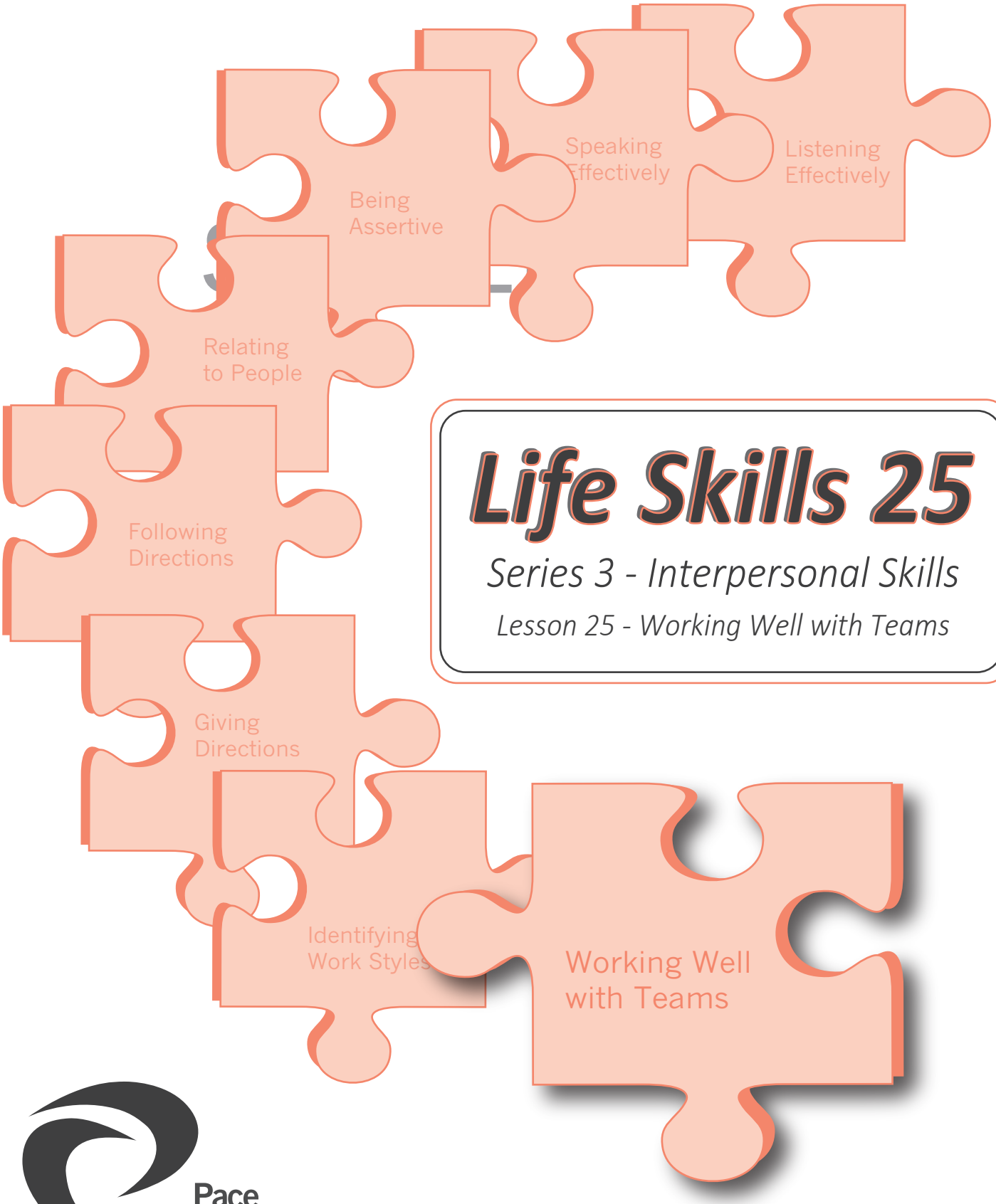

Life Skills 25

Series 3 - Interpersonal Skills

Lesson 25 - Working Well with Teams

Pace Learning Systems

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Name:

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Working Well With Teams

Understanding Teams and Teamwork

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You may already know you can improve your life as you work to improve your personal skill set. It is also important to be able to use your skills within a team. You have likely worked with a team before. Teams are formed in sports, committees, and at school. Teamwork affects your work and career path too. Those who are successful in teams are much more valuable to employers.

In most organizations, work can be done more efficiently with effective teams. Work also tends to be of higher quality when good teamwork is involved. In many job roles, workers' individual contributions and talents can be quite limited without successful teamwork.

A team is not just a group of individuals. Team members have different skills and talents, but they work together on a common goal. A football team works together to win every game they play, while a goal for a team of volunteers at a local community center might be to teach a certain number of people how to read. A common purpose or mission is what makes a group of individuals who work together a team.

Team members' tasks and skills are usually **complementary**. Some team members may be better at achieving one task, while other members are more suited to complete a different task. As a whole, the team uses these individual differences to its advantage in order to reach goals more efficiently. For example, in a restaurant the goal might be serving good food and pleasing customers. The cooks won't know what to prepare if the server doesn't take the order correctly. Even good food is not enough if the tables and plates aren't clean or if the wait staff doesn't provide prompt service. It takes all team members to get the job done well.

When complementary skill sets are combined through teamwork, the increased effectiveness is called synergy. **Synergy** means individual team members' combined skill sets produce an effect that is greater than the sum of the individual parts. In other words, teams can achieve more than an organization of individuals working alone.

There are also personal benefits to teamwork. Team members are able to learn from other team members. In this way, they can sometimes improve their own knowledge and skills. Some studies have actually shown that successful teamwork and friendship at work can impact employee well-being, leading to less illness and higher productivity. Finally, employees with good teamwork skills are more valuable to employers. Having those skills may mean you can make more money or get a better job.

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How Successful Teams Operate

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For teamwork to be successful, individual team members should have clear, shared goals. This common goal and its related shared objectives are what make a team different from a simple group of individuals. Team members can be individually responsible for certain tasks or activities. However, members should have a sense of commitment to the team's shared purpose or goal.

Team members should understand how their function fits in with the team's objectives. They should know their role and the roles of other team members well. This way, team members can see clearly how their roles are connected. In working with teams, seeing your role as it relates to your teammates' roles and the team's overall purpose can be helpful.

Successful teamwork is supported by trust and **accountability**. On an effective team, members can trust other team members to share information about the work they are doing and be responsible or accountable for their role on the team. Team members depend on other team members to bring value to the team, but they are also aware of the value they personally contribute to the team. Usually, everyone on the team will want to contribute and be valued. A team will be more likely to have a sense of cooperation if all team members are comfortable with their role and know they are a valuable part of the team.

Team Leadership

In general, successful teams need team leaders. A team leader, who is also a team member, plays a unique leadership role. Even though responsibilities of team leaders vary a great deal, they usually lead by positive example or by their behavior rather than by just acting as a "boss."

A team leader should be able to help lead or guide the group in decision making. At the same time, the team leader is willing to defer to the team to make final team decisions by **consensus**. Team leaders do not generally tell other team members what to do. Instead, they will be more likely to persuade other team members to agree with them. Usually, team decisions should be made by consensus, meaning that all team members agree with the decision being made.

A team leader also sometimes provides attention to individual team members when needed. For example, rather than addressing the whole team, a member may be more comfortable speaking with a team leader first about a sensitive issue or conflict.

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Team Construction

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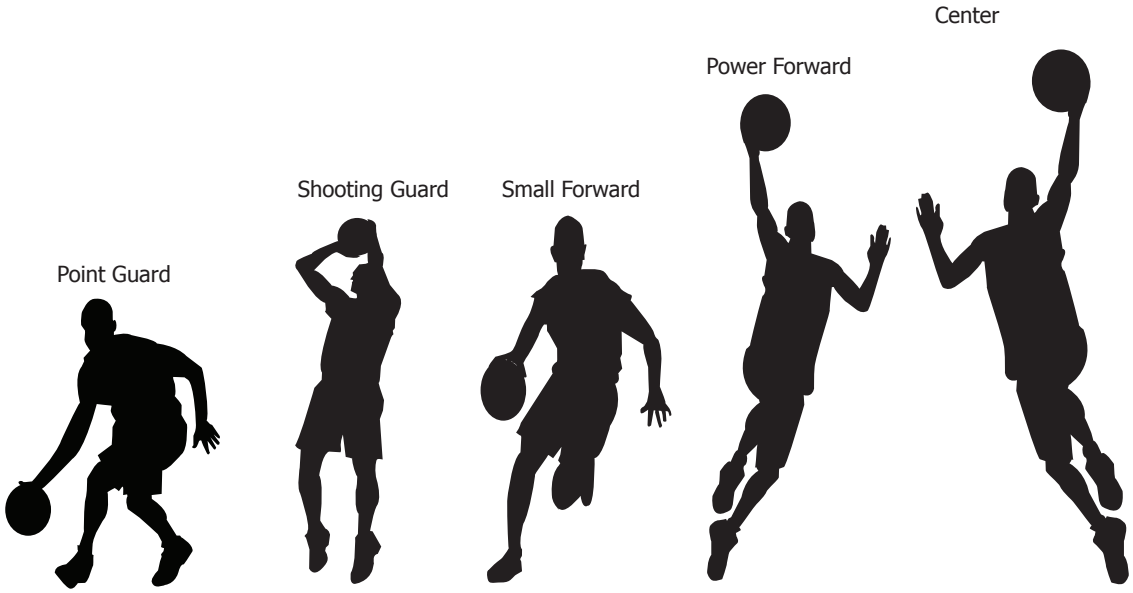
Usually, teams are put together based on strengths or weaknesses of team members, according to the goal or purpose of the team. There are three very different examples of team construction below. Be aware of synergies that are created by the design of each team. In other words, what can each team accomplish that its team members couldn't accomplish alone?

Building a Basketball Team

Imagine you are building a basketball team. Basketball teams take the floor with five players at a time. Like many teams, basketball teams tend to do better with a good mix of player types with different talents or skills. These different, complementary skills can combine well to serve the team's cause of defending the basket (on defense) or scoring points (on offense).

Traditional Basketball Positions:



If you design a team of nothing but "centers," you will probably have a height, weight, and strength advantage over the other team. However, you will likely have very little team speed, ball-handling skills, and shooting ability. These skills are often found in the smaller, quicker "guard" or "forward" positions.

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It is wise to design your team with the best mix of skills to achieve the team's goal of winning the game. Basketball teams are a great example of different synergies that can be created by mixing and matching different basketball skill sets among your players on the court. As shown in the graphic above, most basketball teams play with the following mix of player types:

- 2 guards (a "point guard" and a "shooting guard")
- 2 forwards (a "small forward" and a "power forward")
- 1 center

If you've ever heard of an "alley-oop," this is a clear example of synergy. Alley-oop is a basketball term. It refers to a high pass above the rim of the basket, which is caught and shot at once by a leaping teammate. The leaping teammate tries to catch, shoot, and make the basket before landing. This play allows the team a quick chance at a basket, before the other team can defend the shot. Generally, the pass comes from one of the smaller "guard" positions, to one of their taller teammates at the "forward" or "center" positions. An alley-oop can't be done without the help of a teammate.

Building a Rapid Response Team

Now imagine you are a hospital administrator. You are charged with assembling a "Rapid Response Team" for a critical patient. A Rapid Response Team (RRT) is a team designed for special emergency medical care that happens away from the hospital. RRT patients, for whatever reason, cannot be held in the critical care unit at the hospital. This team is designed to provide medical care for the off-site patient. RRT patients are usually in critical condition. This means that they are at a high risk of serious illness or death if they don't receive care immediately.

RRTs vary in their construction. A team like this may include a variety of hospital staff positions such as the lead physician, any surgeons that may be needed, the physician's assistant, critical care nursing staff, and respiratory therapists or other **specialists**.

Now, ask yourself what is most important in considering the skills and staff needed on this RRT. It is the patient – the team's shared purpose. Depending on the patient's condition or particular ailments, a wide range of different staff persons should be considered. What else should you consider? Team dynamics and communication are very important in a Rapid Response Team. You will need to make sure the people on this team work well together, communicate well, and function well under pressure.

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End of Lesson Sample

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800-826-7223
info@pacelearning.com