

Let's agree how we are going to work together (A Team Ethos)

 <p>Purpose</p>	<p>To gain the team's full commitment to the process they are engaged in with their manager. This will be achieved through both parties to the contract having a clear understanding of what is expected of them, and what they are prepared to give.</p>
 <p>Application</p>	<p>In this specific application, it will help the team and manager to define the relationship they will have during the training sessions.</p> <p>It can also be used in a wider sense to define or re-define the relationship between any people involved in a customer-supplier situation. For example, between a manager and his/her team, or between team members.</p>
 <p>What happens?</p>	<p>After a suitable briefing related to the purpose of the session, the two parties involved take an agreed time to develop their 'shopping lists' of what they expect of the other party, and what they are prepared to give.</p> <p>The next stage is to compare the two lists, and check for understanding on the issues listed, which hopefully can be agreed by everyone involved.</p>
 <p>Resources</p>	<p>Overall time required: 45 minutes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 minutes for introduction and initial briefing • 15 minutes for both parties independently to develop their lists of what they would like to give and receive • 25 minutes for open discussion on the lists, to clarify any issues of concern, and to reach agreement. <p>Materials and resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flipchart Stand with Blank Pads • Marker Pens • Blue-tack • Paper, Pens or Pencils for Participants
 <p>How do I do it?</p>	<p>OPENING THE SESSION</p> <p>Open the session by stressing that you wish to secure your participants' full commitment, and that you believe this will be best achieved by agreeing a set of ground rules, or 'contract' with them.</p> <p>Many relationships in life whether they are between married couple, business partners, or between managers and teams, come to grief because either or both parties have an unreal and often undisclosed expectation of what to give or receive.</p>

Certainly many training sessions fail to deliver their full potential for this very reason. The participants arrive with their own expectations, and the trainer comes along with a specific set of objectives.

How much simpler relationships could be if the people involved could be quite explicit about what benefit they expected to derive from the relationship, and what exactly they were prepared to put into it.

Investing time up-front in agreeing a contract, or ground rules, will enable everyone involved to feel that their own specific needs will be recognised, and will provide a structured way of gaining commitment to specific and positive behaviours.

INITIAL BRIEFING

You will need to pre-prepare four flipchart sheets with the following headings:

- What the team expects from me (the manager).
- What the team is prepared to give.
- What I (the manager) expect from the team.
- What I (the manager) am prepared to give.

Before proceeding, check that you have the team's agreement to the idea of a contract. Once you have this, agree how much time they will need to develop their list (**15 minutes should be enough**).

Leave the team with their two pre-prepared sheets of flipchart paper, pens etc, and go yourself to another room to prepare your two lists.

After the agreed time, return to the team and check that they are ready to display and discuss their lists. If they need further time, be prepared to negotiate.

WHAT'S IN THE CONTRACT?

Once the team are ready, return to the main room and display all four sheets of flipchart paper on the wall. Starting with the team's lists, check that you understand every item, asking for clarification when necessary. Every team will have different ideas but, in general, their lists could well include some or all of the following items listed under the headings below.

THE TEAM'S LISTS

What the team expects from you (the manager)

- Timekeeping
- Clear objectives
- Confidentiality
- Frequent breaks
- Monitoring and reviewing objectives
- Direction
- Facilitation
- Confidence and competence
- Respect
- Listening
- Professionalism
- Clarity
- Value of wide experience
- Practise what you preach
- Positive attitude
- Timely input relating to ideas and techniques

What the team is prepared to give

- Timekeeping
- Attention
- Participation
- Positive attitude
- Be open and honest
- Full time attendance
- One person to speak at a time
- Commitment
- Patience
- Willingness to change
- Team spirit
- Teamwork
- Sense of humour
- Involving everyone in the room
- Respect for individual views
- Feedback
- Confidentiality
- No sabotage
- Opinions

If you can agree to all the items listed, then move on to consider your two lists. Briefly explain each item, and respond to any requests for clarification. Your list might contain some or all of the following items listed under the headings below.

The Managers Lists

What I (the manager) expect from the team:

- Full commitment
- Have fun

- Be open and honest
- Keep to time
- Say if the session becomes unproductive for you
- Reserve judgement
- Keep an open mind
- Everyone has a fair say
- Create a trusting environment
- Care for one another
- Active participation
- Accept responsibility for own learning
- Contribute to decision making
- Confront non-productive behaviour
- Ask naive questions
- Avoid using jargon

What I (the manager) am prepared to give:

- Be open and honest
- Full commitment
- Share expertise
- Respect confidentiality
- Create a trusting environment
- Avoid using jargon
- Non-judgemental and supportive
- Have fun
- Be enthusiastic
- Contribute to decision making
- Respond to participant needs
- Complete the agenda
- Signpost the journey
- Create the optimum learning environment

THE CONTRACT IN ACTION

Once the contract is agreed, you can open up discussion on one or two aspects, simply to start to build rapport with the team. For example, if you noticed a particular reaction to the 'confidentiality' issue, simply asking some open questions around that topic may encourage discussion.

During these discussions keep your ears (and eyes!) alert for any subtle signals which the team may send. Small, apparently minor comments may give you a clue to some underlying issues which may be affecting the team quite seriously.

The contract sets a standard for behaviour which both parties must adhere to, if the session is to be productive for everyone. What can otherwise become sensitive issues, for example timekeeping, will now be more straightforward, since the team

will have already agreed to keep to time. It is as well to mention that the contract can be modified at any stage, through discussion and agreement.

Once these opening discussions come to a natural conclusion, you are ready to move on to the primary topic of the session.

OTHER APPLICATIONS

This process can be very powerful in building the relationship between managers and staff.

A quite different, but related usage is for members of a team to use this process to formalise the relationships within the team.

Each person should take an agreed time to prepare two lists:

'What I am prepared to give to the team',

and

'What I expect of the team.'

Once everyone is ready, the team members explain their lists to their colleagues, responding to any requests to clarify specific issues. Highlight any issues which require further discussion, but postpone consideration until all the lists have been explored.

Once everyone has had their turn, the team should then consider the overall impact of the lists which have evolved.

Are there any items which cause conflict? If so, how can they be handled to everyone's satisfaction? Can everyone 'buy in' to what has been discussed? If not, why not? What would be required to gain the commitment of all team members?

This process should not be hurried: once the superficial issues have been discussed, the way is open to explore some of the more damaging, non-productive behaviours which people may be exhibiting.

Sensitive issues will be raised, and you will need to facilitate the discussion to ensure that it stays on a positive track, and that damaging comments are not made carelessly.

Ensure that the session closes with a specific agreement from everyone to take action on the issues discussed. Otherwise this could just deteriorate into a 'moaning' session with little positive output.



Note

Whilst this should in no way be compared to a contract of employment, most team members are pleasantly surprised when they are first presented with the idea of a 'contract' with their manager. For many it will be the first time that they have been involved this way.

Apart from the obvious advantages, this exercise is also a superb 'ice-breaker' for the team. It forces them to take responsibility for a key issue, and encourages them to start talking to each other within the first few minutes.

In many ways this process represents a customer supplier agreement between the manager and the team, and this may be a useful comparison to make.



When?

- At the start of any project
- When a new manager takes over an established team
- When a potential breakdown in a relationship requires the manager and team to re-focus on what has been agreed