

TENA TALK



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Practical ideas for better teams

How to create an environment that gets everyone thinking "team".

With time and budget constraints that can restrict staff from attending anything other than mandatory training courses, topics such as teamwork come under the heading "luxury" rather than "necessity". This can be a problem for care homes wanting to actively drive forward quality of care, and for individuals who want to keep their career development firmly on track. Does this mean that nothing can be done and that everyone should carry on as they are just hoping that good team working simply develops as a result?

Not so, says Ian Govier, founder of Choose The Right Training & Consultancy (www.crrtraining.co.uk). He insists that having an effective team is one of the cornerstones of good care. "The people who lead and make up residential care teams create the very culture that will determine safe and quality care for those who live, either on a short or long-term basis, in residential homes," he says.

Great teams don't just happen by accident, he says. "Where there is a positive culture of team working in residential care, it is likely that these teams will be focused on providing and continually improving high-quality and compassionate care. They will not only nurture compassion and wellbeing for those within their sphere of care, but also for each other."

So, don't wait for the manager to suggest team activities - put the idea forward yourself. Whether you plan to set aside 15 minutes for a coffee-break session, make it part of your weekly meetings or engage the services of a professional, encouraging good teamwork should always be a priority. Who knows, getting to know your work colleagues better could even be fun.



EFFECTIVE TEAMS

According to Chris Sampson, managing director of specialist training firm The Care School (www.thecareschool.co.uk), who has worked with teams in residential homes for more than 20 years, getting it right means having honest, safe communication processes where teams are happy to challenge each other and set group standards.

"The continuity that is required to ensure consistent care can ultimately mean the difference between physical safety and ill health, emotional security and anxiety," he explains. "So teams need to communicate openly and freely to ensure that care practices are not only accurate, but agreed and in the very best interests of each individual receiving support."

Staff who do not pay attention to team dynamics are generally less motivated, Sampson warns, and often lose the high levels of goodwill that are required in any care sector

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environment - something that leads to a higher turnover of staff and a decreased level of service. The worst-case scenario, of course, is deterioration in the quality of life for patients, he points out.

TENATALK decided to look for some examples of team building activities that can be carried out in a few minutes and without the need to leave your workplace.

One of the essential elements of teamwork training is to start reflecting on how well things are working, says Mr Govier. Some key questions you could think about include:

- What makes you happy to come to work?
- What are you doing when you're at your happiest?
- What is the purpose of your team?
- How would you rate communication within the team?
- Does the team review its objectives?
- What is working well?
- What is not working well?
- What can we do about it?

Rate how effective you are in each area (out of five, say) to help with discussing this with others.

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Tips for encouraging good team interaction...

- Be honest
- Develop a mission statement or philosophy that everyone works to
- Think about your use of language, tone, intonation and body language – and how it can impact others
- Hold open and inclusive group discussions that allow people to express how they feel without retribution
- Run clinics on improvements
- Build a whole philosophy based on positive approaches
- Reward excellent ways of dealing with issues that allow people to learn from problems or difficulties – rather than be punished for raising them
- Stop ticking boxes to satisfy regulating bodies and build cultures that don't automatically discipline, but embrace and learn from errors.

(Supplied by Chris Sampson, The Care School)

As well as openly working through such questions, quick and easy exercises can help spread key messages among the team and get everyone thinking about both their own approach and that of others. Mark Howe, training manager at Healthcare Training Solutions (www.hctrainingsolutions.co.uk), has devised some common care scenarios for you to try...

NIGHT SHIFTS

Help staff understand that night shifts are as important as daytime work by getting them to write a list of all of the required duties that each shift involves. They can then compare them and see if any can be swapped to even out the load. (Up to 30 minutes)

CHALLENGING CARE

Knowing what makes each other tick is always good teamwork. Use an activity called "ladder of severity" – where you ask people to give a behaviour that they hate the most. Once they have 10 behaviours listed, ask each person to rate them on how each one affects them, numbering them from one to 10 (one being the most problematic). You can take this further by encouraging members of the team to help each other out when they recognise someone's worst behaviour is occurring. (Up to 45 minutes)

MAKING DECISIONS

Hold a discussion: a manager asks you to pick up a resident who has slipped out of their chair. Knowing that you're only supposed to do this in an emergency, you attempt to fetch the hoist, but the manager states, "We haven't got time to fetch any equipment as it is nearly lunchtime." Think of all the possible ways to tackle this. (15 minutes)

SAFEGUARDING COLLEAGUES

Set the scene for a discussion by depicting two members of staff who have worked together for some time and consider themselves "workmates". In recent weeks, one of these members of staff has been coming to work smelling of alcohol. How would the other colleague start to tackle this? (15 minutes)

COMMUNICATION

Divide staff into groups of three. Number one and number two start a conversation (about anything – soaps, sport, etc), while the third person rolls up a sheet of A4 paper and places one end close to number one's ear. Number three then starts talking gibberish. This helps people to understand how communication about a patient's needs should be clear and two-way – highlighting to staff that they should involve the resident at all times and not just have their own conversations while leaving them out. (15 minutes or longer if you swap roles)

The idea is that team working can be fun, as well as useful, and doesn't need to take up too much time.

LEARNING – AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

Many training companies now offer various forms of shorter "flash" courses in teamwork for care homes that don't have the time or budget for longer sessions. There is also advice and support for good practice online. For example, the Royal College of Nursing offers a range of free online resources to support flexible and continuous professional development for both nurses and healthcare assistants, including a dedicated teamwork module. Visit rcnhca.org.uk/quality/teamwork