Teams are made up of individuals, and within these teams group dynamics always come into play and typically run through a progression of phases. Within teams, individuals need to understand and cooperate with each other to make logical and constructive decisions based on the experience, knowledge, and abilities of the members of the team and given the nature of the goal and the potential barriers faced by the team in trying to achieve this goal. The degree to which teams encounter the stages of team building can vary depending upon the previous experiences that team members have had with each other but these stages in team building are remarkably common in the life of a team. Functional group dynamics are likely to enhance the safety of all members of the team, the enjoyment of the trip, the potential learning by the members of the group, the physical performance of the group, and the overall odds of the team achieving its goal.

**Four Stages of Team Building:**

1. **Forming**: The group meets and gets together, discusses its goal, begins the trip, and often the individual members communicate about superficial and ice-breaking types of issues (e.g., the weather, recent travels, workplaces, and family). Individuals in the group may have some of the following feelings at this stage, especially if they are new to the group or the type of endeavor: excitement, anticipation, and optimism, as well as possibly fear and anxiety about reaching the goal, or disappointing others.

1. **Norming**: The group starts to develop the way in which they will interact with each other. This is typically within smaller subgroups and eventually extending to the group as a whole. This development can be through both spoken interactions and nonverbal communication. Norms can be conscious or unconscious actions or behaviors of the team and individuals that a team accepts. Typical Norms are centered on how the members of the team are going to treat each other, how the group is going to make decisions, and who is going to be responsible to do specific tasks. At this stage, the group is typically not challenged beyond their original expectations of the trip/task and interpersonal
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conflicts and difficulties have not yet surfaced.

3. **Storming**: The group often encounters difficulties at some stage, often due to external factors (e.g., weather, trail or route finding difficulties, or differences in athletic prowess or endurance). These external events often trigger an internal discussion and disagreement amongst group members who have not previously been challenged together. This is a difficult and formative stage for the group. The group members may begin to realize that the task ahead of the group is more difficult than initially imagined during the Forming Stage. The group members may resist any need to collaborate. The group, as a whole, tries to figure out the group guidelines, such as leadership style and each member’s experience and reactions to stress. Typically, the group will make attempts to define/redefine the goal and how the group will accomplish that goal. Also, the group will often attempt to define acceptable behavior by the members of the group under the pressure of stress. There will typically be much discussion and time spent by the group on symptoms or problems not relevant to the task ahead. There are typically complaints about the organization of the group and negative discussions about barriers to achieving the goal. Group members might become impatient, judgmental, negative towards others abilities or suggestions, and overly aggressive to trying to unilaterally apply their suggestions and plans. It is the challenge to the group’s rules and goals which leads to this stage of team building. Conflict, with both positive and negative results can result from individuals on the team challenging the norms of the group and trying to change the processes the group has already decided upon for delegating responsibility and making decisions. It is the effective resolution of this stage which leads to an effective, functional team which is able to handle challenges in a constructive manner.

4. **Performing**: This stage is the resolution of the Storming phase. The team has weathered the storm and is again functioning without significant internal conflict. Under these circumstances, the testing of group boundaries has led to better communication and understanding between team members as to their individual boundaries, behaviors, and goals. After the turmoil of the Storming Stage, the group members typically accept the equal membership in the group of all
members. This is an important stage for the individual in a group setting and the goal is for the individual to feel safe (physically and emotionally) to express their opinions and needs. The group will typically establish boundaries and guidelines and follow them. Members will discover that give and take is the only way forward so a new ability to express ideas, concerns, and/or constructive criticism is found. Attempts are made to achieve harmony and avoid conflict. There is often more friendliness shown again, with more confiding in one another and sharing of personal problems and concerns. A sense of team cohesion and spirit with a common goal is typically established. It should be noted that teams can go through successive repeats of the Storming and Performing Stages, as the team encounters new, unexpected challenges which again result in the team testing internal boundaries. With each successive round, the team is likely to become stronger and more optimistic as the members build a larger and larger reserve of trust.

All of the Members of a Team have Responsibilities

1. Each member of a team needs to participate in group decisions and everyone has the right to voice their opinion in a non-confrontational or condemning manner. Inputs from the group members are vital when decisions are to be made.

2. Each member team should understand that there are times they must agree to disagree. The group needs to allow each member of the group the right to voice their disagreement at a specific time and place, but the group must decide how long in time that discussions are permitted to go and then it should move on to a consensus or experience-based decision.

3. Within the group, each of the team members should be allowed to be heard. For a group to succeed in reaching its goal safely and without unproductive dissension, the group needs to agree the every voice will be heard and that all will support the eventual decision. If this point has not yet been reached, the group needs to take a step back and continue discussion and compromise until a consensus is reached.
4. All members of a group have a responsibility to help the group reach a consensus. If a group member does not agree with the group’s decision and cannot support it, that person should offer solutions up for discussion by the group.

5. A good team member should be an active listener. Listening serves to help the group come to decisions, allows each member to better understand the goals and limits of the other team members, and allows members to learn from the experiences of others. Team members should give others their attention when they are speaking and try to be open to their ideas. Even if they disagree initially, they may find that there is a kernel of wisdom or truth in what is said that had not previously considered, and/or that there are new ways open for possible compromise. Team members should ask questions about what is suggested, and seek clarification rather than confrontation.

6. Members of a group should express your goals and wishes for the endeavor and be optimistic in expressing a hope for change. There is almost always a wide range of goals and attitudes to be found among the members of a group on a trip; confrontations and group difficulties are commonly related to the differing expectations and goals of group members. Getting these issues out in the open allows everyone to understand why other members of the group may not see the events and decisions in the same way that they do. Understanding each other is a first and best step towards building a functional team.