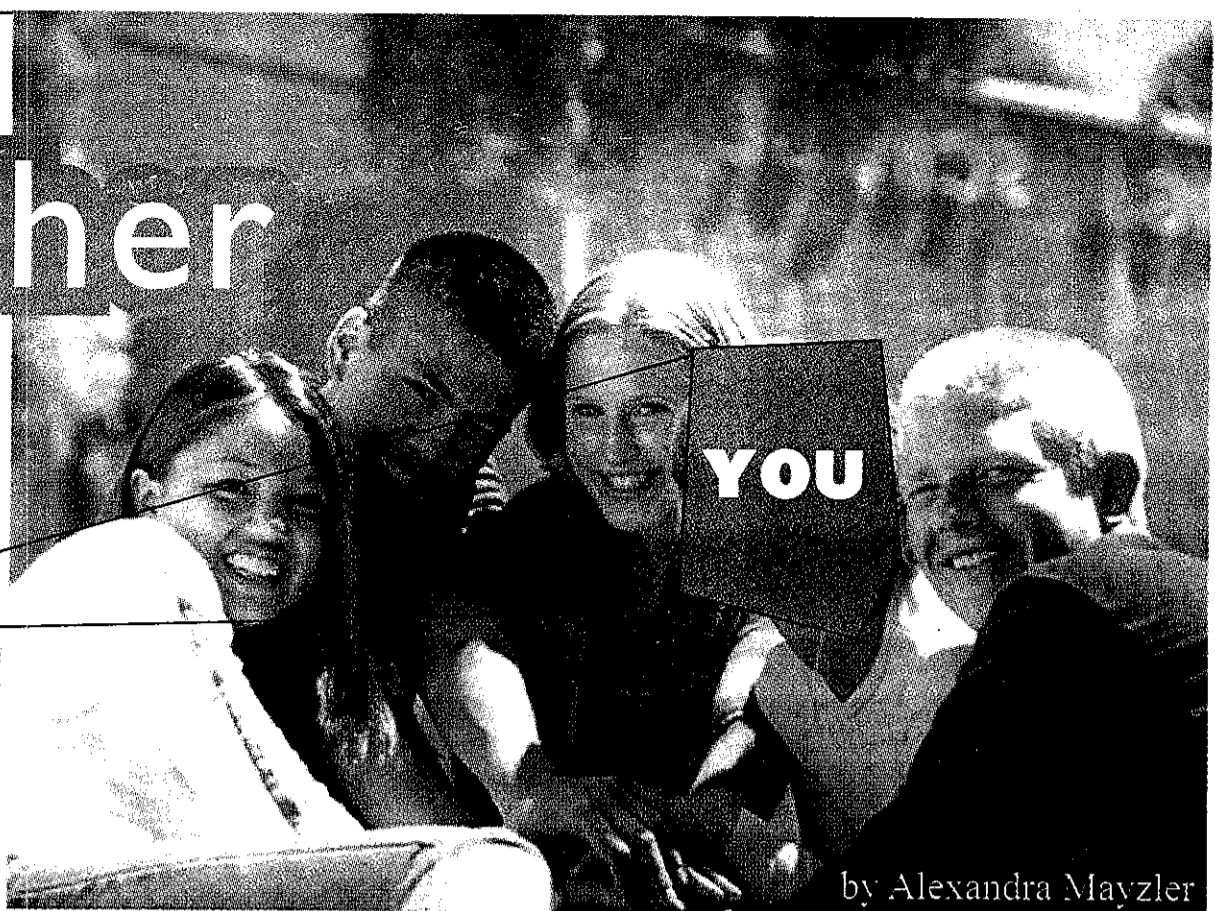


All Together Now

ARE YOU AN EFFECTIVE TEAM MEMBER?



by Alexandra Mayzler

You've heard the catchphrase before: There is no "I" in team. From class projects to sports teams, group involvement demands being a good team member. But what *exactly* does that mean and how do you avoid common blunders of the group experience?

Before starting that collective science project or stepping foot on the ball field with your teammates, read on to discover what you can do to be a good team member and what steps the group should take to perform well.

First, let's talk about becoming a strong team player.

Be reliable.

A good team member is someone who others can count on. Demonstrate reliability by getting your share of the work done in a timely manner and meeting commitments. Complete assignments and be consistent. Don't assume that other team members are going to pick up where you slack off.

Communicate positively.

Letting the team know your thoughts and ideas is essential. Don't shy away from contributing to the group. Instead, share information and knowledge. If you have a good idea, explain it in a positive manner. Avoid putting anyone else down by insulting his or her ideas. Treat your fellow group members with consideration and respect.

Listen up.

Remember to listen first and speak second. This allows you to have an effective and balanced discussion with your team members. Good listeners do wonders to enhance group dynamics. Every team needs a thoughtful member who will listen to all ideas and viewpoints without arguing. Once you've listened to the other members, you can express your thoughts in a meaningful way.

Participate actively.

Don't just show up to a meeting. Come prepared, listen carefully and speak up during discussions. Take initiative to help move the project along and volunteer for assignments. Have a "can-do" attitude.

Roll with the punches.

Working in a team requires you to compromise and cooperate. Realize that even if you are set on doing something a certain way, you may have to meet another team member half way. Be flexible to other opinions. Figure out unique ways to collaborate on various tasks, solve problems and complete assignments. If a teammate needs support, then offer a helping hand.

Problem solve.

No group experience is void of a few rough patches. It is important to have a team member who is willing to deal with problems. Good problem-solvers act to find solutions to problems—and they don't procrastinate or place blame on others.

Put your best foot forward.

Care about the team and the outcome of your joint work. Put in effort and expect everyone else to do the same. Make sure to look at the bigger picture of the project and not just your piece of the puzzle. Be committed to the team and support the other members. Good team players participate and motivate.

Now that you know what it takes to be a good team member, let's take a look at steps everyone should take to work well as a group.

Get to know your group.

Before getting down to business, spend some time getting to know your group members. Learn something specific about each person in the group and discuss individual strengths and weaknesses. By creating a friendly atmosphere that breeds team spirit, all group members feel encouraged to do their best.

Know the ground rules.

It's important for the group to establish guidelines. Volunteer to write down the group's ground rules. These

should include rules on communicating, sharing tasks, and meeting requirements and deadlines.

Understand each task.

Having a clear and united understanding of goals is important. For a couple of minutes during an introductory group meeting, each member should independently write down objectives of the project. Then compare notes and agree on the main goal you are working toward together.

Designate roles.

Once the group has identified the goal, spend time on allocating responsibilities. Because the group has already had the "get to know you" chat, each member should feel comfortable selecting a role. Make sure that people's strengths and weaknesses are considered when roles are assigned. A timid group member shouldn't be forced to be the group leader.

Develop a plan.

After roles are chosen, formulate a plan. Divide the tasks based on roles. Next, create a schedule for upcoming meetings and set goals for each meeting. Discuss ways that the group will communicate. Don't opt for e-mail if someone in the group lacks computer access.

Resolve disagreements.

Not all group projects are smooth sailing. If a problem occurs, don't ignore it. Rather, mention the conflict at a meeting. Find out what is causing the problem and discuss possible solutions with all the team members simultaneously. Encourage all group members to communicate their thoughts.

Alexandra Mayzler is the president and founder of Thinking Caps Tutoring, which offers one-to-one tutoring, test preparation and skill building. For more information, visit www.thinkingcapstutoring.com.