

Teamwork

Teamwork is an essential part of workplace success. Like a basketball team working together to set up the perfect shot, every team member has a specific role to play in accomplishing tasks on the job. Although it may seem as if one player scored the basket, that basket was made possible by many people's planning, coordination, and cooperation to get that player the ball. Employers look for people who not only know how to work well with others, but who understand that not every player on the team can or will be the one who gets the ball. When everyone in the workplace works together to accomplish goals, everyone achieves more.

Teamwork involves building relationships and working with other people using a number of important skills and habits:

- Working cooperatively
- Contributing to groups with ideas, suggestions, and effort
- Communication (both giving and receiving)
- Sense of responsibility
- Healthy respect for different opinions, customs, and individual preferences
- Ability to participate in group decision-making

The ability to work as part of a team is one of the most important skills in today's job market. Employers are looking for workers who can contribute their own ideas, but also want people who can work with others to create and develop projects and plans.

When employees work together to accomplish a goal, everyone benefits. Employers might expect to "see" this in action in different ways. For example, team members in the workplace plan ahead and work cooperatively to assign tasks, assess progress, and deliver on time. They have professional discussions during which differing approaches and opinions might be shared and assessed in a respectful manner. Even when certain employees end up with tasks that were not their first choices, jobs get done with limited complaints because it is in the spirit of teamwork and with the overall goal in mind. A leader or manager may often serve as the teamwork facilitator. In this case, team members participate respectfully in discussion, carry out assigned tasks, and defer to the leader in the best interest of the goal. Consensus is wonderful, but not always possible, and an assigned leader will often support and facilitate the decision-making necessary for quality teamwork to exist.

The activities in this section seek to teach participants about the importance of teamwork to workplace success and the specific role each individual on a team may play. Participants will learn about positive teamwork behavior and discover how their own conduct can impact others on a team. The section also discusses possible obstacles to teams working successfully and offers the opportunity to build constructive strategies for overcoming these challenges.

***Note to facilitators:** Learning the value of teamwork and becoming an effective member of a team is an important first step to developing leadership skills. For disconnected youth, especially those with underlying disabilities, the development of these skills is critical. Young people without a connection to work or school typically have had limited exposure to positive and proactive support systems, or a true sense of the essence of the proactive support of a community. Affording young people experiences through which they learn to rely on themselves and others is an important factor in the development of a productive teamwork mentality. If working with disconnected youth and/or youth with disabilities, use these activities to bridge teamwork skills as a stepping-stone to leadership development.*

11. There is No “I” in Team

JUST THE FACTS: The purpose of this activity is to enrich participants’ understanding of what it means to be part of a team and why being a good team player is important for career success.



Time

15-20 minutes



Materials

- Chart paper or sentence strips with markers and/or Activity 11 printed out for each participant



Directions

Choose and display five “teamwork” quotes (see Activity 11). This can be done on chart paper, using the accompanying worksheet, writing quotes on sentence strips, or reading each quote aloud. What is important here is the quote - and not necessarily who said the quote.

Ask participants to choose the quote they like best. Divide the larger group into smaller groups according to the chosen quote (i.e., all participants who liked quote #1, etc.). Participants should spend approximately two minutes discussing the quote and coming to consensus on the reason they liked it the best. One member of each team should be prepared to offer the group’s feedback and reflection.

For another, more hands-on version of this activity, write each of the quotes on sentence strips. Cut the sentence strips into individual words or manageable chunks/phrases. Have groups work together to arrange the words/phrases into the correct order.



Conclusion

Tell participants that employers rate the ability to be a “team player” as one of the most important qualities and characteristics of their current (and future) employees (i.e., the job candidate). Ask why this is might be so. Elicit responses and an interactive discussion.



Journaling Activity

A friend comes to you seeking advice. He got into trouble at work for not being a team player. He really likes his job and isn’t quite sure what to do. What suggestions would you give to your friend to help him improve? How might he respond to his boss?



Extension Activity

Have participants create their own personal quotes about teamwork...why it is important... what can be accomplished...etc. The quote should be one that encourages peers to gain a better understanding and perspective on the importance of teamwork AND why it is often a core value shared by many different cultures, populations, and groups.

Offer the opportunity for participants to research and share proverbs related to teamwork from their own cultures.

Activity 11. Teamwork Quotes

“Individual commitment to a group effort - that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.” - Vince Lombardi (football coach)

“Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.”
- Henry Ford (pioneer of the assembly-line production method)

“There is no such thing as a self-made man. You will reach your goals only with the help of others.” - George Shinn (former owner of Charlotte, now New Orleans, Hornets basketball team)

“It is amazing what can be accomplished when nobody cares about who gets the credit.”
- Robert Yates (politician in the 1700s)

“Teamwork divides the task and multiplies the success.” - Author Unknown

“I am a member of a team, and I rely on the team, I defer to it and sacrifice for it, because the team, not the individual, is the ultimate champion.” - Mia Hamm (retired American soccer player)

“Respect your fellow human being, treat them fairly, disagree with them honestly, enjoy their friendship, explore your thoughts about one another candidly, work together for a common goal and help one another achieve it.”

- Bill Bradley (American hall of fame basketball player, Rhodes scholar and former three-term Democratic U.S. Senator from New Jersey)

“Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence wins championships.”

- Michael Jordan (former American basketball player, businessman and majority owner of the Charlotte Bobcats)

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

- Helen Keller (American author, political activist, lecturer, and the first deafblind person to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree.)

“The strength of the team is each individual member...the strength of each member is the team.”

- Phil Jackson (widely considered one of the greatest coaches in the history of the NBA)

“Unity is strength... when there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved.” - Mattie Stepanek (advocate on behalf of peace, people with disabilities, and children with life-threatening conditions who died one month before his 14th birthday)

“Lots of people want to ride with you in the limo, but what you want is someone who will take the bus with you when the limo breaks down.” - Oprah Winfrey (American television host, actress, producer, and philanthropist)

“Finding good players is easy. Getting them to play as a team is another story.” - Casey Stengel (baseball hall of famer)

12. I'll Give You Some of Mine if You Give Me Some of Yours

JUST THE FACTS: Part of becoming a functional member of a team is learning to understand what you bring to the group and what you might need from others. This exercise is designed to help participants begin to identify their individual strengths and needs regarding teamwork.



Time

30 minutes



Materials

- Activity 12
- Pens or pencils
- Optional: Chart paper and markers



Directions

Introduce this activity by reflecting on some of the quotes discussed in Activity 11 (if you have not completed Activity 11, choose some of the quotes to discuss with the group - and offer a brief discussion on their meaning).

Ask participants for a list of some of the characteristics they think make up a good team player. This might be phrased as follows: “What does it take from each person on a team to make a team really work?”

Students will be completing an individual inventory of the skills they possess related to teamwork. This inventory is for personal reflection and need not be shared.



Conclusion

As part of the concluding activity, ask participants to share one of their identified areas of strengths - and one area they would like to improve. This discussion allows each to hear from others their areas of strength and need. This process may help those in need of assistance identify who might be able to offer it.



Journaling Activity

Consider your score on the Elements of Teamwork inventory. Were you pleased with your results? What are some of the areas you would like to improve? How will you attempt to do this?



Extension Activity

Have participants ask someone they know and trust to rate them using a blank copy of Activity 12. Were the scores/checks similar or different? What does this tell them? Does this change any of the notes made related to skills to improve?

Have participants redesign the activity with words and/or actions that better describe the elements of teamwork from their perspective. Another option is for participants to schedule a meeting with an employer and get additional input as to how an employer might identify or describe the characteristics listed.

Activity 12. Elements of Teamwork – An Inventory of Skills

Part of being a good team member is learning how to understand your personal strengths (what you have to offer) AND where you might need to draw assistance from others. Listed on this sheet are 10 of the characteristics that make a productive team member. Rate your level of confidence in each skill (HONESTLY) - and then devise a plan for how you can improve some of the areas you think might need a “jump start.”

SKILL #1: RELIABLE

This means: You can be counted on to get the job done.

Rating: Not so confident Sort of Confident Really confident

SKILL #2: EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATOR

This means: You express your thoughts and ideas clearly and directly, with respect for others.

Rating: Not so confident Sort of Confident Really confident

SKILL #3: ACTIVE LISTENER

This means: You listen to and respect different points of view. Others can offer you constructive feedback - and you don't get upset or defensive.

Rating: Not so confident Sort of Confident Really confident

SKILL #4: PARTICIPATES

This means: You are prepared - and get involved in team activities. You are regular contributor.

Rating: Not so confident Sort of Confident Really confident

SKILL #5: SHARES OPENLY AND WILLINGLY

This means: You are willing to share information, experience, and knowledge with the group.

Rating: Not so confident Sort of Confident Really confident

SKILL #6: COOPERATIVE

This means: You work with other members of the team to accomplish the job - no matter what.

Rating: Not so confident Sort of Confident Really confident

SKILL #7: FLEXIBLE

This means: You adapt easily when the team changes direction or you're asked to try something new.

Rating: Not so confident Sort of Confident Really confident

SKILL #8: COMMITTED

This means: You are responsible and dedicated. You always give your best effort!

Rating: Not so confident Sort of Confident Really confident

SKILL #9: PROBLEM SOLVER

This means: You focus on solutions. You are good about not going out of your way to find fault in others.

Rating: ___ Not so confident ___ Sort of Confident ___ Really confident

SKILL #10: RESPECTFUL

This means: You treat other team members with courtesy and consideration - all of the time.

Rating: ___ Not so confident ___ Sort of Confident ___ Really confident

Consider your answers:

Did you have mostly “not so confident” checked off?

If so, you are still developing your confidence as a team player. These skills often take some time to develop - so don't worry. It might be helpful to reach out to someone you know and trust to help you focus on developing a plan for working on some of the skills in which you would like to be more confident. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Asking for help when you need it is another great skill of a productive team player.

Did you have mostly “sort of confident” checked off?

If so, you are pretty confident in your teamwork skills - but could probably use a little extra support or development in a few areas. Invite someone close to you (someone you know and trust), to work with you on the areas you would like to improve. Most people would be really happy to help you! Learning the strategies to become a good team member takes time, energy, and dedication.

Did you have mostly “really confident” checked off?

If so, you are truly confident in your ability to be a good team player. That's great! Figure out an area or two where you would like to continue to see improvement (since we should always be striving to be the best we can be) and develop a plan for how to further grow those skills. Also try to offer support to someone you know who might be struggling with building his or her own level of teamwork confidence.

Now consider your teamwork skills confidence levels:

I am most proud of my ability to:

I want to improve my ability to:

I will reach out to some of these people for guidance:

13. The Good, the Bad, and the Reasonable

JUST THE FACTS: Teamwork can be tough. Dealing with different personalities and compromise is not necessarily easy. So, what do you do when you are part of a team and there are barriers to the team's success? This could be a sports team, a team at work, or a group working on a school or community project. The purpose of this activity is to engage participants in a discussion of some of the barriers to effective teamwork and the strategies they may be able to put in place to create positive outcomes.



Time

25 minutes



Materials

- Flip chart and markers
- Dry spaghetti and marshmallows
- Optional: Timer



Directions

Ask participants if teamwork is ALWAYS easy. (Most likely you will receive “no” answers). Delve deeper and ask about some of the reasons why teams sometimes don't work or what makes teamwork so difficult at times. Write these answers on the flip chart. Answers may include: inconsistent team players, time issues, compatibility, differences in communication styles (both giving and receiving), lack of trust, no clear goal, etc.

Next, divide participants into groups of four or more. Ask each group to elect a team leader for this activity. Give each group a supply of spaghetti and marshmallows. Tell the group they will have 15 minutes to work together to create the tallest freestanding structure possible. Before you say, “go,” tell the teams that their team leaders may only supervise and offer instructions. He or she may not physically participate in this activity.



Conclusion

After 15 minutes, evaluate the structures. Usually the highest structure has a solid and wide foundation. Discuss with participants what it means to have a solid foundation - and why laying a solid foundation is important (and the core of an effective team).

Use the following questions for additional discussion:

1. How did your team work together? What specifically worked well? What difficulties did you experience?
2. Besides the team leader, what role did each person play in the group? How was each person helpful to the end goal?
3. Was it a plus or a minus that the team leader was not able to physically participate in the activity? How did the team leader feel about his or her level of participation?
4. What would you do differently if given a second chance at this activity?



Journaling Activity

You are the leader of a team at work. What type of leader would you like to be - one that gets involved and works with the team or one that tells the team what to do? Explain your choice.



Extension Activity

Have participants interview no fewer than 20 of their peers and ask two simple questions:

1. What is the best part of working on a team?
2. What is the most difficult part of working on a team?

Participants should be instructed to bring their results back to the larger group. The larger group should then examine the most common difficulties described and come up with solutions to turn these difficulties into successes.

14. How Many Shapes Does it Take?

JUST THE FACTS: It takes all types of team members to create a balanced, cohesive team. This activity will give participants the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the roles different people play on a team and the importance of each role.



Time

20 minutes



Materials

- Five large pieces of paper, each with one of the following shapes drawn: square, rectangle, circle, triangle, and squiggle



Directions

Before beginning this activity, place each of the five shapes in a different location in of the room. Ensure there is enough room for participants to move around for this activity.

Discuss the fact that teams are all made up of people who perform different roles. Think about a sports team (football, basketball, soccer, hockey, etc.). What might happen if one basketball player hogged the ball all of the time? What might happen if the quarterback tried to run the ball all of the time instead of passing? So, it takes all different types of players to make an efficient and winning team, right?

Now, switch gears. Tell participants that not only does it take all different types of players to make a team effective; it takes all kinds of shapes, too.

Say something to the effect of: “I want you all to look around the room. Five different shapes are hanging up. The shapes are a square, a rectangle, a circle, a triangle, and a squiggle. What if I told you that knowing whether you, your co-workers and friends are squares, rectangles, circles, triangles, or squiggles could help you build better teams and better careers?”

Ask participants to stand up and take a few moments to think about the shape they like best or find most appealing. Then ask participants to walk over to that shape.

Once everyone has chosen their personal shape, use the information in Activity 14 to tell them a little bit about each shape’s “personality.” In fact, when you are finished with this activity, many participants will want to have a copy of what the shapes mean.



Conclusion

Discuss the following questions with the group:

- Do you think people have the characteristics of more than one shape?
- Why do you think it is important to have all different shapes working on the same team? Offer some of the information below, if appropriate:
 - The Square, Rectangle, and Triangle are all convergent. This mean they are working TOWARDS something specific and finite, and they do it in a logical and systematic way. But they might be lacking in personal creativity.
 - The Circle and Squiggle are divergent. This mean they are creative, extroverted, and intuitive. They will reach out around them into new areas and to other people. But they aren't particularly systematic or dependable.



Journaling Activity

Do you think it is easy or difficult for different types of personalities to work together? Why is it important to not only understand how you work best, but to learn how others work best?



Extension Activity

Spend some time with participants to explore different types of personality assessments for the purpose of team building. Have students take different assessments and determine the validity of each. Research further and find out which occupations are best suited for which types of personalities.

Another option is to have participants think about and describe their favorite sport and compare players on those teams with the different roles found in the workplace. Examples might include: boss - coach; customer - fan; player - co-worker; etc. See how many different types of comparisons can be made and how important it is for all of these roles to work together in order to create harmony on a team.

Activity 14. Which Shape are You?

There are some people who believe there are five basic personality types, and each type tends to prefer a different shape. Knowing whether you, your co-workers and friends are squares, rectangles, circles, triangles, or squiggles just might help you build better careers, teams, and friendships. Here is what each shape might say about you - and how you can recognize other people for their shapes.

If you are a SQUARE: You are an organized, logical, and hardworking person who likes structure and rules. But sometimes you have trouble making decisions because you always want more information. You feel most comfortable in a stable environment with clear directions on what to do. You tend to like things that are regular and orderly. You will work on a task until it is finished, no matter what.

How to spot a square: They appear to move “straight,” use precise or specific gestures, love routine, and are very concerned with detail. They are also very neat in their appearance and their personal workspace. They do a lot of planning and are always prompt.

If you are a RECTANGLE: You are a courageous (brave), exciting, and inquisitive explorer who always searches for ways to grow and change. You enjoy trying things you’ve never done before and love asking questions that have never been asked. You like structure, and will often be the person to be sure things are done the proper way, taking all rules and regulations into consideration. When you are given a task you will start organizing it to be sure it can be done in the most systematic way.

How to spot a rectangle: These people often have “fleeting eyes and flushed faces.” They also tend to giggle and they like variety. For example, they’ll come into work early or late – but not on time. And those who have offices tend to be disorganized with a mishmash of furniture.

If you are a TRIANGLE: You are a born leader who’s competitive, confident, and can make decisions. You also like recognition. You are goal oriented and enjoy planning something out and then doing it (you are motivated by the accomplishment). You will tend to look at big long-term issues, but might forget the details. When given a task you set a goal and work on a plan for it. American business has traditionally been run by triangles and, although usually men, more women are taking those roles today.

How to spot a triangle: They have powerful voices, love to tell jokes, and they play as hard as they work. They also tend to be stylish dressers.

If you are a CIRCLE: You are social and communicative. There are no hard edges about you. You handle things by talking about them and smoothing things out with everybody. Communication is your first priority. When given a task, you will want to talk about it. You are a “people person,” with lots of sympathy and consideration for others. You listen and communicate well and are very perceptive about other people’s feelings. You like harmony and hate making unpopular decisions.

How to spot a circle: They are friendly, nurturing, persuasive, and generous. They tend to be relaxed and smile a lot. They're talkative, but have a mellow voice. They also have a full laugh and like to touch others on the shoulder and arm.

If you are a SQUIGGLE: You are “off-the-wall” and creative. You like doing new and different things most of the time and get bored with regularity. When given a task, you will come up with bright ideas about to do it. But you don't think in a deliberate pattern from A to B to C. Instead, you tend to jump around in your mind, going from A to M to X.

How to spot a squiggle: They can be “flashy,” dramatic, and extremely creative - and they don't like highly structured environments. Both men and women squiggles tend to be funny and very expressive. They also have great intuition. Most performers and writers are squiggles.

15. Teamwork on the Job

JUST THE FACTS: The purpose of this activity is to help participants understand how teamwork is managed on the job - both from the perspective of the boss and from the perspective of the employee.



Time

15 - 30 minutes



Materials

- Copies of Activity 15a or 15b, depending on your time frame



Directions

This exercise offers two different activities. You may choose one or both, depending on time. One is scenario based and one is a role play.

Activity 15a: For this activity, read (aloud or independently) the library scenario. Discuss as a group what Shawn (the librarian) did well, and what she could have done differently. How might she handle herself in the future? Discuss how Nathaniel (the boss) should handle this situation. Consider the fact that he probably wants to help Shawn to improve and not necessarily punish her.

Activity 15b: For this activity, request volunteers to act out a role play. Allow a few minutes for the actors to read through the scene so they know what their character is like. After the scene is read aloud, ask the following questions:

- What was the real problem at the coffee shop?
- What could Jarrod and/or Steffy have done differently?
- Do you agree with how the manager handled the situation?
- What might you have done in this situation?



Conclusion

The importance of teamwork is undeniable. Ask the group to come up with a list of the benefits of teamwork and to illustrate or give examples of each. If the group has trouble coming up with a list, use the following as conversation starters:

- **Support** - Teamwork leads to camaraderie between team members. This will not only lead to better social relationships, but can also act as a support when things go wrong.
- **Varied skills** - Different team members bring with them different skills.
- **Distribution of work** - Distributing work not only reduces each individual's burden, but also increases responsibility and ensures better commitment to completing the task individually and as a whole.

- **Creativity** - Different people have different skills and possess different perspectives. Therefore any activity that involves teamwork benefits from the various creative thoughts and inspirations of different people.
- **Accomplish faster** - People working together will tend to complete a project faster than if one person was working alone.



Journaling Activity

Think about a time when you were part of a group/team and things worked really well, and a time when things didn't work out so well. What were the situations and what made the differences?



Extension Activity

Consider different jobs in your community. Arrange for field trips to some local job sites where participants can ask both managers and employees a few questions about teamwork (or ask an employer and employees to come in to talk about the impact of teamwork on the job). Alternatively, participants can do this independently and then share their experiences with the larger group.

Work with participants to develop a single set of questions to ask of managers and employees. Questions should be focused on the importance of teamwork and what happens when one or more chooses not to be a team player.

Activity 15A. Teamwork on the Job

SCENARIO:

Shawn works in a library. She and three other co-workers have been tasked to work together on a project. Shawn turns in the completed product, but she completed it without input or help from the others. Shawn said it was really tough to find time to meet together. She did text the others (asking about working together), but got no responses. Her supervisor, Nathaniel, knows that she is a promising young librarian who wants to advance to a leadership position. Nathaniel also believes that Shawn has the potential to be a good leader, but feels she is impatient when it comes to working with others.

DISCUSSION:

- What did Shawn do well?
- What could she have done differently?
- How might she handle herself in the future?
- How should Nathaniel handle this situation?
- Consider the fact that he probably wants to help Shawn to improve and not necessarily punish her.

Activity 15a. Teamwork on the Job

Narrator: Five characters will role play a situation to determine whose job it is to restock the condiments at the coffee bar.

Characters:	Jarrold	Steffy
	Pam	John
	Manager	Narrator

Jarrold: It wasn't my job! It was Steffy's job! The policy around here is that the new employee restocks cream and sugar station. She's the newest employee. It's her job!

Steffy: I don't get to work until 10:00. By the time I get here, the station should already be stocked. Otherwise, customers won't have the stuff they need for their coffee.

Pam: You're just trying to get out of doing your job.

Steffy: No! Jarrold gets here at 7:00. He should already have it done by the time I get here.

Jarrold: You're the newest employee.

Steffy: What's your problem?

Jarrold: What's your problem?

Steffy: I do my job.

John: But you're the newest employee. It's your job to restock.

Narrator: Voices are getting louder.

Steffy: But Jarrold gets here earlier. I am only trying to think about our customers.

Pam: Are you just trying to get out of your job?

Jarrold: You're impossible.

Steffy: No, you are!

Manager: Okay, okay! What's the problem? Steffy, continue restocking the condiment station. Jarrold, go ring up the customers.

Narrator: Both are taking a break from each other to calm down. Later in the day, the manager speaks to Jarrod and Steffy.

Manager: Steffy, Jarrod is right. The new person stocks the cream and sugar station.

Steffy: So you mean Jarrod shouldn't have to do this anymore?

Jarrold: Told you!

Manager: Jarrod! On the other hand, that rule was made when everyone came to work at the same time. However, since Steffy doesn't come into work until later in the day, the customers have a right to have a fully stocked station.

Jarrold: So Steffy doesn't have to do this job either?

Steffy: No, I get it! Whoever comes in earliest should restock the station from the night before.

Jarrold: Okay, so I don't have to restock the station all day? Just replenish from the night before. Steffy should then do it when she comes in - and then throughout her shift?

Manager: Exactly! Also, I would like you two to start treating each other with a little respect. It's good to have a sense of humor. What happened to yours? Every customer and employee that comes in here deserves to be treated with courtesy. Okay? And, by the way, the customer is always right and always comes first.

Narrator: (Next day) Their voices are calm and respectful.

Steffy: Jarrod, I am here now. I'll finish those. Why don't you go take a break?

Jarrold: Okay, thanks! I think I will. Hey look, there's a whole new kind of sugar that just came in. The boxes are in the back. I thought you might want to know.

Steffy: Thanks, Jarrod.

Adapted from Problem Solving Video, Workplace Videos 2000, Glencoe McGraw