

Now What? Go Forth and Collaborate



A collaborative team can be one of the most strategically advantageous resources an organization has. When you're lucky, collaboration happens organically and seamlessly. Some people just gel that way. But most of the time, effective collaboration is an art form that takes a little work—and that's when collaborators are in close proximity with one another. Now, with the landscape in most businesses changed and people teleworking more than ever, is it even possible to create effective collaborations anymore? Well, we may be biased (okay, we ARE biased), but Jenn and Ron (JP Carlson Consulting and Ron Schrader Consulting) say, yes, it's very possible.

For the last 13 years, Jennifer and Ron have been business partners working on opposite coasts and in different time zones. We both have different strengths and very different work styles. In fact, in most ways we probably couldn't be more opposite. But that often translates into a stronger collaboration because each of us brings something unique to the table. Over the years, we've helped clients build effective collaboration into their organizations. But really, it's been through the act of practicing collaboration virtually every day that we've picked up some really good tips and tricks. And we'd like to offer some of these for your consideration.

Collaborating effectively is much more than dividing tasks between people (I'll wash the clothes, you fold the clothes, etc.). When done correctly, all parties in a collaborative effort come out a little more knowledgeable. So before embarking on a decision to collaborate make sure the reason for the collaboration is clear. Collaboration works best when the extra cost and complexity of teamwork pay off and improve outcomes. * The beauty of collaboration is when you can look at the assignments and see that the outcome will be better with others' involvement. So, as you look at virtual collaboration—whether you are assigning work, or have been assigned work—consider the following tips:

1. **Explain/Understand the Why**—People need to comprehend the value and objectives of the collaboration. Be clear on what the leader desires to get out of people working together on a particular effort.
2. **Kickoff the Collaboration**—The first meeting for any new collaboration should always include a discussion around rules of engagement between collaborators. How will we work together? How often will we meet, what are important reasons for connecting, and what is everyone's specific role and responsibilities? Even for people who know each other, this is very important. We do this all the time on new consulting gigs, and we've been working together for years.
3. **Increase Communication**—Talk often, even if it's more than you think you need to (these may be short conversations and check-ins throughout the day, but they keep ideas flowing, and foster integration of inputs from all of those involved).
4. **Play to Everyone's Strengths**—Leverage the talents of people involved and ensure you have discussed how each person can bring his or her best to collaboration.

5. **Capitalize on Cross-Pollination of Knowledge**—A good collaboration will include some cross-training and knowledge sharing that will help all involved in the long-term, and ultimately build a stronger, more knowledgeable team overall.
6. **Conduct Leader Check-Ins**—Leaders should plan to check in on progress and ask questions to ensure the team is working together and not just dividing up responsibilities. Encourage information and task sharing and cross training whenever possible.
7. **Peer Content Review**—Arrange for peer groups to review the work of a collaboration (it not only helps to ensure that the final product is thorough and accurate, but also allows other sets of collaborators to see how different teams work together).
8. **Post Collaboration Assessment**—After the work product is complete, ask the collaborative team to review what worked well, where they hit obstacles and what could be better next time (you may even want to create a place to share these learnings for future work).
9. **Reframe Information Sharing**—Good collaboration will not just encourage sharing of information, but create an environment where it feels more like you are donating it to a worthwhile effort (reward information donations).

Putting some effort into crafting collaborations benefits your organization and the parties of the project. As we find our new normal in these changing times, being able to do this effectively (whether in-person or virtually) is going to become increasingly important.

Have a great week. If you need ideas, communications, tools or other support, Jenn and Ron are here to collaborate with you.

Want to read more?

* <https://www.fastcompany.com/90431464/how-to-collaborate-better-by-collaborating-less>