

# How to Work Collaboratively in Team Ministry

Collaboration comes from a Latin word which means, *to labor together*. It refers to a group working on a project or solving a problem by combining the contributions of each member.

There are reasons some find collaboration awkward. Collaboration slows the decision-making process. Collaboration requires group members to spend a lot of time communicating. The delegation involved can be hard work. Sometimes we feel it would be "easier just to do it all myself."

So why use teams? First, teams bring multiple gifts and personalities to the table. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. You get more perspectives in the decision-making process; together you make better decisions. Each of us has blind spots; a group can pick up on things one person might miss. The group can prevent one member from over-reacting. Teams give you a bigger "antenna" to receive feedback; they provide more eyes and ears. While someone may not feel comfortable coming to one team member with feedback, he or she may feel free to approach another team member. You find out sooner when you get off track. Teams may take more work, but they multiply effectiveness. They get more done... better.

The team leader can facilitate the collaborative process in ways that that bring out the team's tremendous potential. Some ways you can do this as team leader include:

**Get some training.** Your team should be the church experts in your area of ministry. Attend a training event, listen to an audio CD, read a book.

**Call the meeting.** *Please* call the meeting! Teams plan their own work and ministry. If the team doesn't meet, then the team won't make plans for ministry. Some people think meetings are boring; so *don't* have a *boring* meeting! While informal communication is important, if a couple of the members *make a decision* in the hall between Sunday School and the Worship Service, then someone will be left out. In effect, you are telling that person who was not present that he or she is not a valued member of the team. Before the meeting, get resources and information to the team; this gives them the opportunity to think things through before the meeting.

**Have a grocery list of things that need to be discussed and decided (an agenda).** Don't go into the meeting and ask the team, "What do you guys want to do?" It's too hard to start from scratch. Have a list of problems to be explored, possible solutions, open dates, etc.

**Facilitate the entire team's participation.** There is a saying that a camel is a horse designed by a committee. It refers to the excessive compromises sometimes made by committee members in trying to avoid conflict and get along. With team ministry, members need to have the courage of their convictions. When there is disagreement, team members should be willing to make the case for their ideas—instead of peacefully compromising their way to a camel. In the meeting, get the team to brainstorm. Team leader, don't allow an individual member to dominate the conversation. Call on silent members. Ask team members to share their feelings about the team's progress. Make it safe to be honest. Listen actively, showing members that each one's ideas are taken seriously; help the rest of the team to do the same. Seek opinions and refine ideas until the group arrives at a decision.

**Divide the work.** Assign jobs and set dates to report back. Take advantage of each member's strengths and spiritual gifts.

**Agree on what you agreed on.** A real ministry plan has details and deadlines. Put it in writing.

**Keep things going!** Check in with team members to monitor progress and give encouragement.

See yourself as involved in two ministries: the one your team is tasked to do – and the other, developing your team members.