

4.1: Prelude to Working Effectively in Groups

Significant portions of this chapter were adapted from Scott McLean's *Business Communication for Success* textbook with permission of the author.^[1]

Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.

- Andrew Carnegie

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

- Margaret Mead

Teamwork at Quick-Lube

At Quick-Lube, the promise to customers is to change oil within ten minutes. There is no way that Quick-Lube could do this without teamwork. For example, in one shift, there is someone assigned as the customer interface, the below hood, and the above hood. The duties of the customer interface include checking people in, moving the car into the stall, and managing the oil change process. The below the hood person is responsible for draining the oil and replacing it. The above hood person washes the windows, vacuums the floors, and also checks the above the hood items such as the air filter. All of these people must communicate well in order to finish the job in ten minutes. Sometimes, on busy days such as Saturday afternoon, this can be stressful, but each team member knows their job, which creates a better and faster customer experience.

As humans, we are social beings. We naturally form relationships with others, as in our opening example of Quick-Lube. Sometimes forming relationships is necessary to serve the customer best. In fact, relationships are often noted as one of the most important aspects of a person's life, and they exist in many forms. Interpersonal communication occurs between two people, but group communication may involve two or more individuals. Groups are a primary context for interaction within the business community. Groups may have heroes, enemies, and sages alongside new members. Groups overlap and may share common goals, but they may also engage in conflict. Groups can be supportive or coercive and can exert powerful influences over individuals.

Within a group, individuals may behave in distinct ways, use unique or specialized terms, or display symbols that have meaning to that group. Those same terms or symbols may be confusing, meaningless, or even unacceptable to another group. An individual may belong to both groups, adapting his or her communication patterns to meet group normative expectations. Groups are increasingly important across social media venues, and there are many examples of successful business ventures on the web that value and promote group interaction.

Groups use words to exchange meaning, establish territory, and identify who is a stranger versus who is a trusted member. Are you familiar with the term "troll"? It is often used to identify someone who is not a member of an online group or community; does not share the values and beliefs of the group; and posts a message in an online discussion board to initiate flame wars, cause disruption, or otherwise challenge the group members. Members often use words to respond to the challenge that are not otherwise common in the discussions, and the less-than-flattering descriptions of the troll are a rallying point.

Groups have existed throughout human history and continue to follow familiar patterns across emerging venues as we adapt to technology, computer-mediated interaction, suburban sprawl, and modern life. We need groups, and groups need us. Our relationship with groups warrants attention on this interdependence as we come to know our communities, our world, and ourselves. This will be the focus of this chapter.

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