

## **How do I become a Team Player?**

So you've decided to take responsibility for your own career advancement by making yourself valuable to the organization you work for. It's best for the organization, and it's best for you. It's ethical and fulfilling, and gives you a chance to play a legitimate role in the success of your organization. You've decided to become a team player. The question is, "how do you go about it?" There are five principles you can follow that will put you well on your way.

First, always ask yourself what is in the best interest of the organization. This is the first, and most important step you will take, and for some it can be the most difficult. In America, we have long been conditioned to look out for number one. The rugged individualist is our national hero. We honor the self made man. And we put bumper stickers on our cars announcing that "He who dies with the most toys, wins". The problem is that, except for the rare, lucky exception, looking out for number one rarely equates with career advancement, and often is quite self-destructive.

The point is that the organization you work for is more interested in its own success than in your individual success. As a result, if you put your own self-interests ahead of the interests of the organization you will find yourself at cross purposes with the organization. To then expect the organization to reward you with advancement and growth opportunities is simply irrational. On the other hand, if you seek opportunities to do what is in the best interest of the organization, you will find yourself doing exactly those things that make the organization successful. Those are the activities that your supervisor and managers will find valuable, and will want to reward.

The next thing you can do to make yourself valuable to the organization is to show that you value those who lead the organization. Respect and trust those who are in positions of leadership and authority over you. This is not to be confused with kissing-up or being a yes-man. Part of what it means to show respect and value for your leaders is to give them clear, honest opinions, even when you disagree with them. But whether you agree or disagree, you must do so with respect. This means that you don't badmouth your supervisor to your colleagues. You trust that your managers are competent. You make a conscious choice to believe that the organization's leadership is pursuing what is best for the organization, and has the ability to accomplish the task. Valuing your leadership in this way makes you valuable to them.

The most pragmatic way to practice showing value for leadership is the third strategy for becoming a team player. Actively support organizational decisions. We have all seen, and many of us have been, the employee who continually questions and criticizes decisions after they have been made. In many ways, this is like arguing a referee's call. You are never going to get the decision changed, and all the energy you spend in the argument is incredibly counterproductive. Rather than increasing your value to the organization, you actually become a negative force, working against the organization's

success. Instead, you should put your energy into supporting the organization's decisions. Even if you disagree with the decision, your job is to support it, and by doing so, you help the organization succeed in carrying out the decision. Helping the organization succeed makes you more valuable.

The fourth strategy may surprise you. Ask questions. The reason it may surprise you is that you may be picturing that annoying employee who is always asking "why do we have to do this?" or "why did they do that?" And you know they know exactly what the answers to those questions are, but asking gives them the chance to register their disapproval, make their point, and try to get others riled up about their issue. That person is not valuable to the organization, and those are not the questions I am talking about. Ask useful, clarifying, constructive questions. Do your homework to understand the context that your organization operates in, and then ask intelligent questions that clarify decisions, needs and the work that needs to be done. Asking questions that help you to do better work makes you a better team player.

Lastly, and this is the obvious one, work your butt off. I'm not saying that you necessarily have to put in 100 hours a week. In fact, appropriate boundaries that allow you to stay mentally and physically healthy and to avoid burnout are an important part of your ability to sustain high performance levels. However, that is not the problem most of us have. If you want to be truly valuable to your organization you should spend all day working hard. Not shopping on eBay, not sleeping at your desk, not working on your entry for the March Madness office pool. Work hard until your tasks for the day are complete, and then spend the rest of your time adding value. Investigate ways to improve productivity. Search for novel new markets for your company's products. Clean. Go back to the first principle, and do whatever it takes to advance the interests of your organization.

As you apply these five strategies to your job, you will discover that your value to the organization will grow steadily, and you will be recognized as the kind of employee that all organizations look for. A team player.