



Views from VanDeWalle

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Collaboration and Teamwork

As we wrap up county fair related work and head back into other extension programming, I always reflect on the county fair experience. This year's fair was definitely one that will go down in history. This marks my fifteenth Fillmore County fair, although it definitely seemed like my first fair again. With the go and show livestock format and many modifications, we started planning for many different versions of how the fair would look. Back in March, we weren't even sure we'd be able to have county fairs. Then we had a virtual option and finally we were able to successfully have a face-to-face option.

I'd like to give a huge "shout-out" to the Fair Boards for allowing us to have the youth component of the fair. This year, I relied heavily on 4-H Council members and superintendents to help us walk through a modified county fair to meet health department guidelines. This year's fair went very well, mostly due to the amount of teamwork and collaboration observed. First of all, when it comes to putting together a fair, there are many small, behind the scenes tasks that occur. 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. All of this preparation allows for a much smoother fair during the actual week of fair.

Without the collaboration of staff, fair would not occur. Also, there is a lot of time spent from volunteers such as Council members and superintendents. From helping with winter 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 are able to 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. It's 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 times, 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

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members specific tasks to evaluate and provide praise to other team members for achieving results.

I would certainly like to take some time this week to thank the entire Clay and Fillmore county staff for the hours of time spent. Without the entire staff working together, fair would be miserable. Also, I'd like to thank the 4-H Council members who have so freely given of their time during the whole year with various tasks and take time away from their own family to help make the fair a success. Of course, livestock superintendents put in a large amount of time during the fair during 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!

I'd also like to thank everyone for allowing me the chance to be a "mom" on Fillmore County beef show day and help McKenzie get her three calves ready. It was valuable time I was able to spend teaching her and being able to create memories. One of the best quotes someone once told me has stuck with me: "It's better to be a part of the solution, rather than a part of the problem." I saw a lot of sportsmanship being conducted in a positive manner this year which is refreshing at a time when so many people in our country, find things that are wrong and focus on those. Congratulations Clay and Fillmore County 4-H and FFA programs on a great county fair!

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