

Career Garden

Cultivating Career Success

Module #6

Working in Teams

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Working in Teams

Increasingly, workplaces are being organized as teams. And even if the management at your workplace never uses the word "team," the person-to-person skills required for effective teamwork will help you be successful in any work setting that requires interaction with another human being.

Objectives

Here is what you'll be able to do when you have successfully completed this module:

1. Describe the characteristics of an effective team.
2. Identify the functions an individual may serve in a team setting.
3. Identify skills and specific behaviors which promote effective teamwork.
4. Create a plan for on-going strengthening of teamwork skills.

1. The Effective Team

Focus Questions:

What are the characteristics of an effective team?

Say the word "team" and many people think sports. Even if you hated PE in high school, the world of sports gives us good illustrations of teamwork that can help us understand the world of work. At one point I worked with a group of people who played volleyball together every Friday after hours.

Frank and Paul could both spike the ball pretty well. Kathy and Sonny each had fierce serves. At the start of a new game, we'd make sure that we set up our rotation so that either Frank or Paul was always in front at the net, ready to hit hard. We also spaced Kathy and Sonny so that our strongest serving fire-power was spread out. We **recognized the strengths** of each player and organized ourselves accordingly.

When the ball was hit onto our side of the court, somebody had to get in front of 50 mph leather before it hit the floor and then bump it up into the air. Keiko was great at making saves, but of course the ball didn't always come to Keiko. Whoever was closest was expected to act, even if bumping was not their strength. **Everyone was ready to pitch in**, even if we weren't all experts. And we **depended on each other**.

If everyone had pitched in at once, all six of us diving to save one ball, we would soon all have been off the court with concussions and bruises! But we **communicated** with each other - "I got it!" "Mine!" - and **followed through** with what we said.

After the bump, saving the ball, the next hit was a set, a vertical hit, placed so that one of the front-line players could use our third hit to spike the ball down onto the other side of the court. Rarely did we hit the ball over on the second hit, and almost never on the first hit, though this is legal in volleyball. **We had procedures**, normal patterns of cooperation, that we adhered to most of the time.

As a team on the court, we **shared a common goal** of scoring 15 points before the other team. The drive to accomplish that goal motivated us to:

- organize ourselves by each person's strengths,
- set and follow procedures,
- cooperate/work inter-dependently,
- communicate, and
- pitch in on whatever needed to be done.

We were an effective team.

Comprehension Question:

1. Which of these is not identified as a characteristic of an effective team:

- A. Members share a common goal.
- B. Members are organized by individuals' strengths.
- C. Members attend all practices.
- D. Members agree on procedures.
- E. Members communicate with each other.

Answer

1-C. See Discussion of Review Questions on p. 23-25.

2. Roles on a Team

Focus Question:

What functions must members of a team perform for the team to be effective?
What team functions am I most comfortable with?

For the human body to function, a remarkable number of processes must all be working.

- The respiratory system must bring oxygen into the body.
- The digestive system must bring energy (food) into the body.
- The circulatory system must distribute oxygen and energy throughout the body.

- The excretory system must eliminate wastes from the body.
- The nervous system controls the timing and so forth of these other systems.

...And so on. These processes all rely on one another. None could survive if one of these key systems failed. If any one of these systems becomes impaired, the health of the entire body is impaired.

As with the body, there are a number of functions necessary for health, so there are functions – roles – that must take place within a team to keep the team healthy and performing well.

I was once a member of a team that wrote grant proposals for a school. Catherine, Gloria, Chris and I came to be fairly successful in our grant-writing work, eventually pulling down “million dollar years” for the school. Each of the four of us did some research, wrote, negotiated agreements with other organizations, and so on. Those activities are part of grant-writing, just as serving, bumping, setting and spiking are part of volleyball. But, besides those activities, each of us acted in particular roles that our *team health* required. Let me introduce each of the four of us by describing the roles we played in our team discussions.

Catherine could listen to any of us expound on one of our great ideas for minutes on end, and then summarize the idea in a sentence or two. Even more powerfully, when our group might spin out 20 minutes worth of team discussion about our current project, Catherine was the one who took advantage of a pause to restate concisely the main ideas that had been put on the table. One of us might need to “correct” her restatement of an idea; she welcomed such corrections. Catherine functioned in the role of **Summarizer/Clarifier**. She would often serve in the role of **Recorder** as well, getting these summaries of our discussions on paper for future reference.

Of the four of us, Chris was the most likely to come up with a hare-brained scheme. She pushed our imagination of what our school could accomplish and how. Rarely did we do what Chris actually proposed, but the contributions of this **Idea Person** moved us to pursue creative new directions that proved fruitful.

Gloria was often the first to poke holes in Chris’ wilder ideas. Gloria would do this gently, asking questions such as “What resources do we have already that would help us...?” “What are our other options?” or “Can we look at this from another angle...?” In her **Evaluator** role, Gloria kept us from rushing to pursue an idea before we had assessed it thoroughly. In contrast, Gloria at other times would chime

enthusiastically, “This is a great idea! We can ace this one!” She was a good **Encourager** who played that role at strategic times.

I often helped find the middle roads between Chris’ crazy ideas and Gloria’s thorough assessment of those ideas. When Chris suggested we pursue a training contract with a major airline and Gloria pointed out all the reasons we could not, I suggested we consider targeting airport management for a training contract. Such a contract would build on the expertise we had gained in our contract with a local hospital to train their housekeeping personnel. When I did this, I functioned in the role of **Compromiser**. I was also the one of our team who would say, “Let’s come back to that at another time.” “For now, we need to prioritize....” And “When will we meet next?” By prioritizing and organizing the team’s work, I served in the role of **Leader**.

Having members who played these roles on our team helped make us strong and effective. Do not misunderstand. No one member had the monopoly on any role. Each of us would at times generate new ideas, clarify the discussion, encourage, and so on. But each of us did have our own personality and habitual patterns of thought and communication that made each of us more ready to play particular roles.

We were fortunate to have in our team this mix of personalities and aptitudes. It doesn’t always happen that way, though. You will become increasingly effective as a team player as you build the skills required for each role and the awareness to know when each role is lacking from a team.

There are a number of different roles that people adopt in meetings, some of which are listed below. **These roles are not always constant - one person might adopt several of these roles during one meeting** or change roles depending on what is being discussed.

Compromiser

Compromisers try to maintain harmony among the team members.

They may be willing to change their own views to get a group decision. They work well with different people and can be depended on to promote a good team atmosphere, helping the team to gel. A compromiser pulls people and tasks together, is a tolerant individual, and a good listener who will listen carefully to the views of other group members. A compromiser is a good judge of people and is diplomatic and sensitive to the feelings of others, not seen as a threat. They are able to recognize and resolve the development of conflict and other difficulties. A compromiser enables "difficult" team-members to contribute positively.

They might say:

"We haven't heard from Mike yet - I'd like to hear what you think about

this."

"I'm not sure I agree. What are your reasons for saying that?"

Summarizer/Clarifier

Clarifiers summarize the group's discussion and conclusions. They clarify group objectives and elaborate on the ideas of others. A clarifier goes into detail about how group plans would work.

They may say:

"So here's what we've decided so far...."

"I think you're right, but we could also add"

Evaluator

Evaluators help the group avoid coming to agreement too quickly. They tend to be slow in coming to a decision because of the need to think things over. They are the logical, analytical, objective people in the team and offer measured, dispassionate critical analysis. They contribute at times of crucial decision-making because they are capable of evaluating competing proposals. They may suggest alternative ideas.

They may say:

"What other possibilities are there?"

"Let's try to look at this another way."

"I'm not sure we're on the right track."

Encourager

Energizes groups when motivation is low through humor or being enthusiastic. They are positive individuals who support and praise other group members. They may use humor to break tensions in the group.

They may say:

"We CAN do this!"

"That's a great idea!"

Ideas person

The ideas person suggests new ideas to solve group problem or new ways for the group to organize the task. They dislike orthodoxy and are not too concerned with practicalities. They provide suggestions and proposals that are often original and radical. They are more concerned with the big picture than with details. They may get bored after the initial impetus wears off.

They may say:

"Why don't we consider doing it this way?"

Leader

Good leaders direct the sequence of steps the group takes and keeps the group "on-track." They are good at controlling people and events and coordinating resources. They have the energy, determination and initiative to overcome obstacles and bring competitive drive to the team.

They give shape to the team effort. They recognize the skills of the individuals and how they can be used. Leaders are outgoing people who have to be careful not to be domineering. They can sometimes steamroller the team but get results. They may become impatient with complacency and lack of progress and may sometimes overreact.

They may say:

"Let's come back to this later if we have time."

"We need to move on to the next step."

"Sue, what do you think about this idea?"

Recorder

The recorder keeps the group focused and makes sure that everyone in the group is helping with the project. They are usually the first person to offer to take notes to keep a record of ideas and decisions. They also like to act as time-keeper, to allocate times to specific tasks and remind the team to keep to them, or as a spokesperson, to deliver the ideas and findings of the group. They may check that all members understand and agree on plans and actions. The recorder acts as the memory of the group.

They may say:

"We only have five minutes left, so we need to come to agreement now!"

"Do we all understand this chart?"

"Are we all in agreement on this?"

Destructive or selfish group roles

Try to avoid being any of these!

- **Autocrat** - tries to dominate or constantly interrupt other members of the team.
- **Show Off** - talks all the time and thinks they know all the answers.
- **Butterfly** - Keeps changing the topic before others are ready.
- **Aggressor** - Doesn't show respect for others, comments negatively about them.
- **Critic** - Always sees the negative side to any argument, but never suggests alternatives. Puts down the ideas of others.
- **Help Seeker** - Looks for sympathy from others: a victim.
- **Self-Confessor** - Uses the group as a forum for inappropriate talk about self.
- **Avoider** - Refuses to focus on the task or group relationship problems.
- **Clown** - Shows non-involvement in the group and engages in distracting communication.

Comprehension Questions:

2. What comparison is made between a team and a human body?

- A. Both a team and a body can move and go places.
- B. Both a team and a body must excrete wastes in order to remain healthy.
- C. Both a team and a body are living and dynamic organisms.
- D. Both a team and a body require certain functions to take place to remain healthy.

For items 3-9, match each of the team roles with a sample phrase that corresponds with that role.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 3. ___ Summarizer/Clarifier | A. "I'm not sure we're on track." |
| 4. ___ Compromiser | B. "So here's what we've decided so far..." |
| 5. ___ Evaluator | C. "Let me get this written down right." |
| 6. ___ Encourager | D. "We need to move forward now" |
| 7. ___ Ideas Person | E. "I'm jazzed about this!" |
| 8. ___ Leader | F. "Here's a new one for us to think about..." |
| 9. ___ Recorder | G. "How can we make that work with what Phil has proposed?" |

Answers:

2-D; 3-B; 4-G; 5-A; 6-E; 7-F; 8-D; 9-C. See Discussion of Review Questions on p. 23-25.

3. Skills for Effective Teamwork

Focus Question:

What specific skills and practices can I use to help the teams I participate in to be effective?

Participating in an effective team, whether in sports, at work, or in the community, can be very rewarding. While sports, work, and community projects might each require different skills, one set of skills is common to all these contexts: the skills required for participation in an effective team.

Christopher Avery describes these five skill sets in his book, *Teamwork Is An Individual Skill*:

- Taking Responsibility
- Creating Partnerships
- Affirming Shared Purpose
- Building Trust
- Maintaining a Collaborative Mindset

The following material is adapted from Avery's excellent book.

Taking Responsibility

This is foundational to working in a team. Some people may be comfortable holding this attitude: “It’s not my fault, it’s the team I’m on. They don’t know how to work together!” This attitude is the opposite of what is required to make a team effective. As a participant in a team (work group, department, program, staff), you have influence on the performance of the team. You make choices and take actions that help your team function more or less effectively. Responsibility drives us to practice the following skills:

Don’t “go along.”

Does being a “team player” mean you agree with everything anyone on your team says? Absolutely not! When you take responsibility for your team’s success, you don’t let your team pursue a plan that you do not think is in the best interests of success.

There is a story about Uncle Ben, Aunt Susie, Loretta and Billy sitting around bored at home on a hot Sunday afternoon. Uncle Ben shot out of the blue, “Why don’t we get in the car and go get dinner at that barbecue place in Mojave?” After a silence, “Well, I guess we could,” Loretta offered. “If you like,” Aunt Susie said softly. “Sure, why don’t we?” Billy popped in with a tone of almost enthusiasm. An hour and forty-five minutes later, after a long silent trip across the desert, they reached the restaurant in Mojave. There they had chicken, ribs, potato salad and silence for dinner. By the time they got back home, another long silent ride, the weather had cooled off. But now home, conversation heated up.

“Why the heck did we drive all the way to Mojave for dinner?” Billy broke the silence.

“Don’t ask me!” Aunt Loretta sharply replied.

“I didn’t want to go!” Susie declared. All eyes turned to Uncle Ben:

“Well, I was only making conversation!”

This group of family friends spent five hours of silent resentment together because everyone “went along!”

Your silence will usually be interpreted as consent. If you disagree with a proposal – if you believe it will harm your team, you, or another team member – you must respectfully voice your concerns.

Learn from every upset.

As hard as you work, as smart as you work, still, “stuff happens” to all of us. If you have the habit of taking responsibility for your actions and the outcomes of your actions, when a snafu happens you will not point an incriminating finger of blame at others or even at the more nebulous negative forces that seem to have been working against you. Your

question is not, “Whose fault is this?” Instead, your questions are, “How could I have avoided this? What could I do differently in the future?”

It may be that one of your colleagues really did have more direct responsibility for an event that impacted you and your team negatively. When you have reflected on events and summarized your learning, the lesson is not, for example, “JoAnn should have gotten another temp in when we got backlogged.” Instead, the responsible team member concludes, “I should have spoken to JoAnn when I saw things moving so slowly. I must share my perceptions with my colleagues when I perceive emerging problems.”

Give practical service to your team.

Since that new machine was moved in a couple weeks ago, everyone has been saying that cable across the walkway needs to be taped down. Lots of talk. Instead of talk, take responsibility. Take the ninety seconds required to run a piece of duct tape over that cable. It’s not your job? It may not be on your job description, but it is well within your power to accomplish this. And it makes a practical difference for you and your team.

If you think about your workplace for a minute, you would probably be able to come up with a dozen or more small things that need to be done: a small process that needs to be improved, a form that needs to be redrawn, a safety hazard that needs to be handled, a person whose difficult behavior needs to be addressed. Choose one of these small things once in a while, and take care of it. Just do it. You won’t do this self-righteously or to get attention. You will just take responsibility to do something good for you and your team.

Comprehension Questions:

10. T F Cooperating with my team will sometimes require me to do things I don’t agree are right.

11. Which of these indicates responsible learning from a negative situation?

- A. “He tends to be late most of the time.”
- B. “Next time I’ll make sure the due date is clear to him.”
- C. “I never should have trusted him with that.”
- D. “The boss doesn’t understand what is required.”

12. T F The point of taking responsibility is to get people to notice your hard work.

Answers:

10-F; 11-B; 12-F. See Discussion of Quiz, p. 26-28.

Create Partnerships

A team may have many members, but between you and each one of the other members, there is a one-to-one relationship. Strengthen those one-to-one partnerships and you strengthen your whole team.

Discover the interests of your teammates.

Your team will be more successful, your workplace will be more pleasant, if people are motivated to be there and work collaboratively. How can people be motivated to work together with you in a spirit of partnership?

For some reason, people get up out of bed every day and go to work. Each person has good reasons for doing so, but those reasons may not ever be spoken. They may even be hidden from oneself. It is these deep motivations – not just sticks and carrots – that can move people to effective work. To get people to collaborate with you, they must see how doing so will help them achieve their deepest hopes, desires, and aspirations.

Before you try to uncover the deep motivations of others, try uncovering your own. We are often conditioned to think we work for money. What else is there for you? Security? Children's education? Free time? Flexibility? Make a contribution to the world? After you've had this conversation with yourself, have the same conversation with some of the people you work with. Talk with co-workers about how working together can help each of you reach your own interests. Each team member must clearly see how if the team wins, the individual wins.

Give and ask for favors.

For many of us, it is easier to grant a favor than ask for a favor. But think about this: When I ask for a small favor, I am giving a favor at the same time. I am showing the person that I ask that I trust and depend on them, and that I am willing to "owe them one."

Asking for and granting favors increases the value of a relationship. These favors might cost us next to nothing to give:

- holding a door open
- making a referral
- taking a message
- giving early warning of an opportunity or threat
- proofreading a document
- answering a question (even a "silly" question) thoughtfully

Here is an experiment to try. Ask someone you don't know very well or want to get to know better for a favor. Do not couch your request in terms

such as “You know I’ll do the same for you sometime,” or, “I’ll pay you back.” Just ask straight out and be willing to receive.

Celebrate others’ successes.

Success is not necessarily in short supply. There can be enough success to go around. Envy or resentment toward others who experience good news can poison a team. Celebrating each other’s successes fertilizes the ground for more success to grow. When you celebrate my success, I believe you have my best interests at heart. Our partnership is enriched.

Give feedback, not criticism.

What distinction are we making here between criticism and feedback? The language of criticism tends to label people or their work with value judgments. The language of feedback reveals the potential consequences of specific actions.

Sample Criticism	Sample Feedback
“This report is weak.”	“When you don’t include those details, the reader is less likely to believe you.”
“That was a poor response to her question.”	“When you used the word ‘selfish,’ her posture and expression indicated she felt defensive.”
“You have been irresponsible.”	“When you are late and don’t call in, we don’t know how to respond to the people who phone you with urgent questions.”

Even when offered as “constructive criticism,” value judgments often put the other person on the defensive. The “compassionate revelation” of cause and effect feedback will often be welcomed and received when criticism will not.

Comprehension questions:

13. Committed team members...

- A. subordinate their personal interests to the interests of the team.
- B. don’t care about any of their teammates personal interests.
- C. encourage their teammates to put the team above their own interests.
- D. seek to meet their personal interests by means of the team’s success.

14. Choose the statement that best demonstrates feedback rather than criticism.

- A. It was stupid to overspend your budget so much.
- B. When you overspent the budget, I felt like you were being a jerk.
- C. When you overspent the budget, it became impossible to give raises to the staff.
- D. When you overspent the budget, I felt very angry.

Answers:
13-D; 14-C. See Discussion of Review Questions on p. 23-25.

Affirm Shared Purpose

Your team has a reason for existing. Your team has goals to achieve. When you help maintain your team's focus on its purpose, you contribute to its success and the success of each member.

Establish shared clarity.

Does your team know its purpose? If each member of your team were asked why the team exists and what its goals are, would each give virtually the same answer? If so, your team has shared clarity, and as Avery puts it, "clarity is power."

Suppose a business or a department is told that its job is "to make money." That can be a great idea, but its ambiguity makes it powerless to help engage a team effectively. Now suppose the business or department takes on these goals: "Between now and the end of the year, reduce expenses by 5% and increase the 'outstanding' ratings on customer surveys by 5%." There is enough detail there for a team – if all members are aware of the goals – to get some traction and move together powerfully toward improvement. And I'll bet the workplace will be a generally more energizing, stimulating place to be.

If such clarity is not present in your team, you don't need to wait for management to saddle you with its plans. Take responsibility to initiate conversations with your peers about your group's purpose or goals.

Help make consensual decisions.

A team that makes decisions by consensus – not "majority rule," but agreement by 100% of the participants – is a very powerful team. If you've been in a group that operated by consensus, this suggestion might seem absurd. Many people have experienced consensus-governed groups that moved painfully slowly. "How could a powerful team take so long to make decisions?"

Most of the slow motion, the belabored discussion, of groups working by consensus has to do with "being nice" or political posturing around two "right and wrong" proposals. On the other hand, a goal-focused, effective team will consider a large number of proposals, not just two. As many team members are coming to agree with a particular proposal, they will ask those who disagree, "What will it take to make this work for you?" The minority voice is encouraged to help find a solution.

Consensus is valuable to the team because without it, the team loses power. The minority who feel the proposal is not in the best interest of the team will lose motivation – they won't work as hard for something they

don't really believe in. In an ironic way, these team members will become the most powerful people on the team. Why? Because the limit on a team's success or productivity is not its talent, but the motivation of its **least motivated member**.

Your behaviors toward consensus-based decision-making:

- Encourage the development and consideration of many possible solutions to a problem.
- Voice your dissent when you disagree with a proposal.
- Ask dissenters this question: "How can we change this proposal to make it work for you?"

Comprehension Question:

15. Choose the statement that is true of consensus-based decision-making.
- A. It always takes a long time to form a consensus.
 - B. Without consensus, members who disagree will be less motivated to work.
 - C. It is important to keep your ideas to yourself so that the group can reach consensus more quickly.
 - D. When most of a group agrees on a proposal, you have consensus.

Answer:

15-B. See Discussion of Review Questions on p. 23-25.

Build Trust

Success requires you to work together. But you won't be able to work together without trusting one another. A skilled team member knows how to build trust with her colleagues.

Make and keep small commitments.

The path to begin building trust is incredibly simple. Do you trust people who have not followed through with what they have said? Probably not. You probably won't depend on that person for something very important. To begin increasing trust with someone, try these steps.

1. Make a small agreement with the person, an agreement you can afford to have broken if they don't follow through.
2. Keep your part of the agreement, and find out if the person has kept their part.
3. Make a larger, more risky agreement, and repeat the process.

As the old proverb goes, "Whoever is faithful in small things will be faithful with the large as well."

It is easy to focus on the other person's keeping or breaking the commitment. But these are the "nevers" of commitments:

- Never agree to something you know you cannot follow through on.
- If you do fail to keep a commitment, clean it up right away.

The clean-up is critical to your relationships with your colleagues, and therefore critical to your team's (and your personal) success. We'll devote a larger discussion to this issue shortly.

Deal directly with violations of trust.

When someone does not follow through on an agreement with you, you have three choices. You can absorb the loss that the broken agreement incurs. You can withdraw from the relationship, or, if the relationship is important to you, you can work to repair the relationship. The repair work is primarily a conversation about the broken agreement. The conversation includes these steps:

1. **Make sure it is a good time.** Say to the other party, "I'd like to talk to you about how we are working together. Is now a good time?" If it is not a good time, arrange one, and resume at the appointed time.
2. **Be specific.** Describe in non-judgmental terms the behavior which you believe broke your trust. Describe the impact it had on you (and the team). Describe how this made you feel. Here is an example: "You posted the new files to the website on December 5, though we had agreed that December 1 would be the day to go public with the announcements. The delay caused our sales people to be idle, with nothing to do, for four days at this strategic time in our season. It put us way behind on our December sales goals. I had assumed you would post the files on the first, and so I was extremely frustrated by the unproductivity the delay caused."
3. **Listen.** Now it is time to be quiet and let the other person react. If your words have been compassionate, accurate and non-judgmental, you will probably have appealed to this person's sense of integrity. He will probably start to make amends. If the other starts a finger-pointing blame and excuse game, ask the person to review the concrete facts of their behavior again. Keep an even, neutral tone of voice.
4. **Make a new agreement.** Start afresh by discussing what you want, need, or expect from this relationship in the future.

This may be a difficult conversation to initiate, but is part of the task of being a responsible team member.

Clean up broken agreements.

Perhaps more difficult than initiating a civil conversation with one who has violated your trust is to begin a conversation with a person whose trust you have broken. If you do not clear the air, you will erode the other's trust in you. If others lose trust in you, they will probably withdraw from you, not permitting you to be involved in their life or work in meaningful ways. Your team will be handicapped, as you will be, since your success is tied up with the success of the team. How do you manage the clean-up operation? Here are the steps for a clean-up conversation:

1. **Acknowledge that you broke an agreement.** Don't make excuses. Simply admit your error. This first step is a tremendous gift to your partner. Your initiative means your partner does not need to ignore your behavior, dismiss it as OK, or call you on it.
2. **Apologize.** Tell the person they didn't deserve to be treated by you that way. The words, "I am sorry" might work for smaller offenses; "I apologize to you" seems somehow stronger.
3. **Ask what you can do to correct the situation.** You may know what is required to fix the problem caused, but asking the question focuses on repairing the relationship.
4. **Recommit to the relationship.** Tell your teammate how important your future relationship is to you and what you intend to do to ensure you follow through on commitments in the future.

You may be able to practice this clean-up process this week. Think of some minor ball you dropped—perhaps you did not return a phone call in the time frame you said you would. Practicing with the smaller issues gives you good experience, and even though your offense may have been minor, your initiating the clean-up conversation builds trust.

Comprehension Questions:

16. T F Never agree to something you know you cannot follow through on.

17. T F... If you do fail to keep a commitment, it is a valuable test of your teammates trust in you.

18. Which of these best summarizes what you should do when you have broken an agreement?

- A. Hope that no one notices.
- B. Hope that no one notices, but then after a period of time, talk about it with the other party.
- C. Initiate a conversation acknowledging your error and offering to correct the situation.
- D. If someone brings up the matter apologize and assure them of your commitment to do better in the future.

Answers:

16-T; 17-F; 18-C. See Discussion of Review Questions on p. 23-25.

Maintain a Collaborative Mindset

People with a collaborative mindset are able to step into another person's shoes and understand the other viewpoint. Yet they remain focused on the purpose and goals of the team.

Honor differences.

Suppose everyone in your team was the same gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status, had the same educational background, read the same books, watched the same movies, listened to the same radio station, and followed the same spiritual or religious practices. Compare the range of human experience represented in such a hypothetical group compared to the range of experience of the group of people you probably work with. In a team, the wider the range of experience, the greater variety of responses to a given situation, and the greater number of solutions that might be generated by a problem.

The differences among you are a priceless asset to your team. The conformity or uniformity you want your team to have is not conformity in appearances, tastes, or thinking styles, but in **purpose**.

It can be hard work communicating across differences. How do you honor these differences? A key is to ask genuine questions and listen as openly as possible. Listen with the attitude that you may well hear something that will enrich your life.

Accept what others say as true for them.

Remember the old tale of the blind men and the elephant? Five blind men approached an elephant and began describing it. "It is like a wall," said one. "It is like a rope," said another. "It is like the trunk of a great tree." "An elephant is like a python." "It is broad and flat like a banana leaf," said the last. Each of the blind men spoke what he knew to be true. Their descriptions of the elephant were so different because their experiences of the elephant were so different: one blind man touched the elephant's side, and others the elephant's tail, leg, trunk, and ear.

In a way, our workplaces are elephants and we are all blind. We capture only a portion of the total reality in our experience. How do you suppose any of the blind men might have reacted if someone told him he was wrong about the elephant? If someone told us our perceptions about our workplace were "wrong," we would doubt that person's judgment and resent them for making such a bigoted and egotistical claim.

It is not that the truth about a matter is unattainable or completely subjective. Rather, the truth is bigger than any one person's perceptions. Humility is required. It takes humility to listen attentively while someone explains how an issue is shaped like a banana leaf when you have known it to be shaped like a rope.

But there are times we must disagree. What words can we use to avoid judgmental language? "That doesn't work for me," has become a common expression, and it is useful for expressing disagreement without expressing negative judgment.

Value the task *and* the people.

Some of us hold as their basic orientation to work "Let's get it done." Others tend to live more in a "Let's get along" mode. In particular circumstances an individual might drift from one of these basic intents to the other. The miracle of the collaborative mindset is this: holding the task orientation (get it done) and the people orientation (get along) as **equal priorities**.

Workers who are exclusively focused on the task may tend to run over other people, weakening those individuals and team. Workers who "over-focus" on relationships with people might never get anything done and cause great frustration to others. (See the Career Garden module, *Working with Difficult People*.)

When task orientation and relationship orientation are yoked like a pair of same-size oxen, they can plough through the rockiest soil. Take responsibility to monitor your own actions at work. Are you over-emphasizing one of these orientations over the other? Keep yourself in balance, and discuss this balance with your colleagues.

Comprehension Questions:

19. Which of these qualities would make a team the strongest?
- A. The members have very diverse backgrounds and are very unified in purpose.
 - B. The members are very similar in background and very unified in purpose.
 - C. The members are very similar in background but do not agree on a clear purpose.
 - D. It is impossible to make a good guess with the information given.
20. T F Teams are strongest when they keep the drive to get the task done prioritized above the drive to take care of team members as people.

Answers:

19-A; 20-F. See Discussion of Review Questions on p. 23-25.

4. Cultivating Your Teamwork Skills

Focus Questions:

How can these skills become more a part of my life?

Becoming skilled at working in a team does not happen overnight. It requires, time, patience and nurturing. I'd like to suggest a practice to help you nurture your teamwork skills over the coming weeks and months.

Context: Think about the group of people you interact with at your workplace. If there is an individual you are required to interact with frequently but these interactions just aren't working, you might focus on that one difficult relationship as the context of this exercise. If you are not working now, consider some other context, such as a class you are in, or a community organization you participate in. You could consider focusing on one important relationship such as your roommate or spouse.

Reflect: On a **daily basis**, review the team skills described here. When you notice that you exercised any of the team skills, acknowledge yourself. Give yourself a pat on the back. When you notice that you missed an opportunity to exercise one of the team skills, forgive yourself. Correct your behavior if you still have a chance. Commit yourself to catching yourself earlier, forgiving yourself faster, and correcting behavior more effectively.

After taking a minute or two for this reflection every day for a month, it will probably become a habit, part of your daily routine. To keep this good habit, write it into your schedule to reflectively review the skills once a week for the following two months.

Here is an example of what my line of thought might be as I do this exercise: "When I asked Cherie for a lift to the train station today when it was raining [*"Give and ask for favors"*] I did well. It is good to let others feel trusted and valuable. I congratulated myself. [*I acknowledge myself.*] When Vickie and Marla were talking about what our next project should be, I disagreed, but I did not speak up. [*"Don't go along."*] I caught myself. Going along with what I don't agree with is going to make me miserable and zap my motivation and drain our whole team's energy. I forgive myself. We don't submit our plan to the boss until next week. Tomorrow I will make a point to share my perspectives on the next project with Marla and Vickie. [*Correct my behavior.*] I'm glad I caught myself. Next time I'm going to catch myself while we are still in the meeting, and speak up with my opinion right then. [*Commit to catching myself earlier, correcting.*]"

To get you started in this practice, use the *Monitor Your Team Skills* worksheet, which follows. Since you are just beginning, first think back over the last couple weeks of work. Record some of your successes in using team skills and some missed opportunities.

Summary

In this module, we have first considered the characteristics of an effective team, considering the familiar experience of a sports team. We then discussed the various roles members can play within a team to make it function well. Finally, we looked at a number of specific skills you can exercise on the job or other places where you work in groups. Practicing these skills can make you a superb asset to your organization.

Monitoring Your Team Skills

Consider your work situation. Reflect on your experiences of the last several weeks to identify times when you used good teamwork skills and times when you did not. Name the situations in which you used or failed to use good team skills. Be sure to congratulate yourself for your successes and move forward from your failures (as suggested at the bottom of the chart).

Team Skills	I used this skill when...	I failed to use this skill when...
Take Responsibility		
Don't "go along."		
Learn from every upset.		
Give practical service to your team.		
Create Partnerships		
Discover the interests of your teammates.		
Give and ask for favors.		
Celebrate others' successes.		
Give feedback, not criticism.		
Affirm Shared Purpose		
Establish shared clarity.		
Help make consensual decisions.		
Build Trust		
Make and keep small commitments.		
Deal directly with violations of trust.		
Clean up broken agreements.		
Maintain a Collaborative Mindset		
Honor differences.		
Accept what others say as true for them.		
Value the task and the people.		
	...I caught myself doing something right. I acknowledge myself for using these skills.	... I caught myself. I forgive myself. I will correct my behavior. ...I commit to catching myself sooner, forgiving myself faster, correcting more effectively.

Review Questions

1. Which of these is not identified as a characteristic of an effective team:

- A. Members share a common goal.
- B. Members are organized by individuals' strengths.
- C. Members attend all practices.
- D. Members agree on procedures.
- E. Members communicate with each other.

2. What comparison is made between a team and a human body?

- A. Both a team and a body can move and go places.
- B. Both a team and a body must excrete wastes in order to remain healthy.
- C. Both a team and a body are living and dynamic organisms.
- D. Both a team and a body require certain functions to take place to remain healthy.

For items 3-9, match each of the team roles with a sample phrase that corresponds with that role.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 3. ___ Summarizer/
Clarifier | A. "I'm not sure we're on track." |
| 4. ___ Compromiser | B. "So here's what we've decided so far..." |
| 5. ___ Evaluator | C. "Let me get this written down right." |
| 6. ___ Encourager | D. "We need to move forward now" |
| 7. ___ Ideas Person | E. "I'm jazzed about this!" |
| 8. ___ Leader | F. "Here's a new one for us to think about..." |
| 9. ___ Recorder | G. "How can we make that work with what Phil has proposed?" |

10. T F Cooperating with my team will sometimes require me to do things I don't agree are right.

11. Which of these indicates responsible learning from a negative situation?

- A. "He tends to be late most of the time."
- B. "Next time I'll make sure the due date is clear to him."
- C. "I never should have trusted him with that."
- D. "The boss doesn't understand what is required."

12. T F The point of taking responsibility is to get people to notice your hard work.

13. Committed team members...

- A. subordinate their personal interests to the interests of the team.
- B. don't care about any of their teammates personal interests.
- C. encourage their teammates to put the team above their own interests.
- D. seek to meet their personal interests by means of the team's success.

14. Choose the statement that best demonstrates feedback rather than criticism.

- A. It was stupid to overspend your budget so much.
- B. When you overspent the budget, I felt like you were being a jerk.
- C. When you overspent the budget, it became impossible to give raises to the staff.
- D. When you overspent the budget, I felt very angry.

15. Choose the statement that is true of consensus-based decision-making.

- A. It always takes a long time to form a consensus.
- B. Without consensus, members who disagree will be less motivated to work.
- C. It is important to keep your ideas to yourself so that the group can reach consensus more quickly.
- D. When most of a group agrees on a proposal, you have consensus.

16. T F Never agree to something you know you cannot follow through on.

17. T F If you do fail to keep a commitment, it is a valuable test of your teammates trust in you.

18. Which of these best summarizes what you should do when you have broken an agreement?

- A. Hope that no one notices.
- B. Hope that no one notices, but then after a period of time, talk about it with the other party.
- C. Initiate a conversation acknowledging your error and offering to correct the situation.
- D. If someone brings up the matter apologize and assure them of your commitment to do better in the future.

19. Which of these qualities would make a team the strongest?

- A. The members have very diverse backgrounds and are very unified in purpose.
- B. The members are very similar in background and very unified in purpose.
- C. The members are very similar in background but do not agree on a clear purpose.
- D. It is impossible to make a good guess with the information given.

20. T F Teams are strongest when they keep the drive to get the task done prioritized above the drive to take care of team members as people.

Discussion of Review Questions

1. Which of these is not identified as a characteristic of an effective team:

A. Members share a common goal.

Incorrect. Sharing a goal is one of the most important things.

B. Members are organized by individuals' strengths.

Incorrect. Effective teams do this.

C. Members attend all practices.

Correct. Though this might be an expectation in some sports team contexts, the question is about teams in general, not sports teams. Any kind of team can set expectations for its members, but attending practices is not necessarily one of those expectations.

D. Members agree on procedures.

Incorrect. Effective teams do this.

E. Members communicate with each other.

Incorrect. Effective teams do this.

2. What comparison is made between a team and a human body?

A. Both a team and a body can move and go places.

B. Both a team and a body must excrete wastes in order to remain healthy.

C. Both a team and a body are living and dynamic organisms.

D. Both a team and a body require certain functions to take place to remain healthy.

D is correct. While there may be some truth in the comparisons of A, B and C, D is the one described in the text.

For items 3-9, match each of the team roles with a sample phrase that corresponds with that role.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 3. <u>B</u> Summarizer/Clarifier | A. "I'm not sure we're on track." |
| 4. <u>G</u> Compromiser | B. "So here's what we've decided so far..." |
| 5. <u>A</u> Evaluator | C. "Let me get this written down right." |
| 6. <u>E</u> Encourager | D. "We need to move forward now" |
| 7. <u>F</u> Ideas Person | E. "I'm jazzed about this!" |
| 8. <u>D</u> Leader | F. "Here's a new one for us to think about..." |
| 9. <u>C</u> Recorder | G. "How can we make that work with what Phil has proposed?" |

10. T F **Cooperating with my team will sometimes require me to do things I don't agree are right.**

False. If you are taking responsibility for yourself and the team, you will express your disagreement with others in the team. If the team's plans continue to run against your sense of what's best, you may have to reassess your participation in the team.

11. **Which of these indicates responsible learning from a negative situation?**

A. "He tends to be late most of the time."

Incorrect. This is a generalization about another person. It is not about what you will do about preventing or coping with a negative situation in the future.

B. "Next time I'll make sure the due date is clear to him."

Correct. You are planning a responsible action to avoid the same kind of situation in the future.

C. "I never should have trusted him with that."

Incorrect. This makes a judgment about the other person, almost blaming him. But it doesn't talk about the speaker's plans for avoiding future problems.

D. "The boss doesn't understand what is required."

Incorrect. This statement moves in the direction of making excuses. It does not indicate someone is attempting to take responsibility for his own actions.

12. T F **The point of taking responsibility is to get people to notice your hard work.**

False. The point of responsibility is to contribute to your team's success and thereby your own personal success. It is not about getting attention.

13. **Committed team members...**

A. subordinate their personal interests to the interests of the team.

Incorrect. Committed team members pursue their personal interests by means of meeting the team's interests.

B. don't care about any of their teammates personal interests.

Incorrect. Committed team members help their teammates see how reaching team goals contribute to meeting their own interests.

C. encourage their teammates to put the team above their own interests.

Incorrect. Committed team members help teammates see that they can meet their personal interests by means of the their team's success.

D. seek to meet their personal interests by means of the team's success.

Correct. This creates powerful motivation for the team member.

14. **Choose the statement that best demonstrates feedback rather than criticism.**

A. It was stupid to overspend your budget so much.

Incorrect. This is judgmental criticism.

B. When you overspent the budget, I felt like you were being a jerk.

Incorrect. This statement reports details, but then it follows with a strong pejorative value judgment, "jerk."

C. When you overspent the budget, it became impossible to give raises to the staff.

Correct. This message reports a specific action and the consequence of that action.

D. When you overspent the budget, I felt very angry.

Incorrect. This statement reports a specific action, but jumps ahead to report the speaker's feelings. Good feedback gives the action and the consequences of the action.

15. Choose the statement that is true of consensus-based decision-making.

A. It always takes a long time to form a consensus.

Incorrect. Consensus can be reached relatively quickly if a group is focused on its goals and entertains many options, and members speak their thoughts directly.

B. Without consensus, members who disagree will be less motivated to work.

Correct. If a plan doesn't seem right to me, I am less likely to give it my best.

C. It is important to keep your ideas to yourself so that the group can reach consensus more quickly.

Incorrect. "Niceness" can make it take longer to reach consensus. And consensus won't be genuine if your thoughts differ with the group's decision.

D. When most of a group agrees on a proposal, you have consensus.

Incorrect. Consensus means all members agree with the proposal, not just a majority.

16. T F Never agree to something you know you cannot follow through on.

True. Doing so sets you up to violate the trust of the other person.

17. T F If you do fail to keep a commitment, it is a valuable test of your teammates trust in you.

False. Failure to keep a commitment is of no value to your team, least of all as a proof of your teammates' loyalty to you. At its best, a failure in keeping a commitment can be redeemed by cleaning it up. Even so, your team experiences a net loss in trust.

18. Which of these best summarizes what you should do when you have broken an agreement?

A. Hope that no one notices.

Incorrect. Taking initiative to clean up even if no one has noticed the violation enhances trust.

B. Hope that no one notices, but then after a period of time, talk about it with the other party.

Incorrect. You must take initiative to clean up, the sooner the better.

C. Initiate a conversation acknowledging your error and offering to correct the situation.

Correct. You also apologize and express your commitment to making the relationship work in the future.

D. If someone brings up the matter apologize and assure them of your commitment to do better in the future.

Incorrect. You must take initiative.

19. Which of these qualities would make a team the strongest?

A. The members have very diverse backgrounds and are very unified in purpose.

B. The members are very similar in background and very unified in purpose.

C. The members are very similar in background but do not agree on a clear purpose.

D. It is impossible to make a good guess with the information given.

A is correct. Unified commitment to a common goal is the most powerful engine for a team. A team that is diverse in its membership has a greater range of resources to draw on in solving problems.

20. T F Teams are strongest when they keep the drive to get the task done prioritized above the drive to take care of team members as people.

False. The strongest teams are those who manage to keep a task focus and a people focus as equal priorities.

Prepare to Meet Your Coach

Student

Name: _____

Bring these items completed when you meet with your instructor or coach.

Reflective Writing: What idea or activity in this module has been the most helpful to you? Why?

What questions do you still have?

Instructor

Record student performance in right column of the table.

Item	%age of Module	Standard	Student Performance
Monitor Your Team Skills worksheet. (p. 23-24)	40	Records 4 events in 4 different cells of the table. A phrase or two describes each event. Any combination of successes and failures OK.	
Review Questions	60	16 of 20 correct	
		Total:	

Date Module Completed: _____

Notes:

Next Assignment & Due Date: _____