

41.

TEAM MEMBERS DON'T GET ALONG WITH EACH OTHER

Corey was an instructional coach at a small elementary school that was kicking off a new year of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) with teachers. While setting up structures and expectations for each grade level, Corey observed immediate tension with a team of 3rd grade teachers. While two of the teachers came prepared to discuss student work, the third teacher openly complained about the meeting, often interrupting or steering the conversation to an unplanned topic while the other two teachers sat uncomfortably quiet. Corey attempted to reexplain the purpose for meeting, feeling his body tighten with anxiety. He could see that relationships were being further damaged with each meeting conducted in this way, and that intervention was necessary.

Before tackling this issue, it is important for a coach to reflect on the behaviors that they observe among team members, and consider where those behaviors originate. They may stem from simple anxiety. Common anxiety behaviors can look like:

- ✘ noisy sighing
- ✘ frowning and rolling eyes
- ✘ frequently checking watch with exaggerated motions
- ✘ asking off-topic questions
- ✘ using complex terms and references
- ✘ turning body away from group
- ✘ jangling car keys
- ✘ frequently checking cell phone

While a coach or other team members may interpret this conduct as “rude” or “unprofessional,” it is important to note that these behaviors often stem from fear and anxiety. Ask yourself, What might this person be afraid of? Could it be the fear of change? Being wrong? Not being heard? Being exposed? With this in mind, a coach can more skillfully find ways to shape the team culture. To do this, a coach will need to apply strategies for building community agreements in order to develop healthy habits for future progress.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Have any efforts to establish community and norms already taken place?

Has an administrator been made aware of this issue?

What successes has this team had in the past? How do you know?

What strengths does each team member bring to the team?

Have roles and responsibilities been assigned for this team?

What team dynamics have led to this situation?

What does each team member need in order to be their best?
How do you know?

PLAN A: TEAM SUCCESS ANALYSIS

It's a pretty simple idea: People are less likely to be unpleasant toward each other if they discover ways to like and respect each other.

At an upcoming meeting, prepare to facilitate a **Success Analysis Protocol (Appendix)**.

1. A few days before the meeting, ask each member to reflect on a recent success in their classroom and come prepared to share. It can be big or small, about a student, a lesson, or a classroom technique.
2. Using the protocol, each member should take time to journal individually about their success, and then share with their colleagues.
3. After sharing, the team should engage in collaborative reflection, and identify common features of their successes.
4. Before closing the meeting, make sure to ask the team to reflect on the experience. For example, you might ask, "How did today's meeting go for you? Would this be useful to do again in the future?"



Note: One Success Analysis will not “fix” a dysfunctional team, but it can be a solid start to authentic community and empathy building that is still centered on student learning. Consider using this strategy regularly!

PLAN B: ROSES AND THORNS

Developing practices to acknowledge the highs and lows of teaching is key to creating empathy and emotional resilience in a team. Because our days are so pressed for time, we often jump into meetings without taking the time to process the hard work that we do. But it is critical to carve out time to do just that.

At your next meeting, explain that you would like to kick off a new beginning routine. One such routine, called “Roses and Thorns,” is described below.

Before pulling out laptops and getting down to business, ask each member of the team to share:

Roses: A highlight, success, small win, or something positive

Thorns: A challenging experience, or something where more support might be needed

Bud: New ideas that have blossomed or an experience to look forward to

Before moving on, ask each member to reflect on their energy level and thoughts. Ask, “How do you feel as a result of this check-in?”

Over time, a coach can ask the team to facilitate this activity on their own, or find other ways to mindfully check in, but no matter how you approach it, you should always make every effort to facilitate this work objectively in order to bridge communication and relationship gaps.

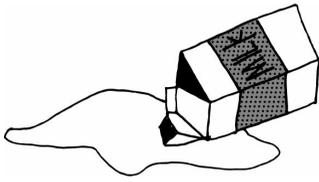


PLAN C: DEVELOP TEAM PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

Once a team has had the opportunity to experience some positive and mindful experiences (such as a Success Analysis or Roses and Thorns) a coach should work with the team to develop community agreements so that they can move on to effectively tackling work that centers on student learning.

Refer to **#45 Team Members Lack Defined Roles** to reexamine each member’s responsibility to the team. If a team member has previously displayed anxiety behaviors, using **Developing Team Partnership Agreements (Appendix)** can help alleviate the apprehension that stems from a lack of clarity within team dynamics.

WORST CASE SCENARIO



If a teacher openly refuses to participate or intentionally sets a team off course, a coach should report these observations to the principal. Because this can be a sticky situation, it is important to

stick to objective facts and refrain from offering your own evaluation. Provide agendas or notes from the meetings, and ask the administrator to attend a meeting to make their own observations. A coach should never attempt to evaluate or supervise teachers, so it is important that this kind of dysfunction is handled by administration who may be able to arrange a third-party mediator or reassemble a more productive team.

FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

- ✦ Lead with confidence
- ✦ Employ empathy-building exercises
- ✦ Build community

PITFALLS

- ✗ Letting adult drama dictate a meeting
- ✗ Taking sides
- ✗ Engaging in unproductive conversations
- ✗ Assuming the issue will resolve itself

YOU GOT THIS!

Schools should be social hubs for strong, healthy communities to thrive. Remember that, while you will have challenging moments, there is the potential for many more joyful moments.

When you shine a light on the good, it builds empathy across the community and influences a healthier culture for all.



READ THIS

Elena Aguilar, *The Onward Workbook: Daily Activities to Cultivate Your Emotional Resilience and Thrive* (2016).

Cesar Romero, "Rose, Thorn, Bud (RTB): A 5-Minute Game to Kickstart Your Mindfulness Habit" in *Medium* (Jul. 28, 2015).

APPENDIX TOOLS

Success Analysis Protocol

Developing Team Partnership Agreements

SEE ALSO

#45 TEAM MEMBERS LACK DEFINED ROLES

