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THE GOOD LIFE

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Teams Aren't Just for Sports

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Gary Yuhas

This will be reaching you right before the Super Bowl. I don't know much about football, have never played football, and don't follow football, but I grew up in western Pennsylvania during the Pittsburgh Steelers' heyday. I was surrounded by football talk, and remember seeing the games on television. There was no way to get away from football in Pittsburgh then, and that holds true to this day. For those of a certain age, the names Terry Bradshaw, "Mean" Joe Greene, Franco Harris, and Lynn Swan may strike a chord. They were household names growing up. The Steelers were a formidable force and won Super Bowls in 1974, 1975, 1978, and 1979. They wouldn't win a Super Bowl again until the mid 2000's. Steelers football is a unifying force, bringing together folks from different communities, beliefs, backgrounds, and financial positions. Family events are scheduled around football games. Everyone I know has been to at least one Steelers-themed wedding. Children are named after favorite players. It's an integral component of the Pittsburgh culture. Steelers fans would say it is the core. As an adult, and not being a football fan, I learned that football games were the absolute best time to run errands, do shopping, and get groceries. Ample parking! No waiting in lines!

As I write this, I'm not sure who will be in the Super Bowl. I'm hoping for the Bills only because that matters a lot to a close friend. Whether your favorite team is in it or not, if you even have a favorite team, many of you are looking forward to this year's big game. It might be because you like football, or the social opportunity it presents. If I'm watching, it's for the food, the commercials, and the halftime show. I don't plan to watch the Super Bowl this year, but given the constant talk during the leadup, it makes me think about the concept of teams and the successes that can come from them.

Sports metaphors do not come naturally to me. And while I am not a part of any sports-based teams, I am part of a different kind of team in my personal life and here at LifePath. Work teams like ours actually have many overlaps with sports teams. LifePath is really a team that is made up of smaller, mostly program-based teams. A lot can be learned from any successful group of individuals and what works in football can work just as well in the community-based support work we do at LifePath.

Some organizations refer to themselves as

a family. I make it a specific point to avoid that reference here at LifePath, and instead refer to ourselves as a team. A team is a voluntary collective of people, working together towards a common goal. We are committed to the same mission. Our work is dependent upon one another. We succeed or fail as a group. A family can be a very different dynamic. Using the term "family" in a work environment can mean different things to different people. It can create a sense of obligation. It can blur boundaries. It can be triggering; many folks have been harmed by their families, and understandably struggle with that association. You don't get to pick your biological family, but you do get to pick what team you want to be on. And if that team doesn't work for you, you can leave the team. Biological family is still family, at least in definition, whether it works for you or not.

A winning team doesn't just happen on its own. Building a team takes a real, focused effort. It needs to be cultivated, sometimes over many years and through ups and downs. Upon arriving at LifePath, I met a number of folks who welcomed me to the team, and I quickly learned that there are many talented and dedicated people here.

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Teams need to find a way to support one another and work together. They need to recognize and leverage the individual strengths we all bring. They need to provide space for folks to grow. They need to recognize ways to improve and support one another on that path. Ideally, the team will bring discipline to the work, reliably meet goals, remain resilient while doing so, and provide accountability to the work and to one another. Our LifePath teams and work are constantly evolving to meet the needs of the individuals and communities we serve, and being a part of a team helps to bring ideas and different strengths to this evolution.

There's been an incredible amount written about teams and teamwork, and it is an active area of study and research. I know that I am not bringing any new revelations to that body of work. But in drawing parallels between different types of teams, I am reminded of how fortunate I am to work alongside so many great people at LifePath and in Franklin County, the North Quabbin, and beyond, and I am deeply appreciative of all of the ways LifePath provides support.

Whether you watch the Super Bowl or not, it does signify the end of football season. And the end of football season means mud season and spring are around the corner. During this particularly long cold snap, it is nice to have a season change to look forward to. And, since I won't be watching the game, maybe I'll see some of you non-watchers at the grocery store. Either way, thank you for being a part of our LifePath team.