

Ten golden rules for effective teams

The way your team works together **will** make or break your project, but more than often your delivery team will be made up of people from different organizations with different objective and goals – as a project manager you will have the responsibility for getting this team to perform.

We have compiled the ten golden rules below to help you build an effective team at the start of the project and how to keep it that way through to delivery.

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1	Start off on the right foot. Many teams are not effective as they are merely a bunch of people with individual skills brought together. If all of your team don't have the same understanding of where your project is going from the start, they'll remain as individuals just working in the same room. Make sure your team has a common understanding of what the project is doing and how their contribution will help get there.
2	Know your team's strengths and weaknesses. Everyone in your team will have strengths and weaknesses – but do you know what they are? By exploring these early in the project you'll know where your team is going to excel naturally, where you have skill overlaps and where your team is likely to fail. You can then put in techniques and processes in place to make the best of your teams skills and fill in the holes - you'll also find some hidden talents that you didn't know your team had!
3	The team is greater than the sum of its individuals. While this is an old cliché, in many cases the opposite is true – and often the case when people with similar skills are brought together with invariably different ideas on how things should be done. Teams don't just become effective; you have to work at it. Understanding how your team fits together is critical – as the leader you need to give them strong direction early in the project so they can see things working from the outset. If you get this right at the beginning, you're up for a smoother ride – it's much harder to resolve team conflict later in the project.
4	Build the team with off site days. Often hugely underestimated in value, off-site days can get your team highly motivated and operating efficiently very quickly. The investment in an early off site day is well worth it when you see the increase in productivity it provides for the team. But to make these effective, you've got to get the off-site day working well – if you've not done one before, use an experienced facilitator and make sure you work with them prior to the day to get the objectives, structure and outputs clearly defined. And don't just focus on project start-up – for longer projects, this should be repeated to maintain the team momentum and keep the team fresh.
5	Give the team a break. The project environment is often highly pressured – especially when a system release is due. Don't constantly work your team into the ground – they will put that extra effort in when it's needed, but don't make this every day, or you'll find motivation will swiftly drop. If your team has worked hard to achieve a delivery milestone, lay off the gas a little and allow your team to recover. We don't mean send them all on holiday, but how about doing some system housekeeping, thinking about the strategy or doing next stage planning activity. If you plan these activities into your project from the

	start you'll keep the pressure off after key milestones and maintain a happier team.
6	Meet regularly as a team. And we don't just mean progress meetings. Use the team to help you solve problems – they'll feel much more valued if you use the whole team to help resolve difficult issues and they'll feel ownership for the solution. Make sure team meetings don't get too big though – team meetings with more than 10 people start too loose their effectiveness and people will feel time is being wasted. Keep large meetings short and to the point, use smaller meetings and workshops to resolve issues and agree solutions.
7	Plan carefully when introducing new team members. Once you have an effective team it can be very difficult to introduce a new team member – a jelled team can have a sense of eliteness, which is great for the team but not so good for a new team member. Put activities in place to make this easy for them – and work with the team to see how they are going to make sure the new member will be integrated into the team.
8	Regularly ask the team for feedback and act on it. You may think your team is working effectively but how do you know? If your team don't feel things are working well, then they won't be. Always ask for feedback, either in team meetings or with more formal methods such as questionnaires. And don't just do it once – it'll be less intrusive if you do this on a regular basis and your team will be more honest with you.
9	Lead by example. Your team will be looking to you for leadership but also respect. If you want your team to complete actions on time, make sure you do too!
10	Give the team space, but know when to step in. Once your team is up and running don't undermine their capability. While in the early stages you need to give strong direction, most teams operate more effectively when the individuals are given increased responsibility. The sign of a great team leader is one that knows when to leave the team to solve problems for themselves, and when to step in to sort things out. Most of this skill comes with experience, but you can help yourself by turning some of the questions your team asks you back to them using responses like "Why don't you ask XXX to help you?"..."What do you think?"..."Come back to me with your ideas". If the team isn't working, find out why. If you really can't resolve the issue don't be frightened to remove the team member that's causing the problem – a bad team member is a real motivation killer.