

Character and Leadership Packet #12

Teamwork

Introduction

There are many ways you can make your life better. For example, you can keep your teeth healthy by brushing, flossing and getting check-ups. Exercising and eating right can help keep your body healthy. You can even improve your mind if you're willing to study and learn more. Studying can improve your grades too. And being polite to your classmates can make it easier to get along. These are just a few examples of how you can help yourself.



There are also steps you can take to be a good team member. You can do this by accepting and fulfilling your responsibilities when part of any group. Baseball players know this. Each player has to make a contribution for the team to be successful. When only one or two players do the majority of the work the team often fails. This is true in most team sports. It is also true in the world of work, when employees don't work well as a team their company can fail and go out of business.

Working on a group project at school can be like playing on a sports team. If there are five people in the group and only two do the work, the result is usually not very good. Everyone should share equally in the work. Sometimes one person takes over, leaving others wondering what to do. A good group leader understands that when everyone shares equally in the work they have a sense of ownership and commitment. The result: an improvement in the quality and amount of work done!

Teamwork is important in most work environments. For example, medical professionals must work as a team to achieve the highest quality of care. When a person needs surgery, success is greatest when the surgeon, the anesthesiologist, the nurses and the technicians work as a unit.

Teachers also use teamwork to achieve goals with students. When a student struggles in English the Language teacher may speak with the rest of the student's teachers to discover what methods work best. Perhaps the math and science teachers are getting better results because they are providing the student with more hands-on activities.

Fire fighting is dangerous work. During a fire, floors can cave in and walls can topple. Flames and smoke can burn or kill. Fire fighters may come in contact with poisonous gases or other hazardous materials. Fire fighters know they have to work as a team. Their goal is to save lives and stay safe themselves. This can only be reached when they help each other.

They depend on each other's skills to put out fires and to rescue survivors. If one person does not know his or her job the others suffer. They practice for many hours, each taking turns with the pumps, the hoses, the oxygen, and the ladders. Knowing each other's jobs helps the team be successful.

In fact, every call fire fighters answer involves teamwork. For example, EMS (emergency medical services) calls require a coordinated effort by fire and medical personnel to insure the patient gets the best care possible. Paramedics are usually busy starting IVs and monitoring other vital functions while firefighters are preparing the gurney to transport the patient.

As you can tell, teamwork is important in many work situations. Chances are good you too will find yourself in such a situation later in life. This is why it's a good idea to learn about the importance of teamwork while at school and to discover ways to be an effective team member.

The Importance of Teamwork at School

As a starting point in understanding the value of teamwork let's take a look at some of the teamwork taking place at your school. There are many organizations in your school where people work together to reach a common goal. Most schools have parent-teacher organizations where teachers and parents work as a unit to create educational opportunities for all students.

Many parent-teacher organizations have fund-raisers so they can purchase new books or equipment for the school. They may have bake sales so they can buy a new computer for the library. Your school might have a band booster organization. This is a group of parents along with the band teacher working to improve the quality of the band program. This year they may raise money for new sheet music or help a needy student purchase an instrument.

There are also many opportunities for students to be part of a team. The Student Council works for the improvement of the school and community. Student Councils get involved in activities like, canned food drives, sponsoring teacher appreciation days, promoting school spirit, and getting the entire school involved in fun activities like, hat day or dress-up days.

Since student council members work on everyone's behalf, they must work as a team; agreeing on what needs to be done and how to get it accomplished. When there is too much disagreement, teamwork breaks down and little gets done. The same is true when just a few people try to decide or control the meetings and activities. Good student council presidents know they need

to support the ideas of many people not just a few.

For some students membership in clubs fill their need for involvement. Most schools have active environmental clubs that serve their school and community. Members are usually dedicated to finding ways to preserve our natural resources and make others aware of the need to recycle and reuse. Activities may include adopting a whale at the local zoo, starting a school recycling program, building bluebird houses, recycling ink cartridges, making informational posters, planting a bird and butterfly garden, and making scratch pads out of used paper.

No matter what the activity, being a good team member or leader is key to the success of the organization. More information about this follows.

Effective Team Members

Here are some tips on how to be a good team member:

If a teammate suggests something, always consider it – even when an idea is completely different than your own. Considering the ideas of others shows you're a good listener and that you respect the opinions of others. Never reject another person's ideas for the benefit of yours.

Be an active listener. Look at the person who's speaking to you, nod, ask good questions and acknowledge what's said by summarizing points that were made. If you're unclear about something that's been said, ask for more information to clear up any confusion. Effective communication is a vital part of any team and when there are active listeners everyone feels more like contributing.

Don't try to force your ideas on the group. If they weren't well received, move on. Groups must accept the best ideas. No one person will always have the best ideas. If your ideas are accepted be humble and do your fair share of the work to help make them succeed.

When you have a complaint, make sure your criticism is genuine and not just a personal gripe. Take time to determine what is really bothering you.

Don't just complain about a problem; help solve it. If you have suggestions or ideas, share them with the right person.

Remember, enthusiasm is contagious... if you're excited about your group's project it's likely others will be as well. This is especially true if you're a leader.

Two Short Stories

Go it Alone Alice

Alice is a good student. She has been on the honor roll every semester for the last three years. No one does better in math than Alice. It seems like she knows as much math as her teacher, Mr. Burton.

Mr. Burton, asked her several times if she would be interested in tutoring younger students after school. Her answer was always the same. “Nope, sorry Mr. Burton, I’m too busy doing my own homework. I just don’t have time to help someone else.”

Alice loves math because everyone works alone. “You either know how to work a problem or you don’t,” she would say. There are no group assignments where you have to work as a team to find the answer. Alice likes to rely on her own math skills to solve problems not someone else’s.

Alice doesn’t care much for science or social studies. She complains about the group work. In science there are a limited number of microscopes. This means you have to share. You’re stuck working on assignments with lab partners. Alice doesn’t want another student describing, on the worksheet, what he sees in the microscope, she wants to do it.

Social studies, however, is the class she least likes. Mrs. Simpson believes in having her students do a lot of group projects. She calls it “cooperative learning.” Mrs. Simpson says, “When we work in groups we learn how to respect and cooperate with each other. We also learn from hearing the ideas of others and how to recognize the best solutions. After all class, when you leave school and get a job it is likely you will be part of a team.”

Mrs. Simpson assigned the next project by stating, “Each row will be a team. The first row will research the causes of the civil war, the second row will research the causes of World War I, row three you will take World War II, row four the Vietnam war will be yours and finally row five, you’re to research the reasons for our first involvement in Iraq. Remember class, when you form your teams the work load must be evenly divided.”

Alice immediately started to dominate and control her group. “OK, guys here’s how we’re going to do this. Tom you create a poster listing all the causes of the civil war. Anita, you and I will actually give the report to the class. We’ll use Tom’s poster. Luke it would add a lot to our report if you made a poster showing all the reasons slavery was wrong.”

The work was divided up like Mrs. Simpson wanted. Tom, Anita, Luke and Alice decided to meet in a week to see what each had accomplished. Everyone had done their part, Tom and Luke had poster presentations and Anita and Alice had outlined all the causes of the civil war.

Alice and Anita then decided on what causes each would cover.

When the day came for the reports, Alice decided to use the posters she had done. She really didn't like the layouts by Tom and Luke.

When the group stood up to give their report, Alice went first and ended up covering a lot of information that Anita was planning to present. This made Anita look bad. Tom and Luke were confused. Both wondered what happened to their posters. Alice, however, thought the report went great.

Teamwork That Gets Results

The whole school was talking about the news. Japan just suffered from an 8.9-magnitude earthquake. The quake -- one of the largest in recorded history -- triggered a 23-foot tsunami that battered it's coast, killing hundreds if not thousands and sweeping away cars, homes, buildings, and boats.

Many students stayed up late the night before watching it. There was television coverage showing people searching in the rubble for loved ones. The images of people walking around stunned with no place to go made students sad. The earthquake was the topic of discussion in many classrooms as well as during lunch. Students were beginning to ask how they could help.

It was Isabella who said to her friend, Madison, "Let's see if the Red Cross would be a good starting place. They'll be able to tell us how we might be able to help."

"Great idea Isabella, let's check it out." Madison said.

After talking it over with her parents that evening Isabella decided she would give the local Red Cross chapter a call. A representative told her a school fund-raiser would be very helpful and advised her to talk with the principal before taking additional steps.

The next day Isabella and Madison made an appointment with Mr. Bennet, the school principal. At the meeting he suggested they contact Mrs. Chapple the student council advisor. When Mrs. Chapple heard that Isabella had already contacted the Red Cross she was impressed. "What a great idea to go through the Red Cross, they are an excellent humanitarian organization. Let's take this idea to the student council at next week's meeting. Madison and Isabella why don't you make the presentation to the council?"

The next few days Isabella and Madison created an outline of the points they wanted to cover with the student council. They would suggest several different ways to raise funds. They planned to offer their help in providing leadership for the project.

The student council listened to all three ideas and voted to adopt the "Pizzas for Japan" plan

where they would use discount pizza cards to raise money. They decided to contact the owner of a local pizza restaurant to help with the project. Given how popular pizza is with younger children as well as teens, pizza cards might be an excellent way to raise money for a good cause.

Madison, Isabella and the student council president, Jayden, made arrangements to talk with Mr. Hut, owner of Pizza Palace. Mr. Hut got on board right away. He had been wondering himself how he could help the people in Japan. Mr. Hut said the idea would also be good for his business, getting more people to try his pizza.

Mr. Hut and the three students decided the pizza card would provide a two-for-one offer, and the card would be priced at \$15. The card would be good for six months and could be used five times within this period of time.

At the next student council meeting the pizza card idea was accepted by the membership and got the approval of Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Chapple. The details of the project began to take shape. Committees were formed and parents became involved. Many parents helped by selling the discount cards at their places of work. The fund-raiser was a big success. Four hundred discount cards were sold and \$6,000 was sent to the Red Cross for use in Japan.

Now the student council is interested in starting a Youth Red Cross Club at their school. Their local Red Cross unit offered to help. Being part of such a club can give members a sense of belonging, teaches teamwork, leadership and caring for others. Visit redcrossyouth.org for more information.

How to Be a Team Leader

Leaders listen to the ideas of others. They realize that the best ideas are generated by team participation. Leaders seek input and agreement by team members before going forward with any idea. Ideas accepted by many are the easiest to carry out.

Smart leaders also ask permission from key people before jumping into any project. Isabella and Madison first went to their principal before going any further. Leaders understand they need permission from adults for many school projects.

If you want to be a team leader you have to be willing to commit yourself to a cause and see it through, just as Isabella and Madison did. First they saw a need, and then they discussed it with important people. Then they got their principal, parents, the Red Cross, the student council and their sponsor involved. Finally, Madison and Isabella, along with the president of the student council, went to Mr. Hut for ideas and help.

The more people involved, the bigger the commitment. When parents agreed to help sell the discount cards the workforce for the project just kept getting larger. As more and more people

became involved the more successful the project became. There was team building and a division of labor—everyone had a job. Everyone played an important role. No one person tried to do it all.

Famous 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

“Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.” -- Henry Ford

“None of us is as smart as all of us.” -- Ken Blanchard

“A man may do an immense deal of good, if he does not care who gets the credit for it.” -- Father Strickland, 1863

“Team means Together Everyone Achieves More!” -- Author Unknown

“Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishment toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.” -- Andrew Carnegie

Teamwork

Questions for Individual Students

Name_____Date_____

These questions are based on the packet you have just read. Please think about what you have read and write thoughtful answers. There are no right or wrong answers to most questions. The questions are written to encourage you to think about the importance of character and leadership. Make sure you write clearly so your teacher can read your answers. You may use the back of this page if needed.

1. Define the word teamwork.
2. Give examples of how medical professionals work as teams.
3. Why do firefighters have to work as a team?
4. Describe why a fund-raiser is more successful when a team of people are involved rather than just one person?

5. How might teachers work together to help a student?
6. Why is it that most basketball teams usually don't do well when there is just one star player?
7. "None of us is as smart as all of us." What do you think this quote by Ken Blanchard means?
8. What makes a person an effective team member?
9. Why wasn't Alice a good team member?
10. Why can being part of a team (sports or academics) be a good learning experience for later in life?

Teamwork

Questions for Classroom Discussion

These questions are designed to provoke discussion and encourage students to see the value of character and leadership. Teachers are invited to modify, add or delete questions at their discretion but the copyright must remain.

1. What makes a person a good member of the student council?
2. What makes a person a good team player in basketball? Soccer?
3. Why do most adults need to be team players when they are at work?
4. Why would it be dangerous if fire fighters weren't team players? What could be the consequences?
5. Why is it important for students to learn how to be effective team members?
6. When you are on a committee why is it good to consider the ideas of others?
7. What is active listening? Why do most of us like being actively listened to?
8. What does enthusiasm have to do with how well a team works together?
9. Why did Alice like math and dislike science and social studies?
10. What advice would you have for Alice the next time she is a member of a team?
11. How might getting teachers involved in a school project like a fund-raiser help ensure a better outcome?
12. Why do you think Isabella and Madison were successful in getting others involved in the fund-raiser?
13. Explain what you think Father Strickland meant by his quote.
14. What are the characteristics of a good team? A good team leader?
15. What are the characteristics of a team that doesn't work well together?