

Building Strong Teams

*This Tip Sheet is a resource for Program Leaders, Managers, and Directors to provide guidance around boosting morale and supporting and retaining your staff. For additional resources, please visit the **KIT Online Learning Center**.*

Respect

This is really the foundation of building a strong team. Every other strategy included here should flow from the the respect you show your staff.

Communicate respectfully and be the role model for the behavior you want to see, like being punctual or having a positive attitude.

Respect your staff's:

- **Time:** Don't interrupt lunch or scheduled breaks with work-related questions or issues.
- **Feelings:** Listen and validate! Use phrases like, "I hear you," "I understand where you're coming from," and "I respect your feelings."
- **Culture:** Allow staff to bring their own heritage and language into the classroom and recognize their cultural celebrations and social practices.

Communication

This may seem simple but, remember, communication is not only about what you say, but also how you say it!

- **Location matters!** Consider a neutral space for important conversations.
- **Go beyond emails!** Get face time in every classroom every day, even if it's only five minutes. Don't wait until there's a problem to visit a classroom.
- **Consider personality or learning style quizzes** for your staff to understand more about how they learn and how they communicate. You can learn more effective strategies for communication from their results!
- **Solicit and implement new ideas and input** from staff. This creates a collaborative work environment and encourages staff to communicate honestly with their Director.

It can be hard to focus on team building and morale during the day-to-day work of managing people, programs, and youth. Start from a foundation of respect and build your communication, support, and morale strategies from there.

Support

If Program Staff don't feel supported by their managers, it can create disconnection, apathy, and a general sense of "why am I here?"

- One of the most vital ways a Director can **support their staff is during conversations with parents.** Your staff are your team members and are a vital part of a child or youth's learning and developmental growth.
- **Approve leave when you can.** When you can't, explain why you had to say no. When possible, consider letting your staff work out leave and cover requests themselves.
- **Think about how you and your team handle failure.** Is there a culture of playing the blame game or throwing others under the bus? How can you shift the perspective to see these as opportunities for learning?
- **Set clear, consistent, and realistic expectations** for your staff. Be sure you're not just enforcing rules *sometimes*, or letting some people bend or break the rules. When policy changes, let staff know quickly.

Morale

Boosting morale is about creating a fun workplace that recognizes everyone's accomplishments and allows you and your staff to build relationships with each other. Everyone wants to feel appreciated!

- Coordinated get-to-know you activities may seem cheesy but they can lead to discovering common interests and shared stories.
- **Celebrate your staff's milestones**, professional or personal. Celebrate birthdays monthly, or a staff member getting a degree or certification, or even getting that tough toddler potty trained! It's meaningful for staff when a Director hosts these celebrations.
- The words "team building" can strike terror in your staff's hearts! Consider **non-mandatory social gatherings** outside of your site. Once a month, have an optional in-person or virtual get together where staff can relax and get to know each other and you outside of work hours.
- **Public recognition** can go a long way! Set performance goals around attendance, positive attitude, or other achievements and recognize staff who make the mark publicly, in front of their peers. If you give someone a coin or a certificate, make a big deal of it.

