bring the groups together and allow individuals to share their strategies for sharing responsibilities on the team.

Speed Bump #17: Not Understanding Team Roles

Key Points

When discussing how individuals can determine their roles in a team, make the following points:

- It is key for you to know where you fit in a larger team.
- You should contribute beyond what is listed in a job description.
- Each team has specific roles and responsibilities needing to be filled.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. Why is it important for you and your team members to fully understand your roles in the larger team?

2. How can you make sure you contribute beyond the role listed on your job description?

3. Are there ways for you to fit in additional roles and still maintain your productivity?

Interactive Exercise

Divide your attendees into small groups. Ask the groups to discuss the following questions:

1. What kinds of roles does our team have, and are they being filled appropriately?
2. Why is it important for our team members to contribute in many ways, not only in the ways listed in a job description?
3. How do the best teams make use of each team member's skills?

Bring the groups back together for a larger discussion. Ask a spokesperson from each group to share key points that the group discussed. After each group has shared ideas, open the discussion up to individuals for comments about ways for team members to know and fill their roles effectively.

Speed Bump #18: Low Personal Return on Investment

Key Points

When discussing team productivity and finding its cause, make the following points:

- When team productivity drops, you should think about whether your own work is deteriorating.
- There are several quick checks to determine whether your personal productivity is decreasing.
- If you cause a drop in productivity, it's best to address the issue quickly.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. How can you work to make sure you are productive and contributing to the wider team?

2. What are some key ways to determine if you are becoming less productive?

3. What steps can you can take to become more productive?

Interactive Exercise

Give your attendees a few minutes to write down responses to the following questions:

1. What should we be on the lookout for in terms of decreasing productivity?
2. What are quick checks to see whether our productivity is flagging or on track?
3. How can we, as a team, work better together to boost productivity?

Conduct a brief discussion in which you and your attendees discuss how to boost individual productivity. See if you can pinpoint specific things that help contribute to your team members' productivity. Allow attendees to share tips and strategies for building up productivity when they notice a decrease in personal performance.

Speed Bump #19: A Lack of Written Work Goals and Performance Standards

Key Points

When discussing how teams can use written commitments in the workplace, make the following points:

- Written agreements can help you set your goals.
- Revisiting these goals keeps you on track during the year.
- You may benefit from using these commitments to balance your annual review.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. Which types of workplace goals or commitments can you most easily document?

2. How can writing down your goals improve on a traditional annual evaluation?

3. In what ways can you improve your performance standards if they are flagging?

Interactive Exercise

Divide your attendees into small groups. Ask the groups to discuss the following questions:

1. How have annual evaluations helped you stay on track—or have they?
2. Would you benefit from using these additional written commitments?
3. What other ways can you and your team use written goals to measure progress and improve your performance standards?

Bring the groups back together for a larger discussion. Ask a spokesperson from each group to share key points that the group discussed. After each group has shared ideas, open the discussion up to individuals for comments about ways for the team to implement new written commitments.

Speed Bump #20: Failure to Get Better Every Day

Key Points

When discussing how to set team goals and why they are necessary, make the following points:

- A strong team will be able to set goals and work toward them in the future.
- Teams should think about several components of goal setting in order to realize results.
- Goal setting is about individuals *and* about the larger team.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. Why is setting goals an important part of individual *and* team productivity?

2. How can you make sure you set appropriate and reasonable goals for yourself and for the team?

3. What elements are necessary for you and your team to be successful and stand by your goals?

Interactive Exercise

Ask the larger group to think about each scenario and to suggest reasonable goals or milestones for each:

1. The team leader wants to launch a new product this year.
2. A team member wants consideration for promotion this year, and speaks with her leader about areas where she should improve.
3. A leader wants to double sales this quarter and wants to discuss individual sales targets.

Allow a few minutes for everyone to debrief. Ask the attendees to share their key takeaways on setting goals and how they would like to implement better goal setting for the team.

Speed Bump #21: Failure to Recognize Flaws

Key Points

When discussing how teams can strive to excel instead of being good enough, make the following points:

- Teams frequently fail because they can't see their own greatest flaws.
- You need to set aside your ego and set strong goals in order to move in the right direction.
- Good communication and role models can help teams improve.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. How can you ensure that you can see your own flaws, so you can improve on them?

2. Which particular strategies can you use to make sure your team is moving forward?

3. What are key reasons why a team might be stuck at good and not superior?

Interactive Exercise

Give your attendees a few minutes to write down responses to the following questions:

1. Is our team good, great, or superior?
2. How can individual team members help our group excel?
3. Are there particular actions we can take to encourage a culture of excellence?

Conduct a brief discussion in which you and your attendees discuss why a team might have stopped striving to be superior and how to fix that. See if you can pinpoint specific actions for the team to take to improve.

Speed Bump #22: Not Getting the Right Training

Key Points

When discussing how to run effective training sessions, make the following points:

- Training is a useful and necessary tool for all employees.
- You may receive many benefits from training.
- Your leaders can make training even more effective with some simple steps.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. Why is training an important part of your employee development?

2. How often should you and your team pursue training?

3. In which ways can you use training to help benefit yourself and your teammates?

Interactive Exercise

Divide your attendees into small groups. Ask the groups to discuss the following questions:

1. When have you experienced productive training?
2. Are there particular steps or activities which may make training more effective?
3. How would you like our team to handle ongoing training?

Bring the groups back together for a larger discussion. Ask a spokesperson from each group to share key points that the group discussed. After each group has shared ideas, open the discussion up to individuals for comments about how training can be best used and implemented for the team.

Speed Bump #23: Personal Underperformance Issues

Key Points

When discussing how individuals can take the lead, make the following points:

- Even if you think you're doing good work, it may not be true.
- If you're a jack of all trades, just don't care, or coasting on routine, you may be underperforming.
- If you have a gut feeling something's not right, then step up and ask your team about your performance

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. In what ways can you tell if you might be underperforming?

2. Do you feel disengaged and disinterested in the team or company goals? Why?

3. How can you recover if you suspect or know you are underperforming?

Interactive Exercise

Divide your attendees into small groups. Ask the groups to discuss the following questions:

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you realized you were underperforming?
2. What did you do to turn the situation around?
3. Did your team or manager make an effort to help you repair the situation?

Bring the groups back together for a larger discussion. Ask a spokesperson from each group to share key points that the group discussed. After each group has shared ideas, open the discussion up to individuals for comments about ways to take the lead.

Speed Bump #24: Settling for Good Enough

Key Points

When discussing the dangers of settling for good enough to your team, make the following points:

- There are many reasons why they may want to improve their value at work.
- Sometimes a shake-up is necessary to force better performance.
- The right mindset is just as important as taking the right actions.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. What are some situations where you may need to shake up your team to increase better performance?

2. What are strategies you might use to become irreplaceable in the office?

3. How do your priorities and attitudes play a role in increasing your value?

Interactive Exercise

Divide the attendees into two groups. Ask the groups to discuss the following questions:

1. What strategies have you seen people use to boost their performance at work?
2. What were the outcomes you witnessed? Did the person become more valuable?
3. How might you help shake up your team to induce better team performance? Or should you even try?

Bring the groups back together for a larger discussion. Ask a spokesperson from each group to share key points that the group discussed. After each group has shared ideas, open the discussion up to individuals for comments about ways to increase value or to support others choosing to do so.

Speed Bump #25: Decisions Take Too Long

Key Points

When discussing how teams can make decisions speedily and effectively, make the following points:

- People can work well in teams, but they should avoid getting trapped in groupthink.
- Team members can take steps to ensure their decision-making is productive and not a waste of time.
- There are several strategies teams can use to speed up decision-making.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. Why is group decision-making important in today's business environment?

2. In what ways can decision-making help you and your team? How can it hinder you?

3. Which strategies can you use to speed up decision-making?

Interactive Exercise

Divide your attendees into small groups. Ask the groups to discuss the following questions:

1. How has group decision-making worked well for you in the past? What about poorly?
2. Are there key strategies our team can use to improve our decision-making?
3. In which ways could we work individually to ensure our group decision-making stays productive?

Bring the groups back together for a larger discussion. Ask a spokesperson from each group to share key points that the group discussed. After each group has shared ideas, open the discussion up to individuals for comments about ways to speed up group decision-making.

Speed Bump #26: Waiting on Permission for Every Decision

Key Points

When discussing whether people should act first or seek permission first, make the following points:

- Sometimes workers have to choose what to do first: take action or seek permission.
- Workers need to balance seeking permission against disrupting supervisors.
- For ordinary decisions, sometimes action may be best.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. What kinds of situations might demand you to take action over seeking permission?

2. When should you always seek permission first? Or do such circumstances exist?

3. How can you and your team develop a strategy for choosing which tasks always need permission, or always need action?

Interactive Exercise

Give your attendees a few minutes to write down responses to the following questions:

1. When have you had to choose action first or permission first?
2. Have you noticed any challenges when seeking action or permission on this team?
3. What particular tasks should always get permission first, or always take immediate action first?

Allow everyone to share a key point from the reflection. Conduct a brief discussion in which you and your attendees discuss why certain tasks might always need action first or permission first. See if you can pinpoint specific things to help the team in the future.

Speed Bump #27: Failure to Take Initiative

Key Points

When discussing how individuals can take the initiative, make the following points:

- There is no single way for you to take the initiative and help your team.
- Each leader and team will react differently to team members taking the initiative.
- Pay attention to the three levels of initiative and when they should apply.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. In what situations might taking the initiative be helpful? When might it be harmful?

2. Which levels of initiative might be easiest for you to start adopting?

3. How can you choose which level of initiative is appropriate?

Interactive Exercise

Ask for pairs of volunteers to role-play the following scenes. Give each pair one to two minutes to construct a scene based on these situations:

1. A team member thinks a project might fail and takes the initiative to check with her manager.
2. There is a tight deadline and some new tasks to be completed, and a team member calls the project team to discuss priorities.
3. A team member sees that no one responded to an urgent request and chooses to do it himself.

After each scene, allow the other attendees to briefly discuss what went well or poorly in the scene. At the end of the exercise, give everyone a chance to discuss different ways of taking the initiative. Try to get the group to pinpoint specific scenarios which could benefit from initiative and the related discussions that should happen.

Speed Bump #28: Doing Things That Waste Time

Key Points

When discussing how to manage productivity, make the following points:

- Sometimes teams should focus on what to *avoid* doing in order to boost productivity.
- Teams can benefit from cutting some tasks and focusing on others.
- There may be negative habits undermining team productivity.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. Why could you benefit from choosing items not to do?

2. How can you decide what is and is not a productive use of time?

3. How can eliminating certain attitudes or habits benefit your team?

Interactive Exercise

Give your attendees a few minutes to write down responses to the following questions:

1. What things I should put on a Not-To-Do list?
2. How can I decide whether or not a certain action or habit benefits team productivity?
3. In which ways could I help the team focus on the right items?

Conduct a brief discussion in which you and your attendees discuss why certain things could help increase productivity if they were eliminated. See if you can pinpoint specific action items for your team.

Speed Bump #29: Focusing on Low-Value Tasks

Key Points

When discussing tasks and how to address conflicting priorities, make the following points:

- No matter how organized you may be, urgent situations can come up, and they require flexibility.
- You should understand how to adapt your priorities quickly.
- There are several ways to address conflicts of priority.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. What are some examples of experiencing conflicts with priorities?

2. How can such a conflict be challenging in a real-life situation?

3. What should you do when you have too much on your plate?

Interactive Exercise

Ask for pairs of volunteers to role-play the following scenes. Give each pair one to two minutes to construct a scene based on these situations:

1. A leader asks a team member to start a new project, even though there's a big presentation due tomorrow. The team member asks the leader to help prioritize.
2. A team member has a long to-do list and seeks help from another team member.

After each scene, allow the other attendees to briefly discuss what went well or poorly in the scene. At the end of the exercise, give everyone a chance to discuss different ways of addressing priority conflicts. Try to get the group to pinpoint specific phrases or actions that could be taken in order to discuss these priorities with other team members or leaders.

Speed Bump #30: Not Accomplishing Tasks in Order of Importance

Key Points

When discussing timewasters and how to reclaim time, make the following points:

- There are plenty of timewasters hidden in our work habits.
- These common timewasters all have easy solutions.
- Always ask yourself, "What is the highest and best use of my time right now?"

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. Why is it so important to eliminate timewasters in your daily processes?

2. Which common timewasters might apply to different businesses or business groups?

3. How can you stay on the lookout for these common timewasters?

Interactive Exercise

Divide your attendees into small groups. Ask the groups to discuss the following questions:

1. Which common timewasters have you recognized in your own working habits?
2. Do you think any of these timewasters are especially common for our team?
3. How can we work together as individuals to eliminate these timewasters from our team?

Bring the groups back together for a larger discussion. Ask a spokesperson from each group to share key points that the group discussed. After each group has shared ideas, open the discussion up to individuals for comments about ways to reduce or eliminate common timewasters.

Speed Bump #31: An Inability to Turn off the Technology

Key Points

When discussing mindlessness and failing to pay attention, make the following points:

- Everyone struggles with paying attention at times.
- Technology can be a distraction from tasks and from other priorities.
- Mindlessness can have negative consequences for you and for you team.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. What are some common mindless activities or habits that people develop, especially regarding technology?

2. Why is mindlessness problematic for you and your team?

3. What are some ways to recognize and combat mindless tech-associated behavior?

Interactive Exercise

Give your attendees a few minutes to write down responses to the following questions:

1. What kinds of mindless behavior most affect you?
2. In the past, how have you recognized and addressed your behavior?
3. Are there particular kinds of mindlessness you recognize on our team?

Conduct a brief discussion in which you and your attendees discuss why mindlessness can be harmful and what activities you have each recognized. Allow attendees to share tips and strategies for combating their own mindlessness.

Speed Bump #32: Excessive Time Wasters

Key Points

When discussing how team members can be a distraction, make the following points:

- It is normal for coworkers to be distracting sometimes.
- Several common habits might be timewasters in disguise.
- You should look out for these behaviors and try to avoid them.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. What are some of the biggest timewasters affecting teams today?

2. How can these behaviors hurt overall team productivity?

3. How should you address these problems within your own team?

Interactive Exercise

Ask for pairs of volunteers to role-play the following scenes. Give each pair one to two minutes to construct a scene based on these situations:

1. A team member is constantly interrupted by a colleague, and the team member addresses this problem.
2. One team member is frequently unprepared and lacks information, and her team member speaks to her about it.
3. A team member has difficulty communicating with his project partner and addresses the issue.

After each scene, allow the other attendees to briefly discuss what went well or poorly in the scene. At the end of the exercise, give everyone a chance to discuss different ways of handling distracting behavior.

Speed Bump #33: Got-a-Minutes

Key Points

When discussing how interruptions can damage productivity, make the following points:

- Although they can be useful, most interruptions are petty and waste your time.
- You should take personal responsibility to think twice before we "Got a minute?" someone.
- There are ways to respond when interrupted that can help preserve productivity.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. How can you productively and politely handle an interruption or drop-in?

2. How can you arrange your work, boundaries, and environment, so interruptions don't happen in the first place?

3. What can you do to avoid breaking others focus?

Interactive Exercise

Give your attendees a few minutes to write down responses to the following questions:

1. How have interruptions negatively affected your productivity in the past?
2. What have you done to limit introductions? Has it worked?
3. Do you make a sincere effort to avoid interrupting others? Why or why not?

Conduct a brief discussion in which you and your attendees discuss how "got-a-minutes" can negatively affect team and personal productivity. Can you pinpoint ways to limit such interruptions? Allow attendees to share tips and strategies for handling interruptions within the group.

Speed Bump #34: Not Taking Advantage of Team Efficiency

Key Points

When discussing how teamwork can benefit workers, make the following points:

- Teamwork can accomplish more than any one individual alone.
- Teamwork has many benefits from you and the larger group as a whole.
- Teamwork is a critical skill for groups to build up in the workplace.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. Why is teamwork such an important part of the modern workplace?

2. How can teamwork accomplish more for a group than any one worker?

3. Are there particular ways in which you can encourage teamwork?

Interactive Exercise

Give your attendees a few minutes to write down responses to the following questions:

1. When have you experienced great results from teamwork? What about poor results?
2. What can make teamwork succeed or fail?
3. How can we encourage a culture of teamwork in our group?

Conduct a brief discussion in which you and your attendees discuss what benefits may come from teamwork. See if you can pinpoint specific goals your group may lack. Allow attendees to share tips and strategies for building teamwork within the group.

Speed Bump #35: Excessive Teamwork

Key Points

When discussing how teamwork can be most effective, make the following points:

- Teamwork can be a great benefit, but only to a certain point.
- Teamwork isn't always necessary.
- Groupthink and other productivity hinderers can come from unnecessary teamwork.
- Focus on how teamwork can be best applied to avoid these productivity problems.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. What are some benefits and possible downsides of teamwork?

2. In which situations might teamwork be useful, and in which is it unnecessary?

3. Are there particular reasons a company may support or not encourage teamwork?

Interactive Exercise

You can divide your teams into small groups for this exercise. Once in their groups, ask each person to write down their answers to the following three questions. They should work alone while writing and then share.

1. What kinds of benefits have you seen from teamwork?
2. What kinds of problems have resulted from teamwork, if any?
3. Are there any common problems you notice in teamwork within our group?
4. How can you weigh the benefits of teamwork against possible distractions?

Everyone in the group should share their answers to the questions one at a time. Bring the groups together and allow individuals to share their strategies for using teamwork in its most beneficial way. Pay special attention to suggestions for the group to improve its productivity through teamwork or individual work.

Speed Bump #36: Obstacles in the Road

Key Points

When discussing how people may inadvertently undermine productivity, make the following points:

- Personality issues and small actions can hurt productivity.
- Each team member can affect the productivity of the entire team.
- Communication and being mindful of attitudes can help your team be more productive.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. What kinds of actions or attitudes can hamper your team's productivity?

2. How can you stay on the alert for behavior likely to drain productivity?

3. How you can think of the consequences of your actions and attitudes *before* you hurt team productivity?

Interactive Exercise

Ask for pairs of volunteers to role-play the following scenes. Give each pair one to two minutes to construct a scene based on these situations:

1. A team member often complains about her work, which distracts her coworkers. Another team member chooses to discuss this habit with her.
2. A leader often uses slow or unreliable methods to complete tasks, and a team leader has a suggestion.
3. A team member fails to check in or ask for help on his large project. A leader wants to make sure he is on track.

After each scene, allow the other attendees to briefly discuss how each situation showed a productivity problem. Give everyone a chance to discuss different ways of addressing these issues with others, as well as responsible ways to accept criticism. Try to get the group to pinpoint specific phrases or actions that they should take in order to discuss these problems with other team members or leaders.

Speed Bump #37: Using the Wrong Communication Channel

Key Points

When discussing best practices for office communication, make the following points:

- There are many methods for business communication, and tips for using each method.
- Some people may prefer some types of communication to others.
- Team members should be aware of which communication methods are preferred by each other and by their manager.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. Why is it important to learn all the different kinds of business communication?

2. Are there certain types of communication that might be more or less appropriate in some situations?

3. How should you determine which kinds of communication should be used, and in what circumstances?

Interactive Exercise

Read the following situations out loud. After each, pause and ask the group which types of communication might be more or less appropriate for the scenario.

1. A team member has a complaint about a coworker and needs to tell the HR contact.
2. A leader just found out his project was cancelled and must update the team.
3. A coworker is arranging after-work drinks and needs to spread the invite.
4. An urgent deadline got postponed, and the team needs to know.
5. A company policy has changed and will affect several team members.

Give the attendees a few minutes to debrief and discuss which kinds of communicating should be used in certain situations.

Speed Bump #38: Using Texting and IM Inappropriately

Key Points

When discussing best practices for texting and instant messaging in the workplace, make the following points:

- Technology has provided great tools for quick communication, including texting and instant messaging.
- These forms of technology can be distracting instead of enabling productivity if improperly used.
- Teams should make sure their communication protocols help team members reach their goals.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. How can texting and instant messaging benefit your team?

2. Which kinds of teams may get the greatest use from these kinds of communication?

3. What kinds of communication guidelines apply to texting and instant messaging, compared to traditional communication methods?

Interactive Exercise

Divide your attendees into small groups. Ask the groups to discuss the following questions:

1. Which communication methods do you prefer using on our team?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of texting and instant messaging?
3. How can our team ensure we use communication to increase productivity?

Bring the groups back together for a larger discussion. Ask a spokesperson from each group to share key points that the group discussed. After each group has shared ideas, open the discussion up to individuals for comments about ways to best communicate in these two forms.

Speed Bump #39: Unclear, Imprecise Communication

Key Points

When discussing how individuals can improve communication skills, make the following points:

- Communicating effectively is a crucial skill for any team member.
- Strong communication can help you improve team productivity.
- You can take simple steps to become a more effective communicator.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. Why is communication a critical part of strong team operations?

2. What benefits can good communication bring to you?

3. How can you work to better develop your communication skills?

Interactive Exercise

Divide your attendees into small groups. Ask the groups to discuss the following questions:

1. What are some reasons we should work on improving communication skills?
2. How can our team benefit from more effective communication?
3. Which steps will you take to become a stronger communicator?

Bring the groups back together for a larger discussion. Ask a spokesperson from each group to share key points that the group discussed. After each group has shared ideas, open the discussion up to individuals for comments about how to communicate in more effective ways.

Speed Bump #40: Technology Addiction

Key Points

When discussing how to increase productivity by limiting technology addiction:

- Technology is helpful in the office, but there are times when workers should exercise digital discipline.
- Certain technology habits can derail productivity.
- You and your team should use technology in certain times and certain ways.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. In which ways can technology distract you in the workplace?

2. Why is it important to set limits around your technology?

3. What measures can you put in place to increase productivity and reduce technology distractions?

Interactive Exercise

You can divide your teams into small groups for this exercise. Once in their groups, ask each person to write down their answers to the following three questions. They should work alone while writing and then share.

1. What kinds of technology distraction have you noticed in your own life?
2. How have you addressed these distractions? Are you still working to address these bad habits?
3. How can our team support its members in digital detoxing?

Everyone in the group should share their answers to the questions one at a time. Bring the groups together and allow individuals to share their strategies for avoiding technology distraction. Pay special attention to suggestions for the team to improve its technology habits.

Speed Bump #41: Unproductive Meetings

Key Points

When discussing how to run more productive meetings, make the following points:

- Meetings can be useful for conducting business, but they can also waste time.
- You and your team can take steps to make sure their meetings are run well by using specific team guidelines.
- Follow protocol to ensure each meeting is as productive as possible.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. When are meetings a good way to communicate ideas, and when may another strategy be best?

2. Which types of team guidelines should you prepare for your meetings?

3. How can you work to ensure productive meetings only?

Interactive Exercise

Divide your attendees into small groups. Ask the groups to discuss the following questions:

1. When have you had an extremely productive meeting in the past? What about an unproductive meeting?
2. What made these meetings run well or poorly?
3. How does our team handle meetings?
4. Are there ways in which our team could improve meeting productivity?

Bring the groups back together for a larger discussion. Ask a spokesperson from each group to share key points that the group discussed. After each group has shared ideas, open the discussion up to individuals for comments about ways to have productive meetings.

Speed Bump #42: Ineffective Conference Calls

Key Points

When discussing how to communicate effectively over a conference call, make the following points:

- Conference calls can help team members in different locations discuss projects effectively.
- You and your team should work on developing best practices for conference calls.
- Use some reasonable protocols to run effective conference calls.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. What benefits do conference calls have over other forms of communications?

2. What key etiquette points are necessary on business conference calls?

3. How can you improve your conference call habits?

Interactive Exercise

Divide your attendees into small groups. Ask the groups to discuss the following questions:

1. When have you had good conference calls? How about unproductive ones?
2. Are there key factors which make a conference call useful or a waste of time?
3. What kinds of protocols can our team utilize to ensure our conference calls are effective?

Bring the groups back together for a larger discussion. Ask a spokesperson from each group to share key points that the group discussed. After each group has shared ideas, open the discussion up to individuals for comments about ways to run effective conference calls.

Speed Bump #43: Ineffective Video and Skype Calls

Key Points

When discussing how to properly use videoconferencing as a tool for business, make the following points:

- Videoconferencing can help team members in different areas connect and be productive.
- There are several key etiquette points to be mindful of during videoconferences.
- You and your team should make sure they present themselves well in a videoconference setting.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. How can videoconferencing be a productive tool for you and your team?

2. In which situations might videoconferencing be an effective method of communication, and when should it be replaced with another form of communication?

3. How can you ensure you are using videoconferencing in a professional manner?

Interactive Exercise

Divide your attendees into small groups. Ask the groups to discuss the following questions:

1. Does our team make good use of videoconferencing?
2. How can we get more comfortable with videoconferencing, and use it more effectively?
3. Are there particular ways we need to improve videoconferencing etiquette?

Bring the groups back together for a larger discussion. Ask a spokesperson from each group to share key points that the group discussed. After each group has shared ideas, open the discussion up to individuals for comments about how videoconferencing could be used more effectively.

Speed Bump #44: Complicated, Time-Consuming Meetings

Key Points

When discussing how to run meetings effectively by using standing as a tool, make the following points:

- Not every team meeting runs at peak productivity.
- Sometimes shaking up the normal meeting routine can help (e.g., by standing).
- You and your team should try out different routines to increase productivity.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. What can cause meetings to run unproductively?

2. How can standing or being active help your team work more effectively?

3. Are there specific strategies you can take to improve your meeting productivity?

Interactive Exercise

Divide your attendees into small groups. Ask the groups to discuss the following questions:

1. Do you recall any past team meetings for being extremely productive or wasteful?
2. How could we adopt standing meetings or other tweaks to improve productivity?
3. What other ideas do you have for improving our meeting effectiveness?

Bring the groups back together for a larger discussion. Ask a spokesperson from each group to share key points that the group discussed. After each group has shared ideas, open the discussion up to individuals for comments about ways to improve productivity by running meetings differently.

Speed Bump #45: Poor Email Communication and Lack of Etiquette

Key Points

When discussing best practices for email in the workplace, make the following points:

- Email can be a fantastic tool and a huge distraction.
- Make sure to set limits around email use, or you risk losing focus.
- Good email protocol can ensure this tool stays sharp and does not become a distraction.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. How has email made a difference in your workplace?

2. What kinds of advantages and distractions can email bring?

3. In which ways can you ensure you use email productively?

Interactive Exercise

Divide your attendees into small groups. Ask the groups to discuss the following questions:

1. How has email helped you on the team? How has it distracted you?
2. In which ways could you change your email habits to be more productive?
3. How can our team better utilize email among team members?

Bring the groups back together for a larger discussion. Ask a spokesperson from each group to share key points that the group discussed. After each group has shared ideas, open the discussion up to individuals for comments about ways to best communicate in email form.

Speed Bump #46: Leaving Bad Voicemails

Key Points

When discussing how to communicate effectively over voicemail, make the following points:

- Voicemail can be an excellent tool for business communication when used properly.
- There are best practices you can develop to improve your voicemail habits.
- You should make sure you abide by key etiquette tips for voicemail.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. What are the main reasons for you to leave a voicemail instead of using another kind of communication?

2. What key etiquette points can make or break a business voicemail?

3. How can you improve your business voicemail habits?

Interactive Exercise

Read the following situations out loud. After each, pause and ask the group for a voicemail message appropriate for the scenario, or if a phone call is not the best method, what other communication might fit.

1. A team member calls a client for a monthly check in.
2. A leader gets urgent project information and calls the project leader.
3. A coworker finds out the client cancelled a meeting and wants to know why.
4. A team member wants to connect later on a new project idea.
5. A project leader wants a new set of deliverables from a team member.

Give the attendees a few minutes to debrief and discuss which kinds of voicemails they should use in certain situations.

Speed Bump #47: Being Inconsiderate to Others Around You

Key Points

When discussing how people may be inconsiderate in their technology habits, make the following points:

- Technology can be a useful tool, but excessive use can be disruptive.
- You should be mindful of how your technology use affects others.
- Take reasonable steps to reduce distractions for others.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. What are some common types of mindless technology use?

2. Why is it important to limit technological distractions for others?

3. How does technology use affect your company in positive and negative ways?

Interactive Exercise

Divide your attendees into small groups. Ask the groups to discuss the following questions:

1. What kinds of mindless technology use are most common for you?
2. What effects might this use have on others? Have you taken steps to address this?
3. How can we help the team function better through moderating our technology use?

Everyone in the group should share their answers to the questions one at a time. Bring the groups together and allow individuals to share their strategies for being mindful of technology use. Pay special attention to suggestions for the group to improve its productivity through cutting down on inconsiderate actions.

Speed Bump #48: No Set Standards for Texting

Key Points

When discussing how to use texting as a productive means of communicating, make the following points:

- You and your team can use texting to communicate quickly and effectively.
- In order to use texting professionally, you should be mindful of key etiquette.
- When used appropriately, texting is a great addition to business communication.

Discussion Questions

Engage your team in a discussion of the following questions:

1. How can texting be a productive tool for you and your team?

2. In which situations might texting be an effective method of communication, and when should it be replaced with another form of communication?

3. Are there ways in which you can check whether you use texting in a professional manner?

Interactive Exercise

Give your attendees a few minutes to write down responses to the following questions:

1. How has texting helped or hurt me in a professional setting?
2. When should texting be used to communicate? When is another kind of communication best?
3. Does our team use texting as an effective method of communication?

Conduct a brief discussion in which you and your attendees discuss why texting can be a useful business tool. See if you can pinpoint specific ways texting should and should not be implemented as professional communication.