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Collaboration

Collaboration is an essential part of my academic, professional, and creative experiences. Whether working on group projects, coordinating with teams remotely, or engaging in collaborative writing, I have learned valuable lessons about what makes collaboration successful and where challenges arise. Through these experiences, I have developed strategies to improve teamwork while recognizing the common obstacles that can halt progress.

One of the most frequent ways I collaborate is through academic group projects. Working with peers requires careful coordination. Early in my academic and professional journey, I realized that poor communication often leads to misunderstandings and delays. I have learned that setting clear expectations and assigning specific roles at the beginning of a project is crucial. For instance, in a group research paper, I typically suggest breaking the project into sections, assigning deadlines, and having regular check-ins. This structure helps prevent last-minute scrambles and allows everyone to contribute meaningfully.

Another area where I have significant collaborative experience is journalism. For example, while working on a news story about aging septic tanks in Miami, I needed to coordinate with multiple sources, including residents, environmental experts, and government officials. This kind of collaboration required a mix of interpersonal communication and time management. Scheduling interviews, following up for clarifications, and ensuring that my sources felt comfortable speaking with me all played a role in shaping the final article. What

worked well in this scenario was my ability to be flexible—some sources could only talk at odd hours, and others needed reassurances about how their quotes would be used. What did not work as well was relying too much on email communication; I found that phone calls or in-person meetings were more effective in getting timely responses.

In a different context, I have also collaborated on creative projects. When working on my story pitch about Vista View Park, I had to engage with parkgoers and security staff. In creative collaborations, the challenge is often balancing different visions. While I wanted to highlight the park's uniqueness, others had different angles they felt were more compelling. What worked in this situation was actively listening to feedback and being willing to adjust my approach while still maintaining my original vision. What did not work was assuming that everyone involved had the same level of enthusiasm for the project; I had to realize that not everyone shared my passion for the subject and adjust my expectations accordingly.

Through these experiences, I have identified several key strategies that contribute to effective collaboration. Clear communication is the foundation of any successful team effort. Establishing expectations, deadlines, and preferred communication methods early on helps avoid confusion. Equally important is defining roles and responsibilities so that everyone knows their tasks and can be held accountable. Regular check-ins, whether through group meetings, shared documents, or quick updates, prevent misunderstandings and keep progress on track. Flexibility is also crucial, as things don't always go as planned. Being adaptable, whether by shifting deadlines, reassigning tasks, or adjusting direction, ensures that projects can move forward even when unexpected challenges arise. Finally, constructive feedback is essential to collaboration. Providing and receiving feedback respectfully helps improve the final product and fosters a positive team dynamic.

Despite my positive experiences, collaboration is not always smooth. One of the most common challenges is where some team members contribute more than others. This can lead to frustration and resentment, but having assigned tasks and deadlines helps mitigate this issue. Communication barriers, such as misinterpretations, lack of response, or conflicting schedules, can also slow progress. Using multiple forms of communication, including emails, phone calls, and shared documents, can help overcome these challenges. Another common difficulty is creative differences, particularly in projects that require a shared vision. In such cases, having an open mind while staying committed to the project's goals is crucial. Lastly, last-minute changes can disrupt plans and create stress, making contingency plans and a flexible mindset important for maintaining productivity.

Collaboration is a skill that extends beyond academics and into professional and creative fields. My experiences have taught me that successful teamwork relies on communication, organization, and adaptability. While challenges such as work distribution, communication barriers, and creative differences can arise, helpful strategies can help overcome them. Ultimately, collaboration is about learning to work with different people, combining strengths, and creating something better together than what could be achieved alone and the only way that can be done is with effective teamwork.