There is no “I” in Teach: Developing a Strong Working Relationship with the Professor and Other TAs of the Course.

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Although a TA often feels like they are on an island, being a TA is not a solo job: you will be working for a professor and usually working with other TAs. In my experience, a strong working relationship with these “coworkers” has been a very important factor in the success of a course.

What can a strong TA/Professor relationship do for a course?

• Having a good understanding of what the professor wants with your section is important. The section won’t be beneficial to the students if you are teaching them material that isn’t relevant to what the professor talked about. It is also much easier planning a section if someone tells you what to teach!
• Different professors have different teaching styles and emphasize different topics. It can be very helpful to know what makes your professor’s teaching style different from ones you have TAed for in the past. That way you can cater your material in a way that will help the students the most, whether that means presenting it again in the same way or presenting in a completely different way.
• If you have a non-existent or negative relationship with the professor it can hurt your credibility as a TA. Often times you are asked questions about how the class is run and why it is run the way it is. If you say “I don’t know” or something similar, you inevitably lose some credibility.
• As will surely happen in your TA career, you will find yourself being an ambassador for the students. If you have established good communication with the professor, it will be much easier for you to approach them with the students’ problems.
• It may be useful for you as a graduate student! Getting to know the faculty can be a very challenging thing to do, and this is an easy way to do it.

What can strong TA/TA relationships do for a course?

• Having continuity between sections with other TAs is important. It can be unfair if one class is learning material that the other class isn’t. Also, sharing the workload with other TAs saves time!

Challenges associated with developing a relationship:

• You feel very independent as a TA, but for the betterment of the course (and your workload) it is better to try to work with others.
• Often you change professors and other TAs every semester, so there isn’t much time to establish a relationship.
• Some professors can be standoffish, stubborn, or might not even care about teaching the course all that much.
• People all have their own teaching styles and often collaborating with others can prove to be difficult.

**Tips for establishing relationships with the professor and other TAs:**

• Communication is KEY! When you first find out you’re a TA for a professor, go introduce yourself to the professor. Ask them what they are working on and tell them what you are interested in. After that, make sure you communicate often. I would say stop by their office at least once a week to talk about how things are going in the course, or even just to say hi.

• Ask the professor what they expect of you and what they expect of the students.

• Suggest weekly meetings to prepare for section. Ideally these meetings would include the professor, but if not surely with the other TAs. If there is a head TA, suggest this to them. This will establish what is going to be done in section that week and TAs can split up duties.

• Attend lecture. Although this is part of your duties, some professors give you permission to skip lectures. I think it is a good idea to attend the lectures because then you know exactly what is going on in the course and how the material was presented in class. This also gives you a better idea how to answer a question a student has from lecture.