# Team Norms Exercise

Step 1. Ask each member to think of the worst team they've served on. Any group counts — a work team, a volunteer group, a sports team — as long as the members were dependent on each other to produce results.

Step 2. Have each team member spend 2 minutes writing down what made that experience so terrible. Direct them to be as specific as possible about their reasons.

Step 3. Ask team members to share their experiences with the whole group.

Step 4. Ask each member to think of their best team experience. As with the negative experience, each team member should spend 2 minutes writing down what made the experience so good.

Step 5. As before, encourage team members to share their experiences with the whole team.

Step 6. With these comments in mind, discuss as a group what makes for a good team experience and what makes for a bad one.

Step 7. Ask team members to suggest behaviours

Step 8. Discuss the suggestions as a group and decide as a group which ones the team can support and adhere to.

As part of this step, flag any concerns or challenges that the team thinks they may struggle with. Even if you can't identify a solid solution, doing this keeps reality in the forefront.

For example, at XYZ Company, most of us are on multiple research, writing, or planning teams in addition to our client work. With full days and even full weeks booked well in advance, we often struggle with the simple task of getting 5 or 6 team members together on a conference call. Simply setting team norms of "participating in team meetings" doesn't help us overcome our scheduling issues. But in flagging this as a challenge, a team can be direct — and possibly more creative — about how its members communicate, accomplish the work, make decisions, and move forward.

Step 9. Discuss how to respond to a team member who doesn't follow the norms. What is the mechanism for dealing with this situation? Ideally, the team members will take ownership of team norms, calling out inconsistencies and violations rather than expecting the team leader to police the process.

Step 10. Transfer the team's list of "must-do" behaviours into a document so all team members have access to it. Your team may choose to post the list of team norms electronically or in its regular meeting room for quick reference.

Finally, as new members join your team, bring them up to speed and get their input on team norms. Make it a point to discuss what is working and what isn't. Keep the team norms front-and-centre, revisit them to update and add norms, and encourage meetings to address both the "what" and "how" of functioning as a team.

Setting team norms shouldn't be a one-time activity — in reality, it's just a way to start talking about how the team gets the job done. It's one of several ways to improve team performance and collaboration. and team norms that would contribute to the current team's success. Pay attention to the most relevant issues or actions that could affect the team's biggest challenges. Be sure to keep track of suggestions on a screen or large sheet of paper that all team members can view.