



Views from VanDeWalle

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Collaboration and Teamwork

After wrapping up another county fair and head back into other extension programming, it's good to reflect on the county fair experience as this is one of the capstone experiences for 4-H youth. This marks nearly my nineteenth year in Extension & eighteenth fair which is hard to imagine! I am still amazed and blessed to have so many excellent and caring volunteers to make the fair a positive experience for our youth. The countless hours spent preparing ahead of time allows for a much smoother week during the fair. I'd like to give a lot of credit to the entire staff of Fillmore and Clay Counties. Weeks before the fair, data is entered into the computer system, stall assignments are created, awards ordered, reminders sent to exhibitors about completing quality assurance, registration deadlines, etc.

Without collaboration, fair would not occur. Also, there is a lot of time spent from volunteers such as Council members and superintendents. From helping with winter/spring weigh-ins to helping answer questions and attend meetings, volunteers are engaged year-round to make the program the best it can be.

An article adapted from Belgrad, W., Fisher, K., & Rayner, S. (1995) best summarizes that "collaboration and teamwork require a mix of interpersonal, problem-solving, and communication skills needed for a group to work together towards a common goal." The best teams I have worked with put their own agenda aside and work towards the greater good for the team. This article also provides tips for how to develop a collaborative team environment. There are five themes that must be present.

The first is trust. Being honest with the team helps each other develop respect within a team. Give team members the benefit of the doubt and work to eliminate conflicts of interest. Secondly is to clarify roles. When each team member knows their key roles, they can perform more effectively and can figure out ways to help each other. Next, it is important to communicate openly and effectively. Work to clear up misunderstandings quickly and accurately. Its best to over-communicate, rather than not communicate. Learn to be a good listener and recognize team member efforts. Fourth, is to appreciate diversity of ideas. Be open-minded and evaluate each new idea and remember that it is okay to disagree with one another but learn how to reach consensus. Often, much is learned from those who differ from you. Finally, balance the team's focus. Regularly review and evaluate effectiveness of the team. Assign team members specific tasks to evaluate and provide praise to other team members for achieving results.

I'd like to thank the 4-H Council members who have so freely given of their time to make the fair a success. Of course, livestock superintendents put in a large amount of time during the fair with check-in, the show, loading animals, etc. Special thanks to the fair board for their support of the 4-H program and the countless hours they spend setting up for events, etc. Businesses and financial donors help provide youth with incentives for their projects. There are so many other individuals and businesses who are helpful and do things without any recognition and to all of you, thank you!

Congratulations Clay and Fillmore County 4-H and FFA members on a great county fair!

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Source: Belgrad, W., Fisher, K., & Rayner, S. (1995). *Tips for Teams: a Ready Reference for Solving Common Team Problems*. McGraw-Hill: New York.

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