

TOOL

What Do Our Norms Mean?



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What Do Our Norms Mean?

Purpose

This tool provides examples of team norms along with guidance for what they look and sound like in practice. It helps teams move beyond naming norms to developing a shared understanding of how those norms are enacted.

When to Use

Use this tool when establishing team norms, when norms are unclear or inconsistently applied, or when you want to deepen alignment around how your team works together. It is especially useful for moving from abstract agreements to concrete, shared expectations.

How to Use It

Review the example norms and the accompanying descriptions, and discuss what each norm means in practice. Use the prompts to surface assumptions, clarify expectations, and align on how the norm should be enacted. Adapt the language to fit your context and co-create shared agreements that feel clear and actionable. Revisit norms over time to reflect on how well they are being upheld and where refinement is needed.

What Do Our Norms Mean?

1. Assume Positive Intent

- Ask yourself what intentions you're assuming about what someone else is doing or saying; be aware of your assumptions
- Give the speaker the benefit of the doubt that they are not trying to hurt you
- Activate your compassion for the speaker
- If you're hurt, seek clarification from the speaker

2. Be Solutions Oriented

- Think about how we can move forward to solve the problem
- If you offer a criticism, also offer a solution or different way of approaching the idea
- Share ideas—don't be shy about contributing your own

3. Be Unattached to Outcome

- Before we land on a decision, make sure we've thoroughly considered it from all angles and that we've identified the root causes of the problem
- Be responsive and flexible in the moment
- Always hold an inquiry stance and be open to surprises
- Also be careful that our lack of attachment doesn't mean lack of commitment; don't be afraid also to take risks
- Remember that we have a limited knowledge set and given that we don't know everything, we can't be attached to an outcome

4. Stay on Topic; Be Fully Present; Actively Participate

- Be seated with the group when the meeting starts
- Monitor your own airtime and remind others to monitor themselves
- Pay attention to what kinds of contributions you make (e.g., opinions, suggestions, ideas, agreements) and try to vary these
- Give time for everyone to speak and don't interrupt each other
- No side conversations—not in whispers or in writing
- Focus on the speaker, and make eye contact
- No cell phone activity and no texting unless it's an emergency

5. Speak Your Truth without Blame or Judgment

- Take responsibility for what you say—communicate in a way that others can hear
- Consider when and where you need to speak your truth and be mindful of the impact that this can have. But don't hold back on speaking your truths
- Be hard on ideas and soft on people
- When others speak their truths, listen to understand
- If you have a conflict with one person, deal directly with that person
- Ask for help (from a conflict mediator) if you need support

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