

Team Roles to Consider

Effective learning teams conduct efficient meetings—and efficient meetings sometimes depend on each member filling an assigned role. Things just run smoother when everyone is clear about what his or her contributions to meetings should look like. The following list of roles might be worth considering when structuring team participation.

El Capitán
<p><i>El Capitán</i> is our team’s official leader—the “Big Cheese,” or “Senorita Importante.” <i>El Capitán</i> will design our meeting agenda—organizing the information that we need to consider—and then share the agenda with the rest of us at least two days before we gather. <i>El Capitán</i> will also guide us through our agenda, starting conversations and moving us to new bullet points.</p> <p>Because <i>El Capitán</i>’s role depends on communicating with others beyond our team, this is a role that depends on consistency. Therefore, <i>El Capitán</i> will remain our fearless leader for at least a quarter at a time.</p>
The Rounder
<p>What do you hate the most about meetings in schools? It’s the wandering off topic that drives most teachers crazy! Teams that start by talking about grading sometimes end up talking about complete goofiness—and who has time for goofiness when there are papers to grade?</p> <p>That’s where <i>The Rounder</i> comes in. <i>The Rounder</i> is responsible for keeping us on time and on task. When our conversations become something other than productive—drifting from the agenda or focusing on something that we just can’t change, <i>The Rounder</i> is going to <i>politely</i> redirect the work of our group. <i>The Rounder</i> is also going to make sure that our meetings start on time and end on time. For that, we should all be thankful!</p>
The Voice of Reason
<p>Another mistake that ambitious learning teams tend to make is designing projects that are just plain impossible to pull off. They start talking about something simple, but somehow end up adding two thousand twists to make it “bigger and better than ever.” By the time they come up for air, they’ve got a project that is way too complicated to tackle. As a result, they end up equal parts frustrated and defeated.</p> <p>Avoiding this professional frenzy requires someone to step in and be our <i>Voice of Reason</i>. <i>The Voice of Reason</i>’s job is to shout, “Stop!” every time we start designing something that stretches the boundaries of our ability. However you have to do it, get our attention—and get our attention quick!</p> <p>Ask a few pointed questions. Remind us of the seventeen other projects that we’re already involved in. Think about what’s possible, what’s probable, and what just isn’t going to happen, and then make us think about it, too.</p> <p>I promise we’ll thank you for this later.</p>
Johnny Notes
<p>Did you ever think about how many decisions a professional learning team makes in a year? Between designing lessons, creating common assessments, answering questions asked by administrators or department chairs, reflecting on student learning results, deciding on materials to purchase, and rearranging class schedules to accommodate random assemblies, professional learning teams are decision-making machines!</p>

As a result, we need someone to be our team's *Johnny Notes*. Johnny Notes is the meticulous sort who is good at keeping track of everything we decide. He (or she, as the case may be) needs to design a system for recording our decisions and then needs to be able to track down our results whenever we can't find them!

Johnny Notes is easily one of the most important roles in our group because not everyone is capable of staying organized—or of keeping the rest of us organized! As a result, Johnny Notes should probably be a permanent position.

Sister Sunshine

Have you figured out exactly how grueling being a part of a professional learning team really is yet? After all, professional learning teams work in new and interesting ways that most teachers just haven't mastered. Professional learning teams need to learn how to collaborate and to make collective decisions. They need to learn to collect and analyze data. They are determined to ensure that every child is successful—and that's a level of pressure that can be hard to support over long periods of time.

This is where *Sister Sunshine* comes in! Sister Sunshine's job is an easy one: Remind us—early and often—that we're good teachers who are working hard and doing the right thing. Smile at us once in awhile. If it looks like we're discouraged or frustrated, slip us a bit of unexpected cheer.

Staying positive is what Sister Sunshine is all about, and sometimes staying positive is hard for professional learning teams.

The Skeptic

Believe it or not, the strongest professional learning teams are *not* the ones in which everyone agrees with every decision all the time! While complete harmony feels really good, it can also mean that teams aren't considering the full range of viewpoints on any given issue. Overlooking viewpoints is a recipe for weak decisions and complete disaster.

This is why our team needs an official *Skeptic* willing to throw some disruptions on the table every now and then!

Now, being The Skeptic doesn't mean being a complete curmudgeon who criticizes with impunity! Instead, being The Skeptic means forcing our team to consider things that we haven't thought of yet. Being The Skeptic means slowing our team down when we're moving too fast. Being The Skeptic means asking the questions that no one seems willing to ask—and looking at things through something other than rose-colored glasses.

Skeptics can force us to think differently, and thinking differently will make our decisions stronger.

Clarified Butter

The cooks in any group know that clarified butter is simply the best. It's made by heating and then removing the sediment from good old fashioned cow-given goodness. The resulting product is literally pure and clear.

In a lot of ways, professional learning teams need a bit of *Clarified Butter*—someone willing to listen to complex conversations carefully, put a bit of heat to them, and remove any waste. Adding Clarified Butter to a professional learning team can ensure that team decisions are pure and clear, too.

Our team's Clarified Butter will concentrate—and help to summarize—our work whenever needed. They'll consider both points of view, identify stumbling blocks that can be easily removed, and bring closure to our decisions. No meeting will begin without hearing Clarified Butter's summary of where we've been; and no meeting will end without hearing Clarified Butter's summary of where we're going.