

Vanderbilt University Team Learns That Putting Each Other First Serves Students Best

INTRODUCTION

When Tammy Key worked as a consultant on Vanderbilt University's Organizational Effectiveness Team she regularly worked with leaders and teams to increase their overall effectiveness. Much of the work was around improving interpersonal skills and coaching leaders and managers on handling performance problems. Before working with teams, Tammy Key consulted with leaders and team members to identify root causes and advise proactive steps to address the issues. Here's an example of one of those teams...

SITUATION

A student-facing team at Vanderbilt experienced interpersonal conflicts, hindering their ability to provide satisfactory service to students. Tammy identified the lack of interpersonal communication and customer service skills as the underlying causes of the team's struggles.

ACTIONS TAKEN

To tackle the issues head-on, Tammy worked with the leader to take the following actions:

1. The leader held consistent performance conversations with underperforming team members, while Tammy provided guidance and facilitated teamwork.
2. Training sessions were conducted on customer service skills, resulting in the creation of a "Serving Students Team Agreement."¹
3. Training sessions were also held on communication and interpersonal skills, leading to the establishment of a "Team Norms Commitment."²

¹ See Example A for the *Serving Students Team Agreement*

² See Example B for the *Team Norms Commitment*

Tammy arrived early to the meetings to build rapport with team members and gain their trust. Ground rules were set to ensure a smooth session, and the participants agreed to give the process a chance. The facilitator used a variety of facilitation techniques to allow for individual and small group brainstorming before sharing ideas with the larger group.

RESULTS

The outcomes were highly impactful, resulting in the continuation of annual sessions for the next three years. The team realized that prioritizing their interactions with each other was crucial for providing excellent customer service to the students. Rapport-building efforts with initially resistant participants proved fruitful. Feedback from one of these team members was particularly impactful. They were able to deal with their personal anger and experience transformative personal growth. They are now teaching others how to manage their emotions at work. Positive feedback and increased performance prompted further consultation opportunities with the manager for ongoing coaching.

The facilitated sessions focused on understanding customers, setting goals, and creating team agreements. As a result, the team improved their relationships, collaborated more effectively, and received less negative feedback from students. They embraced a team mentality and fostered camaraderie through shared meals.

LET'S TALK!

The success story of this Vanderbilt University team highlights the transformational power of prioritizing interpersonal communication and teamwork. By investing in training sessions, establishing team agreements, and promoting a culture of respect and support, the team experienced remarkable improvements in their service to students.

If you're interested in implementing a similar approach with your team, Key Learning & Development offers a free consultation to discuss your needs. Contact them today to schedule a call.

Example A: Serving Students Team Agreement

We commit (recommit) to do the following as we serve the Vanderbilt students:

- ❖ We will come to work with a clear mind, ready to do our best work (well-rested, etc.).
- ❖ We will focus our attention on the students and what is going on around us.
- ❖ We will be respectful.
- ❖ We will be safe and use our resources to meet student needs.
- ❖ We will make sure we have the equipment we need to serve the students.
- ❖ We will drop students off at the Vandy Van stops, making sure the surroundings are safe.
- ❖ We will meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Example B: Team Norms Commitment

We commit to do the following as we work together to serve the Vanderbilt community:

- ❖ We will look out for and support each other.
- ❖ We will be respectful to each other, being mindful of our body language and tone of voice.
- ❖ We will clearly communicate with one another.
- ❖ We will mean what we say, and say what we mean, being mindful of how we approach one another.
- ❖ We will eat together to build our team relationships.