

The 6 Characteristics Of Effective Teams—As Revealed Through Escape Rooms

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Escape rooms are an immersive, live-action experience in which teams are put to the test. The team is locked in a room and must navigate through a series of puzzles and challenges to succeed in completing a goal in under 60 minutes. Escape rooms are a great team-building activity which put the team in the perfect scenario to demonstrate their true potential. The teams must show the following six characteristics in order to achieve victory:

1. A Common Goal

Effective teams have a common goal. They have one shared objective that each team member is working toward. This goal is unambiguous, known to all team members, motivating, and has a clear path to achievement.

An ambiguous goal can never be achieved satisfactorily. Ambiguous goals have ambiguous outcomes with numerous varying approaches. These varying approaches will be debated within the group creating discord.

If the goal is not known to all team members, the approach will not make sense to those in the dark and team members will be unmotivated to complete the necessary tasks. Once the goal is unambiguous and known to all team members, it becomes motivating and the clear path to achievement will reveal itself.

In the introduction to an escape room, the game-master provides this common goal — “Discover the serial killers true identity before he strikes

again.” or “Rid the tormented spirit from the haunted cottage.” This common goal motivates the team to work together along the path to achievement — searching the room, solving the puzzles, unveiling the story. Once the common goal is completed, the team can assess their effectiveness in a post-game discussion. This will help the team recognise their errors and creates a desire to improve upon their results.

2. Open Communication

The foundation of effective teamwork is good communication. As with the common goal, all communication should be unambiguous and shared with all team members. Without any communication, the goal will never be achieved. With bad communication, the goal may be achieved eventually, but the process will involve duplication of tasks, unnecessary tasks, frustration and confusion. Good communication involves accurately dispensing knowledge, an environment where team members can freely express their thoughts and opinions, trust, and, of course, a whole lot of listening.

Escape rooms create a scenario where teams will have to communicate effectively in order to escape. This includes both relaying information precisely and succinctly, and dissecting and interpreting given information. Bad communication in escape rooms leads to time wasted by re-examining solved puzzles, looking for an item that is already found, or attempting an

incorrect solution; And, in an escape room where you have only 60 minutes to complete the goal, time is everything.

3. Team Roles

Establishing defined team roles, with a respect for each role's part in achieving the common goal, is an essential part of effective teamwork. A team can be broken down to 3 team roles: leaders, strategists, and workers. An effective team will include all three roles, however, each team member may possess qualities of more than one role.

The workers will have a narrow focus on the current necessary tasks to progress along the path, finding obstacles along the way. The strategists will develop strategies for overcoming the obstacles with a broader focus on the path to the common goal. And the leader, with the common goal in mind, will decide on the best strategy and delegate the tasks back to the workers.

In an escape room, the workers will search for clues and puzzles that the strategists can then come up with solutions to. The leaders will keep everything on track and get the team to regroup when the goal is forgotten. This set of complimentary roles will show the value of each team member

and highlight their strengths. The division of labour will encourage each team member to participate and excel in their role. A certain level of trust must be given to members for their efforts within their role and these efforts should be recognised for their advancement toward the common goal.

4. Time Management

Effective teams use what precious time they have efficiently. Once the next necessary task is identified, they focus on that task until completion or it becomes redundant. Decisions on the necessity of a task is left to a leader who makes the decision swiftly and definitively.

Discussion and debate are open but concise. Once a decision is made the discussion ends, however, with new information ego doesn't get in the way of a new plan of action. Each team member manages their time and prioritises their tasks.

From the second you enter an escape room the time starts ticking away. Teams will have to learn to keep calm and not crack under the pressure. Clues from the game-master are a tool at the team's disposal. They must make crucial decisions between spending another 5 minutes trying to find a solution or to ask for help. Teams that overestimate their abilities may see their ego blocking their victory.

5. Practical Problem Solving

Along the path to the common goal lie many problems. An effective team identify these problems and solve them practically. They understand that most of the effort in problem solving is in correctly identifying the real problem. Once it correctly identified, a problem becomes exponentially easier to solve.

Effective teams embrace problems as they arise. Problems aren't something to be ignored in the hopes they will disappear. A new problem is seen as a new opportunity to progress further along the path to the common goal.

Problem solving through puzzles is at the heart of the escape room experience. Teams must think outside the box and use their observational and dexterity skills in order to progress in the game. Each problem will have one logical solution and, once found, there will be no doubt if it is correct.

This helps teams build momentum solving puzzle after puzzle.

6. Bonding

A happy team is an effective team. Team members must trust one another to perform and also have each others back when they fail. Teams will thrive with a mentality of mutual accomplishment and mutual defeats — A win is a team win; A loss is a team loss.

Escape rooms bring colleagues closer together and generate a sense of achievement when completed. Teams leave on an adrenaline high and the shared experience is relived through conversation.