

## **Communication Skills: Learning to be a Group or Team Member**

### **Description**

In groups and teams, formal roles refer to those responsibilities for which members are appointed or elected. The leader or chair, for example, who is elected by group or team members or who is appointed by the instructor or someone else, is a formal role. Other formal roles are the recorder or secretary, facilitator, and timekeeper. Each role brings with it a number of expectations of responsibility. Members also have responsibilities that translate into formal roles.

### **Learners**

Asking students who work in groups or teams to assume several different formal roles will help ensure that the work of the group or team goes smoothly and also provides some experience for members in taking on the responsibilities of formal roles.

### **Equipment**

No equipment is needed although members could use a matrix to create a rotating assignment sheet of formal roles if they chose to do so.

### **Facilitator**

Although there are certain responsibilities that attach themselves to formal roles (the secretary, for example, is expected to take minutes) it is also the case that responsibilities associated with formal roles emerge as a result of the culture of which the group or team is a member. Responsibilities of formal roles might also emerge as a result of the necessities of the situation and size of the group. Sometimes, for example, the chair or leader also takes minutes. In an educational environment, the formal roles required for group or team work and the responsibilities attached to those roles might also depend on the age of the participants. The roles and responsibilities within a group of young children would likely differ from roles and responsibilities expected from a group or team of college students.

### **Instructions**

1. Determine which formal roles will be needed to complete the task assigned to the group or team. Members can identify these roles or the instructor can require or designate certain roles.
2. Determine a method for identifying which members will assume which formal roles, or a method by which formal roles will rotate so that all members have the chance to practice each formal role. (See sample matrix)

| <b>Formal Role</b>  | <b>First Meeting</b> | <b>Second Meeting</b> | <b>Nth Meeting</b> |
|---------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Chair/Leader</b> | <b>Mary</b>          | <b>Marcus</b>         | <b>Jolene</b>      |
| <b>Recorder</b>     | <b>Harry</b>         | <b>Mary</b>           | <b>Marcus</b>      |
| <b>Facilitator</b>  | <b>Jolene</b>        | <b>Harry</b>          | <b>Mary</b>        |
| <b>Time Keeper</b>  | <b>Marcus</b>        | <b>Jolene</b>         | <b>Harry</b>       |

3. Agree on the responsibilities that accompany each formal role. These descriptions contain typical responsibilities that accompany each role, but they can be modified to fit group or team needs, ages of members, and learning objectives.
  - a. Responsibilities of Leader/Chair
    - Conduct meetings
    - Coordinate logistics (assign tasks, arrange for equipment, etc.)
    - Serve as liaison of group/team and instructor
    - Plan agendas
    - Work with facilitator to keep discussions on track
    - Require decisions to be based on facts
    - Support the group/team
    - Continuously evaluate team process and effectiveness
  - b. Responsibilities of Recorder
    - Maintain minutes of each meeting
    - Distribute minutes (hard copy or electronic) and agendas to members
    - Serve as contact person when members will be absent
    - Assemble reports, proposals, other products
    - Handle correspondence and maintain records as needed
  - c. Responsibilities of Facilitator (Could be combined with time keeper)
    - Assist group/team to keep on track according to agenda goals
    - Work with leader to plan agendas
    - Encourage all members to contribute
    - Be proficient in decision making methods and other team tools and instruct as necessary in their use
    - Act as timekeeper if there is no official time keeper (Roles of facilitator and time keeper may be combined)
  - d. Responsibilities of Time Keeper (Could be combined with facilitator)
    - Assist group/team to keep on track according to agenda goals
    - Work with leader to plan agendas, weighting items according to importance and time
    - Roles of time keeper and facilitator may be combined
  - e. Responsibilities of Members
    - Attend meetings

- Be prepared to discuss agenda items (read material or complete assignments as necessary)
- Complete assigned and voluntary assignments
- Adhere to group or team ground rules
- Participate in discussions
- Maintain own beliefs, but be prepared to collaborate with others'
- Be willing to consider new ideas

## **References**

There are many references available on various aspects of the subjects of leadership and meeting management. Two helpful websites are:

Big dog's leadership page – meetings. Is a website that lists all the tasks necessary to set up and conduct a meeting: topics such as setting up the meeting site, preparing to attend the meeting, keeping the meeting moving, and taking notes along with other considerations are discussed. <http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/leader/leadmet.html>. (Accessed on 2/07/05).

The Center for Creative Leadership webpage contains resources for learning more about the process of leading and different approaches to leadership. <http://www.ccl.org/cclcommerce/index.aspx> was accessed on 2/07/05.