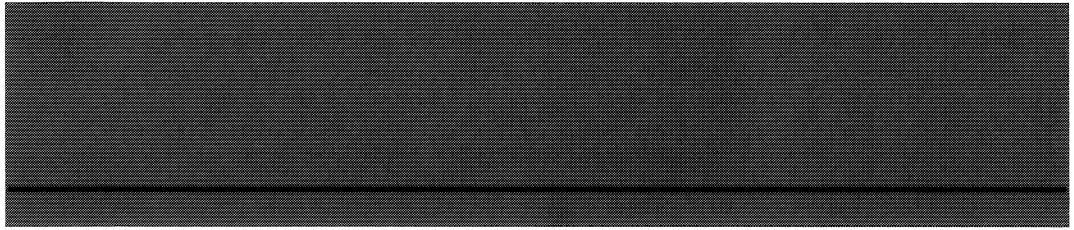


Erin M. Kelland



*Indoor/Outdoor
Team-Building Games
for Trainers*



Indoor/Outdoor Team-Building Games for Trainers

*Powerful Activities from the World
of Adventure-Based Team-Building
and Ropes Courses*

Harrison Snow

McGraw-Hill

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If someone were to compile all the variations of team-building games and initiatives, they would easily fill several books. Resourceful readers will no doubt take the ones in this book and make up some of their own. Karl Rohnke and his associates at Project Adventure were the first to publish variations of some of these activities, the most recent being Key Punch. The complex activity, Journey to Kanostan, was inspired by the team-building game, Gold of the Desert Kings, marketed by the Canadian firm Eagle Associates and by the war games I participated in at Fort Ord and Fort McNair. I am also indebted to the many excellent trainers I have had the opportunity to work with including: Craig Imler, Joe McGeady, Rick Allen, Janna Sill (who developed one of the variations included on Blind Object Assembly), Jeffrey Thomas, Rudy Pucel, Joyce Warner, Dev Pathik, Doug Gray, Tony Gambill, Eric Johnson, Dan Robertshaw, and Lana Hill, all with Outward Bound Professional Development Programs. Special thanks are due to Peg Howle, Wendy Watkins, Brian Johnson, Lex Fry, Frazer Watkins, Tom Wootten, Donna Galluzzo, and David Ingle, who worked with me on a number of Team-Building Associates programs.

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Introduction

*I*ndoor/Outdoor Team-Building Games for Trainers is a book of structured, experience-based games and initiatives for corporate trainers and consultants. The detailed text and clear photos will help you “turbocharge” your team-building programs to a new level of excitement and learning.

By following the detailed, step-by-step instructions in *Indoor/Outdoor Team-Building Games for Trainers*, a capable trainer can transform a group of individuals into a team of high performers. You will find within these pages the essential information you need to set up, conduct, and debrief a dynamic team-building program for a corporate client.

WHY TEAM BUILDING?

The production of world-class quality products or services demands exceptional levels of teamwork and cooperation in the work place. When people work together in a cooperative manner the effect is synergistic; productivity, innovation, and quality as well as employee satisfaction are all enhanced manyfold. Increasingly, major corporations and government agencies are conducting team-building programs to instill a spirit of cooperation and mutual support within their organizational cultures. The results of these programs are showing up in higher productivity, lower turnover, and a more enjoyable work environment.

Teamwork in an organization does not just happen. A team is not a team just because a group of people are given that designation. As Peter Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline*, pointed out, the manager who walks into a work group one day and with a wave of his hand says “Poof, you’re a team” might create a “poof” but never a team. The extent to which a “team” is really a team depends on the communication and leadership skills of all members, both staff and management.

SKILL BUILDING

The action learning activities in this book offer a team fun and engaging ways to learn and practice the skills of teamwork. No special physical strength or agility is required to fully participate. The discussions conducted after each activity help the participants develop their teamwork and leadership skills as individuals and as a team. As the team moves from one initiative to another progress may be observed in the areas of:

- Problem solving using a cooperative approach
- Team planning and time management
- Effective communication and feedback
- Individual and collective commitment
- Handling and resolving conflict
- Participative decision making
- Mutual trust and confidence
- Understanding and valuing differences
- Cooperative use of resources
- Team spirit and mutual support

At the beginning of the training the participants formulate both team and individual learning objectives. At the end of the program they assess the extent to which they achieved their goals and plan how to apply what they learned back in the workplace.

ROPES COURSE

When most people think of outdoor team building they think of a ropes course. A few classroom trainers have the impression that outdoor team building is a risky activity that should only be undertaken by the physically fit. This impression is understandable, since part of a ropes course consists of high elements like the Pamper Pole or the Climbing Wall where people are 20 feet or more off the ground. Other lower elements like the Mohawk Walk take participants a few feet off the ground as they negotiate an obstacle as a team.

If you have been through a ropes course or two some of the activities in this book will be familiar. The low and high ropes events you may have experienced, such as the ones just mentioned, are not in this book because they require a sizable investment in equipment and training to be conducted safely. However, two of the most significant aspects of a ropes course,

group problem-solving and trust-building activities, can be conducted indoors or outside without either a large investment in equipment or specialized training. The scope of this book includes these two aspects plus other exercises that lend themselves to the development of high-performance teamwork.

CORPORATE CHALLENGE

All the activities in *Indoor/Outdoor Team-Building Games for Trainers* are ideal for corporate team-building programs. Each team problem-solving activity is described with the depth of relevant detail and sophistication that is essential to successful training. The games and initiatives selected for this book do not require (nor give the appearance of requiring) physical fitness and they can be conducted indoors or outside with a few simple props. Each exercise includes some of the specific learning and insights you can uncover during the activity and help the team transfer back to the workplace.

WHY THIS BOOK?

The impetus for this book came from the many compliments I received on my previous book, *The Power of Team Building Using Ropes Techniques* (Pfeiffer & Co., 1992), from trainers around the world. Along with the compliments I often received requests for more information. Because the focus in that first book was how to facilitate high-involvement team building, the specific activities were only briefly described. A common trait among capable trainers is a strong desire to deepen and strengthen their repertoire of activities and initiatives. The trainers I heard from wanted to know more about how to actually set up and conduct the ground level activities and initiatives.

This book was written as a response to requests for the specifics of how to conduct high-impact, thought-provoking activities—activities and initiatives that are commonly used in outdoor team-building programs. I have seen the excitement generated among trainers when they realize that they too can use these tools to deepen the impact and significance of the work they do with their clients.

UNIQUE FEATURES

Two features of this book are unique for its type. The first is the section on the transfer of learning included with each problem-solving activity.

4 INTRODUCTION

This material will help the trainer help the group come up with some useful “take-aways.” In my mind it is the quality of the take-aways (learning or insights that improve relationships and productivity) and their application back at the workplace that define the level of success achieved by the training.

The second unique feature this book offers is an organized progression of icebreakers, trust-building and problem-solving activities that make up the design of a professionally run training. A well-structured program has a definite start, middle, and end. In planning the sequence of activities, some are best conducted at the beginning of a program, others at or near the end. And every trainer values a few timely icebreakers. Having a broad and varied repertoire of activities to select from enhances the depth of the work a trainer can do with a team.

KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

Before you use high-involvement activities in a program, be sure you have both the knowledge and skill base as a trainer to maintain physical and emotional safety. It is a good idea to first work with or attend several programs conducted by an experienced trainer. Obviously, the more experience and knowledge you have, the better will be the quality of the work you do for your clients. This book was written to be a resource that you can flip open to obtain some of that knowledge. In terms of experience there are trainers skilled in these techniques who are conducting programs throughout the United States. You can contact the Association of Experiential Education (AEE) in Boulder, Colorado or the author for more information.



How This Book Is Organized

This book has nine sections, beginning with these introductory chapters. These chapters cover how to use this book and how to conduct a debriefing. The key to good debriefing is to ask questions that uncover learning or insight. The key to a good program is to ask questions that help the team apply their learning back at the workplace.

The next two sections (“Warm-Ups for Large Group” and “Icebreakers for Small Groups”) offer activities that help get a training program off to a good start. In the theater or in the training room, warming up the crowd is key to generating audience participation. The remaining sections deal with the heart of a high-involvement team-building program: trust, communication, and problem solving.

Warm-ups: Before you break a large crowd into small teams it is helpful to get the energy moving with warm-up activities. These activities work well with large groups, but you can also use them with smaller groups.

Icebreakers: After the smaller teams are formed from the initial large group, the activities called “icebreakers” will keep the “loosening up” process going in the right direction.

Trust Building: Trust develops as much out of the things people do as out of what they say. These exercises help establish the bedrock of nonverbal trust that interpersonal relationships are built on.

Communication: Communication skills are crucial in any team endeavor. They also impact the verbal aspects of trust building.

Problem Solving: The problem-solving activities provide individual participants with the opportunity to practice the leadership and team-

work skills that are needed in today's workplace. Intact groups will also find the opportunity to develop team-learning and problem-solving skills and address issues that may be hampering the development of the team.

Multigroup Problem Solving: This section offers activities in which one or more teams can participate. Few teams work in isolation. The dynamics of dealing with even a slightly different group culture will prove instructive.

Closure: The eighth section offers activities that will help bring closure to what has probably been a fairly intense day or two of training. It also provides a means for transferring what has been learned during the training back to the workplace.

Models: The final section explores several models for team learning that trainers can incorporate into the debriefing segment of any of the activities.



Action Learning

Typical classroom team building puts people in chairs all facing in one direction while a person facing in the other direction tells everyone how a team should work. Some learning may occur in these situations, but seldom are there significant changes in behavior or attitude.

Action learning uses a different approach. It has two components: action and reflection. The participants learn by doing an activity and then reflecting on what happened. Action learning programs consist of a number of specially structured initiatives each followed by a group discussion. The length of the program usually runs from one to three days. The format is interactive and highly participatory. So it is suited to a variety of learning styles. Participants in a well-run program find the experience enjoyable as well as educational. They especially appreciate gaining practical knowledge and skills that can be put to immediate use back in the workplace.

Some traditional classroom trainers who have not had the benefit of going through an action learning program believe it is folly to conduct a training that consists solely of activities and games. This approach, however, is what action learning is all about. One of the underlying principles is the belief that the team already has the knowledge it needs in order to do outstanding work. The purpose of the training is to access and utilize that knowledge so that everyone will benefit from it.

Based on the experiences of thousands of participants it is safe to say that this methodology is a powerful way to build a team and teach the skills of teamwork. For more information about action learning turn to the section on models on page 223.

LEARNING AGILITY

Some researchers believe that one of the predictors of professional success is the ability to leverage one's learning process. This ability is called "learning agility": the facility to perceive and act upon underlying trends and patterns. The action learning format is a highly effective way to develop a person's learning agility. Participants practice making connections between seemingly unrelated events by analyzing what happened during each structured experience and reflecting on how that relates to or applies in the workplace.

TEAM LEARNING

The capacity to learn and solve problems as a team is one of the major traits of a high-performance team. As they go through each activity the participants in the program gain a greater understanding of how to better inspire and access the human resources in their group. An essential skill is the team's ability to facilitate its own problem-solving dialogues and use that discussion to make the adjustments and agreements needed to improve team performance.

It is often observed that the manner in which the team members work together in the office is replicated during an exercise. Two important questions asked by the trainer at the end of each event are "What worked?" and "What would you do differently?" Teams that have learned how to learn will take the behaviors and attitudes that worked for them to the next initiative and, ultimately, back to the office.

TEAMWORK INITIATIVES

Team-building sessions using the games and initiatives in this book can be conducted on-site or off-site at a conference center located some distance from the client's facility. Working off-site is preferred by most trainers since there is less possibility of interruptions that distract the focus of the group.

During the first part of the training the participants are organized into teams of eight to fourteen and assigned a skilled trainer. Each team is presented with a series of initiatives that require a cooperative effort to accomplish. The initiatives are group problem-solving activities drawn from the ropes course and other experiential team-building methodologies. The activities are selected and modified by the trainer based on the needs assessment and the client's training objectives.

PROGRAM FORMAT

The format of an action learning program is fairly standard from one program to the next. The details of the specific design, however, can vary great-

ly depending on the objectives of the course. Because the learning is “process” rather than “content” driven, the details of the design are always subject to change to reflect the needs of the team at any particular moment.

Although the specifics vary depending on situation, the general outline of a program is usually the following:

- **Introductions:** Warm-ups and icebreaker exercises are conducted. Participants discuss individual and team learning objectives. Action learning is explained.
- **Participation:** Team members are asked to participate on the basis of equality. When participants deal with each other in a nonhierarchical way, old patterns can be transformed and each member gains leadership experience.
- **Problem Solving and Trust Building:** Program activities are carefully sequenced based on the initial needs assessment. Each activity is about 20 to 45 minutes in duration including a debriefing facilitated by the trainer. As the team gains more experience and confidence, more difficult and complex activities are introduced.
- **Reflection:** After the activity the trainer helps the group reflect on what just took place. Both helpful and unhelpful behaviors and attitudes are brought to awareness. In a nonjudgmental manner the group discusses what worked or did not work to further task accomplishment and group cohesion.
These group discussions provide team members with valuable information, insights, and feedback that can be used to build teamwork and leadership skills, as well as mutual trust and confidence.
- **Closure:** In the final session the team discusses the learning and insights gained from the training and how these will be applied back at the plant or office.

PROGRAM PLANNING

What separates a good program from a great one? If you answered “the facilitation skills of the trainer,” no one would argue with you. Obviously, those skills are crucial for maintaining psychological safety as well as helping the participants ferret out the learning that is essential to the development of their team. There is, however, another skill that supports facilitation and takes it one step further. It is an understanding developed through the experience of selecting and “tweaking” the activities and presenting them in a sequence that will lead to the crux of what the training is designed to achieve.

Planning a training program takes time: time to conduct an on-site needs assessment; time to select and modify the activities and plan their progression; time during the training for goal setting; and then even more time to observe how things are unfolding and make adjustments. A one-day program is better than none, but a two- or three-day program is what the process really requires for an intact team.

TYPES OF PROGRAMS

Outdoor team-building programs can be divided into three different categories. While there is certainly overlap from one category to the next the distinctions are important enough to determine how a program is designed and debriefed.

The categories are:

- **Team Spirit**
- **Intact Team**
- **Learning Laboratory**

Team Spirit

Team spirit programs offer a group of people a shared experience in which they get to know themselves and each other better. The emphasis is on fun, excitement, personal challenge, and team support. The group could be a new team or people who do not work closely together although they are in the same organization. Trust-building activities, warm-ups, and icebreakers are just as important or even more so than problem-solving activities.

A high ropes component, although not within the scope of this book, is often a central feature of this type of program. When the team goes back to the workplace, pictures or videos of the challenges they helped each other overcome enhance the feeling that could be expressed as, "Wow! Look at what we did!"

Intact Team

A training program for an intact team focuses on the dynamics of the team and the issues and objectives the members bring with them to the training site. A needs assessment is extremely helpful in preparing for the training. The information you obtain during the assessment can prove invaluable in structuring the training so that the team gains the greatest return from its investment in time and money. It is also helpful to know "where the bodies

are buried” so you do not inadvertently step into an issue you were not prepared for. During the problem-solving activities the team will act the same way it does back at the office. A skilled trainer will help the team become aware of what it does that works or does not work, so that the team can make useful choices that will lead to improved performance.

Learning Laboratory

The learning laboratory frequently brings together people who do not normally work with each other. They may not even be in the same organization. The reason they are attending the training is to develop their leadership and teamwork skills. These are the skills we use when working with people on a shared task, no matter what that task is. People refer to them as the “soft” skills as opposed to the “hard” technical skills that are task specific.

Communication, planning, group problem solving and decision making, motivation, and fostering cohesion are just some in the long list of skills that are normally called soft. Ironically, mastering these skills is one of the hardest tasks there is. Working with someone who has mastered them is a privilege that few would take for granted.

MODELS

The theoretical models covered at the end of the book are presented during a debriefing session to help explain some of the dynamics that a team may be experiencing. An intellectual framework can help the participants put their experiences with each other in perspective.

PLAY POWER

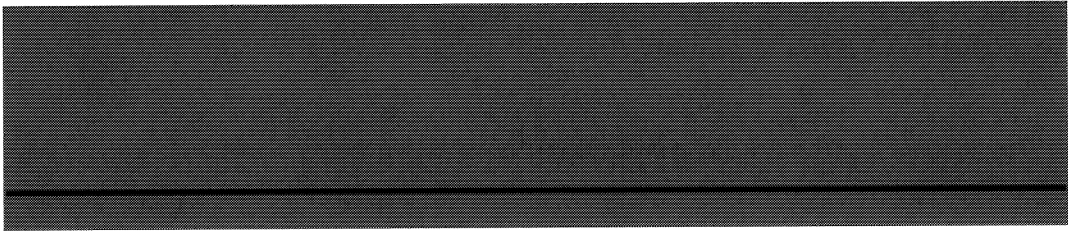
When people lighten up, act a little silly, and start enjoying themselves they put themselves on the threshold of a powerful force. To be playful is to be creative. If we are willing to risk looking silly the energy that went into defending the ego will be available for more productive purposes. The more a group loosens up through icebreakers and warm-up games at the beginning of a program the more deeply it will involve itself in the initial problem-solving activities. Never underestimate the power of play. I believe at least a third of most teams’ problems would be taken care of if the members would just lighten up and have some fun together. Another third would respond to some focused, group problem solving. The final third are beyond the reach of anything the team can do, so remember to keep things in perspective.

SAFETY

An essential part of the trainer's job is to maintain both physical and emotional safety during the program. Safety is everyone's responsibility. Participants should be encouraged to take care of themselves and to take care of each other. Ultimately, no one can do one without doing the other. Part of the safety ethic is asking each person to be responsible for his or her own level of participation. If some physical limitation or concern limits a person's movement, it is still possible to make a significant contribution to the team effort in areas such as planning, problem solving, coaching, or debriefing.

CHALLENGE-BY-CHOICE

True empowerment is going after what you want, not what someone else deems would be "good" for you to do. This learner-centered approach is often referred to as "challenge-by-choice." Challenge-by-choice means no one is pressured to participate. Extending an invitation for participants to step into their own learning zone is part of the process of asking them to set their own goals and learning objectives. What this does *not* mean is that the reluctant participant can leave the room and spend the day reading a magazine while the rest of the team struggles to solve one of the problems on the course. There are many other ways to contribute to the group effort, some listed in the paragraph above, if a person chooses to limit physical participation.



Debriefing the Activities

There are two main approaches to facilitating a group: directive and nondirective. Directive facilitation includes telling as much as asking. The directive facilitator maintains a strong presence in the group, guiding the group's process as the members attempt to solve problems and make decisions.

The nondirective facilitator is not as noticeable, intervening only when the need is clear or the group has arrived at a "teachable moment." The nondirective facilitator may make observations or ask questions at those particular times. However, the evaluation of those observations or the answers to the questions posed are left up to the group.

Team-building trainers often find both approaches useful depending on the needs of the group they are working with. As a group develops it generally needs less directive facilitation even though it may have started with a high need for outside direction. A high-performance team is one that can manage its own process as issues and potential decisions are discussed by the members.

ATTITUDE

Some trainers (myself included) find it hard to be objective and detached when working with a group. We want them to "win," to like us, and to have a good time. Most groups, however, are much better served if we allow them to have and to take responsibility for their own experience, even if that includes "failing" in an activity or getting upset with the facilitator over some perceived unfairness. Being clear in our minds about our own personal needs, issues, and goals (as well as the clients') will help us to be more effective in all our dealings with the group. This type of objective clarity is

easier to achieve if we remember to focus on the group's success rather than on our own success as trainers.

DEFINING SUCCESS

One important issue for a team is how to define success. Most groups assume success is solving the problem in the time allotted. However, the problem-solving activities themselves have no intrinsic value; they do not provide a service or produce a product in the material sense. More important is what the team learns from each activity and how the members will apply what they learned back in the office. Since people are more likely to get there if they know where they are going, it is wise to ask a group at the beginning to think about what they would like to take away from the program. This question is twofold:

- What would the participants like to gain personally?
- What would they like to see the team gain from the training?

TEAM WISDOM

Every activity described in these pages has as many variations as there are team-building programs across the country. There is no "school solution" that constitutes the best way to complete a particular task. Team members will devise a solution that works best for them. This approach reflects the philosophy of experiential learning and the belief that the group already knows what it needs to about teamwork. A good debriefing enables the team to access the full range of its own knowledge.

The purpose of going through the initiatives is to bring this information out so everyone can benefit from the collective wisdom of the team. The only requisite for success is the willingness to question and learn from each experience. Failure is only possible when no learning occurs.

MAKING A CHOICE

A breakthrough learning can build up gradually or occur all of a sudden. When it does occur often it's the result of some greater degree of awareness. Something the team has been doing is shown graphically not to work. Even more important, the attitude or belief that drives the unproductive behavior is uncovered. These behaviors and the beliefs and attitudes behind them are below the threshold of awareness or are so strongly preconceived that they are never questioned.

Even more important is recognizing the behaviors and beliefs that help the team succeed. This awareness gives the team options. They have the opportunity to choose. Hopefully, they will choose wisely and make a conscious commitment to the behaviors and beliefs that lead to success.

TEACHABLE MOMENTS

Getting a team to the point where it can make a choice requires being alert to the “teachable moment.” A good progression will help create teachable moments that generate significant “take-aways” for the team as a whole. Instead of *carpe diem*, *carpe momenta* is the motto of the action learning trainer.

A useful presupposition that supports this process is that whatever happens in the group can be a source of learning. During one team-building program some members of the team were sure that I had made a mistake while calling their errors as they tried to navigate the Corporate Maze. I was fairly confident but not certain my calls had been accurate. Some people started to react like a team at the ballpark when the umpire has made a questionable call. I reframed the conversation around the question of dealing with a boss or coworker when you think they have made a mistake. From that teachable moment the group uncovered some useful insights and strategies about a common interpersonal problem.

THREE QUESTIONS

After time is called and the dust settles, gather the group in a circle. The EIAG process outlined in the Models section is one way to conduct the discussion about how the team did. When in doubt, the best shorthand approach is to simply pose three questions in the following sequence:

- What worked?
- What didn't work?
- What do you want to do differently?

Ideally, the group will take the answers to the last question and apply them to the next activity. Taking the new behaviors all the way back to the workplace could result in significant improvement in the team's performance and quality of life.

SEQUENCING

The most effective programs are those that are tailored to the specific requirements and idiosyncracies of the team. Different activities will highlight different learning. Seldom, however, will the same exercise work the same way twice even with similar groups. This is when judgment born of experience has to be exercised.

As the training unfolds the trainer hopes the team will build on what has been learned from each activity. Each activity is not only its own lesson but part of the overall matrix of learning that was defined by the team at the beginning of the training. The activities are sequenced: selected, modified, and presented in some semblance of order so that they make the maximum contribution to that learning process.

Because the program is driven by “process” instead of “content” the matrix of planned activities will seldom remain static. As the needs of the group come into sharper focus new issues will emerge. The planned sequence has to be altered to give the team the opportunity to address those issues.

The sequencing of activities is an important part of the process of building competence and confidence. Most programs begin with simple activities that loosen up the group in a lighthearted way. As the level of trust and cohesion builds, more challenging group problem-solving initiatives are conducted. The sequence commonly used is:

- Warm-ups/Icebreakers
- Trust-Building and Communication Exercises
- Group Problem-Solving Activities

After several intense problem-solving activities it is a good idea to lighten things up with a group game.

CONTRACTING

Near the beginning of a program the trainer helps the team develop a contract with itself. The contract is an agreement that lays out the norms or ground rules for how the members will work with each other. A typical contract usually includes items like:

- Treating each other with respect
- No put-downs
- Listening to each other

- Participating fully
- Being honest
- Speaking for yourself
- Attacking problems, not people
- What is said in the room staying in the room

As the team goes through the training program, items are added or changed based on the team's assessment of what is working and what needs to be improved. If a participant is not honoring the contract then someone on the team should ask why.

NUMBER OF ACTIVITIES

You might be wondering how many activities a team will do in a one-day program. That number depends on the team and its goals. If the group is just there to have fun and build team spirit it may not be appropriate to spend much time debriefing the activities. The group could easily zip through ten problems if the members are skillful in team problem solving. Groups that are more reflective or have a complex agenda will move more slowly. Three or four activities could easily take all day. No matter what type of group they are working with, trainers who are concerned about their peace of mind will have more activities set up than the team could possibly do.

OBSERVERS

One approach that enriches a debriefing session is to ask one or more team members to observe an activity. The observers stand back and watch how the team members work together. They look at the team's process in such areas as leadership, planning, communication, feedback, decision making, brainstorming, making adjustments to the plan, listening, and other areas of interest. Stepping back and watching coworkers with a nonjudgmental attitude can be highly instructive. An observation such as, "Everyone was talking at once and no one really heard anything other people said," is more potent during a debriefing when it comes from one of the group's own members.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

It is hard to change a behavior or attitude if you are not aware both of it and of the results it produces. Almost inevitably the way a group interacts at the office will be replicated during the training. Experience-based programs

using the action/reflection model bring both helpful and unhelpful behaviors to awareness. It is not the trainer's role to judge the behaviors as helpful or not. The group itself is capable of evaluating their impact. If the problem-solving activity was never solved because no one was listening to each other, the consequences of not listening are apparent. A powerful lesson for a team is learning how to make that connection between cause and effect.

TRUE EMPOWERMENT

The trainer's job is to provide the group with the opportunity to choose. Empowerment is letting people make up their own minds about what they will or will not do. Part of the learning process is for members to take responsibility for decisions and their consequences. The decision to act differently as an individual or as a group is an expression of power. The popular adage—if you always do what you always did you will always get what you always got—aptly sums up the opportunity each problem-solving activity presents.

SKILL BUILDING

Teams, unlike Tolstoy's famous comment that unhappy families are unhappy in different ways, are often unhappy (and therefore unproductive) in similar ways. The behaviors that are preventing them from working effectively tend to fall into a fairly predictable set of categories. The great thing about action learning is that it catches teams being themselves. Some of the more common categories that pose problems for teams include:

- **Listening:** Are people really paying attention to what their teammates are saying? It is not unusual to find groups in which everyone talks at once. Often people tune out because the dominant talkers never give up the floor.
- **Planning:** The old saw that warns that teams that fail to plan, plan to fail is inescapably true. "Damn the torpedoes; full speed ahead" is a cultural attitude that has sunk more than one project.
- **Full Participation:** Is everyone encouraged to offer their input when decisions have to be made? Is the team organized so that everyone's abilities and energy are brought to bear on the task?
- **Mutual Support and Cooperation:** Are we helping each other succeed? Are we treating each other with respect? Are we encouraging each other?
- **Communication:** Does everyone know what the plan is? Are we keeping each other informed? Do we trust each other enough to communicate in ways that are open, honest, and helpful?

- **Gender and Diversity Issues:** Do the men (or women) appear to dominate the problem-solving and decision-making process? Do people with different working styles understand and know to work with each other?
- **Roles and Goals:** Do we know who is responsible for doing what? Do we all share the same purpose and goals? Do we share the values that will help us obtain those goals?
- **Dialoguing:** Can we ask ourselves some open-ended questions about what is working, what is not working, and what we should do differently? Based on that self- or team assessment do we make the necessary adjustments that will improve our performance?

Identifying a problem is half of the process toward improving team effectiveness. The other half is taking the actions or practicing the skills that will resolve the problem. A good debriefing results in clarifying the nature of the problem and the agreed-upon solution. In the next problem-solving activity the team needs to implement the solution. For example, if a team identifies a lack of planning, an effective debriefing will lead the members to start doing more planning.

Effective planning requires other necessary and related skills, such as listening. Few people or teams become good listeners right away. Developing any skill requires information, feedback, and practice. The role of the trainer is expanded during a training program to include being a coach—helping the team make in-the-moment adjustments in specific areas or skills. Each problem-solving activity becomes an opportunity for the team to test, practice, and improve in those areas.

THE POINT OF IT ALL

The point of completing the activities in this book is not to do a certain number of them, or the speed with which they are accomplished. As stated in the section on defining success, the activities are meaningless in the sense that they do not house the homeless or produce a product that people will buy. What gives meaning and worth to the program is what the team learns from working together to accomplish the tasks. The only failure in any training program is the failure to learn something useful. Often the event in which the team has a complete and unequivocal “failure” turns out to be the one that produced the most profound learning.

The job of the trainer is to structure the debriefings and ask the questions that will allow the most potent learning and insights to emerge. Refer to the debriefing questions listed after the description of each problem-solving activity and the personal notes that are included with some of the

descriptions. The topic of debriefing deserves its own book (which incidentally is why I wrote *The Power of Team Building Using Ropes Techniques*).

HAVE FUN

Often the groups that seem to be having the most fun are also the ones that learn the most from the training. A playful frame of mind is a creative frame of mind. The tone of a training program is set in the first twenty minutes. The right tone to set is one of energy, enthusiasm, and a lighthearted sense of fun. Conducting training with this kind of energy can help transform the most jaded and cynical participants into the bold, adventurous learners they were always meant to be.



Adjusting the Complexity of an Activity

Problem-solving activities that offer a team the greatest level of learning are neither too easy nor too difficult. It is up to the trainer to evaluate the capabilities of the group and adjust the level of complexity to provide the appropriate degree of challenge. The first exercise or two should be confidence builders. As the team gains more skill and experience it is naturally ready for a greater level of difficulty. The following are some ways to increase the complexity of an activity. Naturally, if you do the opposite you can reduce the level of challenge.

PLANNING

Require the team to plan in another area without being able to see the props or the site where they will put their plan into operation. Have the team send scouts to check out the site. The scouts, instead of the trainer, brief the team about the problem. As an added twist tell the scouts they cannot volunteer information; they can only provide information in response to a specific question.

HANDICAPS

In this variation, instruct the participants so that some team members can see but not talk, some can talk but not see, others can see and talk but they cannot do anything with the props.

For example, in the Hot Stuff activity, one trainer divided the group into three subteams. One team could see but not touch the equipment, one group

could touch the equipment but not see, and the last group could touch the people who could not see but they could not touch the equipment nor could they talk to anyone (their ears and eyes still worked fine). Each group had to rely on the other groups to complete the task, which they did manage to do.

TOWER OF BABEL

Limit the language the team can use with each other or with certain team members. For example, tell them that they are dealing with people who only know and respond to a few words such as “Yes” (which only means “I hear you” to them), and “No” (which means “Maybe” to them). In activities like Minefield you can totally exclude some words, such as: left, right, stop, and go. Of course, for many activities, the no-talking rule after the planning time is up adds to the complexity.

TAKE OUT THE LEADERS

One or two people may play key roles in the team’s success. Suddenly, you announce that they are struck with a temporary yet debilitating illness that reduces their ability to see or talk or walk or maybe all three. What does the team do now when the pressure is on to perform?

COMBINE ACTIVITIES

Put two activities together. Landing Zone is a combination of Cross-Cultural Sherpa Walk and Blindfold Polygon. Consequently, Landing Zone is a lot more challenging than either of the other two activities are when they are done separately.

ADJUST THE PROPS

Adjust the props to make the activity more challenging. For example: Reduce the space the team can stand on when doing the Balance Beam. Make the object in the Blind Object Assembly more complex in how it is put together. Tighten the standards in the Spider Web (no touches). When you make these kinds of adjustments you might need to allow more time to complete the activity.

Use two sets of props: two ropes for Blindfold Polygon or two sets of toxic cans that must be poured into the same receptacle at the same time in Hot Stuff.

ADD TASKS

Throw in an additional task that the team must accomplish along with the main activity. For example, in Trolley, require the team to pass some item (a cup of water, a ball, or a piece of paper) back and forth between the members while they are crossing the swamp.

CREATE FIXED ROLES

Divide responsibilities and knowledge. Require that only one person or subteam can tie a certain knot that is required to complete a task; only another person or subteam can design the team's approach to the problem; only another person or subteam can execute that design.

LEADERSHIP FROM AFAR

Designate a leader. The leader can see what is going on but can only communicate with a messenger. The people performing the task are given limits either in sight or in speech. They have to depend on the leader working through the messenger to tell them what to do. Blindfold Polygon becomes an extremely challenging task with this set of rules.

REDUCE THE TIME

A task that takes 20 minutes is harder to complete if you only have 15 minutes and it gets even harder if you only have 10. So decrease the time for an activity. For some other groups you can increase the time limit. The more the time they have the more they will use.

TIME-OUTS

Call a time-out to examine how the team is working together (making decisions, solving problems, leadership style, and organization) and what improvements might be made. A time-out could actually make the task easier if the team makes the right adjustments. For some teams that are highly reflective the time-out could increase the complexity of their approach to solving the problem.



WARM-UPS FOR LARGE GROUPS

Before the group plunges into the program, one or more activities are conducted to create an informal atmosphere. Many participants will be unsure of what to expect and what is expected of them. A short, well-run activity can be reassuring. As I mentioned in the introduction, after everyone acts a little silly, group members no longer need to expend as much energy worrying about their images and how they appear to others. This also frees up resources that can be used for problem solving and learning new concepts and behaviors.

As a safety measure, simple stretching exercises should be conducted to loosen up the muscles and tendons. Stretching for a few minutes both before and after the day's activities will help prevent strains and soreness.

Warm-ups and icebreakers get people moving and laughing. After a long car ride to the training site, part of a person's energy is still back in bed. Involving the team in a simple game starts the juices flowing so that people are present in both mind and body. After lunch, or when people need to lighten up and energize, these simple games are invaluable.

Again, do not underestimate the power of fun. A few minutes invested in some seemingly silly game can lead to a huge increase in creativity. In fact, the more fun people have, the more practical results they seem to get out of training.

These games all have a high giggle factor but some tend to get a better response with small groups, others with large groups. I've put the large group activities together and called them "Warm-Ups." The activities I more often use with small groups (14 participants or fewer) are

grouped together as “Icebreakers.” The Warm-Ups are presented first because it is helpful to do a few with a large group before breaking them into smaller teams. Of course, you may find your favorite Icebreaker is just what you needed to lighten up that group of 200 accountants. If it works, do it.

ACTIVITY

1

Networking

Set-Up

Networking is a great icebreaker at the very beginning of a training session or after lunch. As people trickle into the room, hand out the forms. I like the fact that this activity allows a trainer to start the program on time and still integrate latecomers. I've seen the exercise help get the day off to a good start with groups as small as 10 or as large as 150. To get the best response modify the categories on the form to fit the group you are working with.

Debriefing

Keep it fun and simple. One way is to form a large circle. Call out a category. The people who share that category run to the center of the circle and give each other high fives. You can ask the group that has to prove their category to sing the theme song to *Casablanca* or do a few steps of ballroom dancing.

Team Builder

Networking

If a person matches an item. Then ask her to initial it. The first **five** items must be initialed by **five** different people.

If the item says {prove}, then the person has to prove it before you have her initial the item. The object of this exercise is to get all the items initialed.

Played in a band	Can Hum theme to <i>Casablanca</i> {Prove}	Has an often mispronounced name {Prove}	Been on TV
Has a tattoo	Has been paid to sing	Is a twin	Speaks two languages
Drives a 4 x 4	Has been to four continents	Has scuba dived	Knows ball-room dance {Prove}
Won an award	Is wearing a sock w/a hole in it {Prove}	Ran a 10K	Has met a president of the USA
Acted in a play	Owens a Pentium PC	Has taken a balloon ride	Knows a good joke
Skied the alps	Rides a motorcycle	Goes camping	Surfs the Internet

ACTIVITY

2

Yurt Circle

This is a good introductory event for large groups that emphasizes interpersonal coordination. Participants need to depend on others to accomplish the task. The group stands in a circle, almost arm's length apart, and holds hands. A count-off by one and two designates those who will lean out and those who will lean in. Slowly, coached by the trainer, the "ones" lean out, and the "twos" lean in and then vice versa. The more people lean out the more their weight must be balanced by people leaning in for the circle to hold its shape. Some people put most of their weight into the circle. Others will be much more cautious. When the risk takers find themselves paired up with their more cautious colleagues the results can be humorous as well as instructive.

Yurt Circle is also a nice closing activity. You will see a lot more leaning at the end of a program than at the beginning. So you might need to caution people not to lean too far. After the group has done the activity you can thank everyone for leaning out and leaning in with each other. After all, that is what teamwork is: supporting your teammates and letting yourselves be supported. Both require trust and full participation.

ACTIVITY

3

720 Walking Tag

This is one of the great original icebreakers for large groups. Have the group form a circle. Naturally, the larger the group the larger the circle. In the center demonstrate with a volunteer how to play the game. One person is “it.” The other is trying hard, but not too hard, to avoid being tagged by the “it.” The “it” must first spin around twice before walking, not running, after her partner. The partner can only walk, not run, away to avoid becoming it. Once he is tagged he becomes “it” and must do a 720 (two complete spins) before walking off in hot pursuit of his partner. The object of the game is not to be “it” when time is called, usually after one minute of play. After demonstrating the game have the participants partner with a person next to them. Let them decide who will start the game as the “it.” The more people there are playing the game the more confusion and mayhem and consequently the more laughs everyone has chasing each other. Be sure to define the boundaries. And keep reminding people to walk—not run.

ACTIVITY

4

Pass the Hoop

You remember the phrase “passing the buck.” Well, this activity offers an opportunity to pass the hoop. Instead of one person jumping through a hoop, why not try to make it a team effort?

The group stands in a circle, holding hands. One hula hoop is sent around the circle counterclockwise. Another hula hoop, starting from the other side of the circle, is passed clockwise. Passing a hoop from one person to the next takes teamwork because only arms and bodies are used. As people step through the hoops laughter builds till it overflows when the two hoops meet. For more fun, add more hula hoops.

ACTIVITY

5

Three Faces

Put the group in a circle and ask:

Does anyone remember the expression the young hero made in the movie, *Home Alone*? [Usually a participant or two will demonstrate the face.]

Great, that's just like in the movie. Okay, does anyone remember the face Curly Joe made when he wanted to make a point? I know someone here remembers the Three Stooges. Come on, I am not the only one here old enough to have watched them on television [Someone demonstrates Curly Joe's head-tapping moves with the appropriate sounds.]

Wonderful, you got it. Now when you were in class as a kid what expression did you make when the teacher turned her back after telling you to be quiet. [People stick out their tongues and wave their fingers from their ears.]

That's right. I made one like that, too. Could someone who is an intelligent, personable, outgoing, risk taker join me in the center of the circle? [If no one joins you, call on someone.]

Bob, you look like you fit the part. Bob and I are going to show you a process for developing our powers of ESP. You remember the game, Rock, Scissors, Paper, don't you, Bob? [Hopefully, Bob does remember.]

Instead of those three items we are going to use the three faces we just talked about. We'll stand back-to-back for a few seconds, think of a face and on the count of three turn around and present the face to each other. The object is to match faces. Is that clear? [Check to see if people nod that they understand.]

Now before Bob and I do this could everyone refresh our memories by what showing us the faces? Let's start with *Home Alone* [Go through the three faces with the group.]

After reviewing the faces with the group, demonstrate with a volunteer at least once how to stand back-to-back, choose, and then make a face at each

other. Have people pair off and go through the activity one or more times. After each round ask for a show of hands from the pairs that matched faces.

This icebreaker generates lots of laughs. If anyone was afraid of looking silly during the training program they (and everyone else) will have gotten that fear out of the way. It is a good activity for large groups at the beginning of training before they are broken down into smaller groups. Of course, some groups may not be ready to have this level of fun. So use judgment in deciding when to use this activity.

Variation: Tiger—Hunter—Hippie

Instead of standing back-to-back, you can have the partners face each other. The three choices are Tiger, Hunter, or Hippie. Have two volunteers demonstrate for you by doing what a Tiger does—growl. The Hunter shoots a gun and the Hippie flashes a peace sign. At the signal from the trainer the pairs present their character of choice. Those that match get a round of applause.

Personal Notes

Some trainers use a Romeo who blows a kiss instead of the Hippie. That's fine, but you may have to deal with the unexpected, like one trainer I know of. He was leading a large group through this version of the icebreaker when he heard a commotion in the back of the room. He ran to investigate. To his horror a man had a woman in a full body-head-back embrace. To his relief it turned out they were married and the husband was using the activity as an opportunity to celebrate their anniversary.

ACTIVITY

6

Orientation Square

This activity is a good one to use after lunch for a large group to make sure everyone is still breathing. Have the group form four teams that are about the same size. Instead of creating a circle the teams line up facing each other, forming a square. Stand in the center of the square and ask the members of each team in turn to join hands, raise them over their heads, and give a yell.

Ask each team to remember which side of you they are facing. For example:

Team "A" is looking at your front.

Team "B" is facing your left side.

Team "C" is facing your right side.

Team "D" is looking at your best side (your rear).

No matter which way you turn, the teams should reposition themselves so they are facing the same part of your body they started with.

The object is to be the first team to reposition itself. The way you can tell which team is first is that as soon as the team gets into the new position, they raise their hands and give a yell.

Count down, turn around, and then look out as people go in all directions. When the shouting is over pick the winner and then do another turn. For the last turn add some more excitement by running off to another spot while the teams follow in pursuit.

ACTIVITY

7

Paired Sharing

This activity offers a comfortable, getting-to-know-you-better format that will warm up a group of any size. Start by asking people to find a partner. The larger the group the more time you will need to make sure everyone has one. Have the partners ask each other about their first job. What did they do to make a living when they first left home and were on their own?

Allow about 3–5 minutes of discussion, or less if the energy ebbs. After asking people to circle up I usually say something like: “If your partner’s first job seemed particularly noteworthy or interesting and it is okay with him or her, please share with the group what you learned.”

If people are slow to respond I ask, “Did any pairs have the same first job?” A story that is either funny or inspiring is sure to emerge. After that first round ask people to find a new partner. When things settle down introduce the next topic, such as:

- Discuss your ideal vacation if time and money were no object.
- What is something your partner is proud of that is not on her resume?
- Find the most obscure thing you have in common.
- Ask your partner to tell you about a time he was at his personal best.

This activity helps people who have been working together for years see each other in a new light. Within every group there are incredibly rich and diverse backgrounds that others would never learn about unless someone asks.

With some groups you may want people to keep the same partners for all the questions. Having one partner ask questions and then report the answers to the group gives everyone the opportunity to practice their listening skills.

ACTIVITY

8

Transformers

This activity is often done as the precursor to another warm-up, Animal Name—Sound—Motion. Have the teams come together so that they can see you and each other and still maintain some space between each other. Ask each team to form the letter “H.” After a minute or two of milling around, the team members will figure out how to arrange themselves in the shape of that letter. Lead the teams in applauding each other’s success and introduce the next task for each team to do in turn.

- Form a zipper, zipping and unzipping.
- Arrange yourselves in the shape of a helicopter.
- Become a cannon ball fired from a cannon.

The ingenuity and speed that teams display in this activity can be surprising.

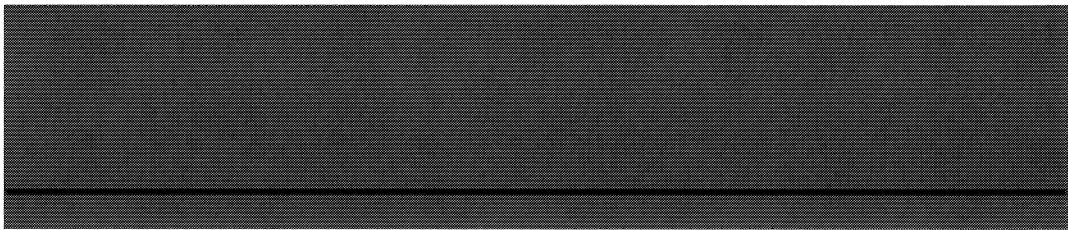
ACTIVITY

9

Animal Name—Sound— Motion

After the teams have loosened up and gained some experience working together in Transformers, this activity provides a fun way to build a group identity. Each team should caucus for a few minutes and come up with an animal name, sound, and motion that the members will all do as a team. Each member can act like the chosen animal or work with other team members to form the shape of the animal. When teams have their totems, they present what they came up with to the entire group. Along with a good laugh or two the results provide identities that the teams can refer to throughout the rest of the training.

You'll have teams that bark like dogs, roar like lions, or hiss like snakes. The popular eagle totem is expressed by people flapping their arms and making bird-like cries. As corny as this all may seem the teams actually enjoy the exercise and adopt the animal names for the rest of training.



ICEBREAKERS FOR SMALL GROUPS

ACTIVITY

10

I've Got the POWER ...

Before doing any physical activity, no matter how mild, it is wise to loosen up the muscles and joints. Industry studies have shown a better safety record for workers when they do some stretching activities at the beginning of the workday. If you have any joggers in your group they will have some firsthand knowledge of the importance of loosening up. One way to get things started is to ask the joggers to lead the group in a few stretches.

Another way to start the activity is to put it in the context of empowerment and shared leadership. You might start by telling the group ...

There is a lot of talk these days about empowerment and shared leadership. In terms of a team you cannot have one without the other. Leadership, no matter how much it is "shared," is an expression of personal power. In my opinion no one can empower you; if you are going to be empowered you have to take power. Like any other skill, the more you take power the better you get at being powerful.

Here's what we are going to do. When someone says, "I've got the power ..." everyone else does the stretching exercise that person is doing. This activity is like the game, Simon Says, except we are focusing on getting warmed up. I'll start out with one of my favorite stretches. Feel free to take the power when you feel inspired.

If no one takes the power after I lead a stretch or two I'll say, "I've got the power," get down on the floor, and start pumping out military-style push-ups. In less than a flash someone else gets inspired and takes the power.

ACTIVITY

11

Knots

In the life cycle of almost any project there comes a time when everyone seems tied up in a knot. “Knots” is a classic metaphor for one-of-those-days. Getting things untangled at work or during this activity calls for patience, ingenuity, and a sense of humor.

The group circles up. Members reach across the open space in the circle and grasps the hand of another person across from them. With their free arms, they reach across again and grasp the hand of someone else. From then on it is up to the group to figure out a way to untangle the mass of bodies and arms and recreate a circle without letting go of anyone’s hand. A squeeze check sent from hand to hand around the circle arrives back to the person who started it—proving there is only one circle.

People climb over, through, under, and around each other. In ones and twos people manage to step clear of the tangle.

Finally, it is down to a knot of three people still tangled up. Like the ‘60s party game of Twister some fancy footwork is required to unravel the final knot. Encouraging remarks and suggestions enable the team members to unthread the final strands of the knot. The team applauds its success as it stands again in a circle.

Additional Suggestions

Here are a few pointers to remember when conducting this activity:

- Knots works best with 9 or 10 people. More than 12 and the knot is not likely to be untangled without giving the group one or more hand breaks. Fewer than 8 people and the activity is often too easy.
- A hand break means two people can let go of their hands and then rejoin them immediately after making a quick adjustment.

52 ICEBREAKERS FOR SMALL GROUPS

- If the initial squeeze check never makes it back to the person who started it, it is likely that the group formed more than one circle. Have the group circle up again and start from the beginning.
- Dresses, high heels, and this activity do not mix very well.
- Spotting may be necessary. Remind people to be careful with their backs, elbows, and wrists. Tell them to let go if there is any strain.

ACTIVITY

12

Balloons

This activity can provide lots of fun and lots of laughs. Have the group form a circle. Blow up some balloons. Toss them out into the circle and have the group keep them up in the air. Have the group keep them off the ground without using their hands. Try passing the balloons around the circle, again without using hands.

Provide one balloon for each person. Without using hands or forearms, the group finds a way to keep all the balloons off the ground. Have the group pop all the balloons by squeezing them between bodies. Again, no hands or fingernails are allowed.

ACTIVITY

13

Zen Bat

In the mountains of Japan students of Zen spend long hours learning to concentrate the mind. Zen stories are filled with examples of students whacked by their teachers when their minds begin to wander. This game is a Western version that makes concentrating the mind a group effort.

The person who's "it" sits in the center of a circle. Others sit facing him with their feet pointed to the center. (At the start of the game, whack yourself with a foam bat a few times to show that it does not hurt.) Armed with the foam bat the person who's "it" calls out someone's name in the circle. The person named calls out the name of someone else also in the circle. That person calls out the name of someone else and so it goes on. After the first person, everyone in the circle is fair game. If your name is called and you get hit with the bat before you can call out the name of someone else then you have to take a turn in the center of the circle.

Zen Bat never fails to generate a lot of giggles. It is a fun way to wake people up after lunch and get both body and mind in gear for the afternoon program.

ACTIVITY

14

Birthday Lineup

Without talking or using obvious hand signs or making any kind of noise as a signal, the team must line up by birthday (not birth date). January is at the head of the line, December at the end. When the team is lined up, have them call off their birthdays giving only day and month. Be prepared to be impressed with how close they come to the right order. And now everyone knows who has a birthday coming up. Happy birthday!

Other versions of this game have people lining up by height or shoe size with their eyes closed. Or you can ask each person to call out the name of an animal without repeating any of the names other people have chosen. Have people line up, eyes closed, by size with the smallest animal first in line, making only the sound that animal would make.

ACTIVITY

15

Have You Ever ... ?

Form the ubiquitous circle and ask people to mark their places with something (hat, cup, lighter, etc.). While everyone is marking their spots you are standing in the center of the circle. Consequently there is one less spot than there are people. If you are indoors with a small group have people pull chairs in a circle.

Explain that this is a game like musical chairs. Instead of music, however, we'll use questions. The person in the center will ask a question starting with, "Have you ever...." An example is, "Have you ever gone canoeing?"

If you have you must change places with someone from another part of the circle who has also been canoeing. You cannot change places with someone to the immediate right or left of you. Only ask about something you have done yourself.

Don't ask, "Have you been to Moscow?" unless you have been there. Of course, the cities in Russia and Idaho both count, unless you specify only one.

When the first question is popped people trade places leisurely. But it quickly becomes evident that the person who moves the slowest does not have a place to go to except the center of the circle. That person steps to the center and asks the next question and the fun begins as people dash to find another spot in the circle.

ACTIVITY

16

Team Mapping

An important component of breaking the ice and building trust is getting to know the people on your team. Team mapping is a fun way to invite people to open up and talk about themselves.

Set-Up

In an open area designate the boundaries for North America or whatever continent you happen to be on. For example, New York City is next to the tree on the right. Los Angeles is 15 feet away by the rock on the left. Kuala Lumpur is several more feet past the rock and Paris is a few feet beyond the tree, but not too many because you want people to be able to hear each other. If you are training indoors write NYC on one piece of paper, LA on another, and put them on the floor 20 feet apart.

After you have pointed out the boundaries ask the participants to:

Go to the place that represents the location where you had your most memorable meal (best, worst, or most exotic).

As people rearrange themselves make sure no one goes so far away that they are out of earshot. When the traffic stops have people report where they were and what they had to eat. You will get some interesting stories and obviously this is a good activity to use just before lunch.

After you hear from everyone (or some people if the group is large) pose one or two more topics. Dream up anything that is pertinent to your group. It is best to start with less serious subjects such as a memorable meal before you ask more thoughtful questions.

Time

For a small group allow 10–15 minutes.

Topics

Other topics that have proved to be good stimuli to self-disclosure include:

Go to the place where you were born.

Go to the place where you would like to vacation if money and time were no object.

Go to the place where you want to be living in five (or more) years.

Go to the location where you had your most significant learning experience.

Let each person in turn give a brief response. There is no need for a prolonged discussion since the purpose of the exercise is simply for the participants to get to know each other better. Too often we work with people for years without really knowing much about who they are beyond their job titles. What people share about themselves in this simple exercise can be surprisingly meaningful, especially if the topic is one's most significant learning experience.

ACTIVITY

17

Frog/Face

Circle up the group. In your left hand hold one of those small, ugly, plastic heads (the face) your six-year-old has been begging you to buy at TOYS R US. In the other hand hold a rubber frog.

Present the frog to the person on your right and say the profound words, "This is a frog."

Coached by you he responds, "A what?"

Sagely you reply, "A frog."

Taking the frog he says, "Thank you."

He repeats the process with the person on his right.

However, when that person says, "A what?" instead of responding he turns and repeats "A what?" to you.

Wisely, you reply, "A frog," two words he takes and repeats to the person who asked. After answering, "Thank you," that person takes the frog and presents it to the next person and says, "This is a frog."

That person responds with, "A what?" and heads turn as "A what?" is passed back to you. You again respond wisely with, "A frog," an answer that is passed from person to person back to the person who is about to be presented with the frog.

And so it goes with each repetition of passing the frog, heads turn back and forth as the questions and answers hop around the circle. Now in case you have been wondering about the face in your left hand, watch out, because it is making its way around the opposite side of the circle in the same manner. When frog meets face the laughs can literally get out of hand.

ACTIVITY

18

Team Cheer

Whenever the team has a “win,” something people did that should be celebrated, gather the group in a circle and lead a cheer. The cheer begins with hands in the circle and a yell that starts low and ends in a high-volume outburst. The yell could be the classic “GO, TEAM” ending in an exchange of “high fives” or a loud, drawn-out “YES! ...” done in conjunction with a quick pump of a fist. The best cheers are the ones that emerge spontaneously from a shared experience of success.

Group Grumble

Sometimes when the energy level of the group is a little low the best antidote is focused grumbling. Have the group stand in a circle. Ask people what they really hate. When someone comes up with a gripe, for example, highway traffic, have the team join hands and start repeating the phrase, “I hate traffic.” With each repetition of the phrase the team steps closer together and says the phrase more forcefully. On the last possible step the group shouts the phrase as loudly as possible. After the group has screamed a few gripes, notice how much the energy has shifted. There is something about a good shout, if you are the shouter, that releases stress and tension.

In other versions of Group Grumble each member in turn spouts off his biggest pet peeve. The best or worst pet peeve of the group gets repeated by everyone. An additional touch includes grumbling in made-up words or sounds. The most expressive grumble in gobbledygook wins the applause of the rest of the team.

ACTIVITY

20

Dream Weavers

In this game one or more people leave the room. While they are out of earshot the others are supposed to make up a dream for each of them. The dreams can be the kind you have at night or a vision a person might receive on a mountaintop. When the people return they ask the others questions about their dreams. The team may answer only “yes” or “no.” From the yes’s and no’s the people try to reconstruct what the dreams were that the team made up for them. The only catch is that the team is answering with a set sequence of yes’s and no’s: first two yes’s and then one no. No matter what the questions are the pattern of answers stays the same. Each dream turns out to be of the person’s own making, which makes for some interesting insights.

ACTIVITY

21

Stride Right

Have the team members stand shoulder to shoulder forming a line. Keeping the line straight, the team moves forward. The hard part is that each person can only move a foot if it moves in conjunction with the foot of another team member who is beside him or her. This may sound complicated and for most teams, at least for a few minutes, it is.



TRUST-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

Early in a training program it is wise to include one or more initiatives that foster trust among the participants. Activities commonly used for this purpose are Spotting Stance, Team Spotting, Trust Circle, Levitation, and Multisensory Trust Walk. Trust comes not only from what we say but even more from what we do. When you physically experience someone acting in a trustworthy manner—in a way that lets you know you can rely on them—the effects are felt in every aspect of your relationship with that person.

ACTIVITY

22

Spotting Stance

This activity provides a short but important lesson in learning how to protect the safety of other participants. First conduct a few stretching exercises or do an activity like “I’ve Got the POWER.” Then start off by demonstrating a good spotting stance: hands up, feet apart, one foot in front of the other, knees bent, and eyes on the person being spotted. The hands always stay between the other person and the ground. Ask for a volunteer and show how you can easily support each other’s weight if you are in a good stance. Pair the team off and have the pairs practice leaning their weight into each other. Stress the importance of two spotters or more on one person whenever a team member is off the ground. Spotting is one way everyone can participate and contribute to the group effort.

Team Spotting

Team the partners into groups of four. Demonstrate that one person will be the faller, one the spotter, and the other two backup spotters. The faller stands about a foot from the spotter. The two backup spotters stand behind the spotter and put their hands on his upper back.

With his back to the spotters the faller asks the all-important question, "Spotters ready?"

The spotters should respond with a loud and confidence-inspiring, "Ready!"

Reassured, the faller replies, "Falling!"

The spotters quickly reply, "Fall!"

Keeping stiff as a board, knees locked, the faller falls backward to the waiting hands of the spotter. The spotter gently pushes the faller back to an upright position. Each person in the foursome takes a turn as a faller, spotter, and backup spotter.

Trust Circle

The Trust Circle, also known by the descriptive title of “Wind in the Willows,” is an excellent exercise for building the mutual confidence necessary for a cohesive team. Be sure to build the team’s skill base by conducting a lesson in spotting first.

Set-Up

Standing shoulder to shoulder, a group of 8 to 12 gathers in a tight circle. Everyone is coached to assume a good spotting position; legs slightly bent, hands out chest high, feet apart, and one foot in front of the other. One person stands in the center of circle. With arms crossed and knees locked, the person looks at his teammates and asks if they are ready to catch him.

When everyone’s reply is affirmative the person in the center closes his eyes and announces, “Falling.” Keeping his body rigid the faller falls against the group’s outstretched hands. Gently (something that has to be emphasized with younger participants) the person is passed around or across the circle.

A blissful grin spreads across the face of the person in the center as he lets go and trusts the group to do its job. After a minute the person is steadied by the team and allowed to get his balance back before rejoining the circle.

Stop the action if a group gets the least bit rough, jokes too much at the expense of the person in the middle, goes too fast, or loses its concentration. The object is to take care of each other and to treat the person in the center as he wants to be treated. If anything emotionally or physically unsafe occurs, intervene without being judgmental. Express your perception and concern using a problem-solving approach. Again, the standard question, “What’s not working?” helps the team evaluate its own behavior and the impact it has on others.

**Debriefing**

Trust is said to be the glue that holds a team together. Do the individual team members feel safe enough to ask for what they want and to tell others how they want to be treated? Do they look out for each other? Do they have confidence in each other? How a group conducts the Trust Circle speaks volumes. Focusing on the attitudes and behaviors it takes to build trust can lead to a rich debriefing and set the tone for the rest of the training.

ACTIVITY

25

Levitation

This activity dovetails well with the Trust Circle. After the faller has been steadied in the center of the circle ask if she would like to take the exercise to the next level. If the answer is yes, organize the team in pairs. Each pair has a job vis-à-vis the faller's body. One pair takes the shoulders and head and another the back. The lower back, upper thighs, and lower legs are each assigned to a pair of supporters. Anyone left over can help out where there is an open space. Starting with the shoulders the faller is gently lowered and brought to a horizontal position, shoulder-high off the ground. At a given signal the team lifts the faller overhead and does a slow 360-degree turn so that everyone rotates in a circle. Tall team members need to remember that their shorter associates cannot lift as high as they do. For an added bit of spice some groups call out several times the name of the person they are lifting. After a rotation or two the faller is lowered, feet first, to the ground and steadied a few seconds before the next person steps in to take a turn.



ACTIVITY

26

Multisensory Trust Walk

Theme

Building trust.

Task

Lead a blindfolded person nonverbally.

Set-Up

The name for this activity is a bit of a misnomer since we are taking away one of the senses. However, it is amazing how this heightens the blindfolded person's other senses such as touch and smell.

The group is paired up in teams of two. One member is blindfolded and taken for a walk by his partner.

Signals are worked out between the partners before the blindfold is put on. After the blindfold is on there is no talking. Encourage people to request the specific behaviors and nonverbal communication that will enable them to trust their partner. Some people want to be guided by hand claps without being touched. Others may want to be guided in the prescribed fashion—a step behind and to the side of the blind person with a hand on his upper arm.

The person who can see carefully leads his partner around obstacles, stopping to let him feel what is in front of him. Doing the walk without talking deepens the uniqueness of the experience. If you want to be creative, use some rope and tables that the pairs have to crawl over or under.

Safety

The trainer should be observing the group at all times to make sure that no one is behaving in an unsafe manner. With rare exceptions most adult groups will take good care of each other in this activity. Occasionally, you may have to intervene if a guide tries to take advantage of the blindfolded person by leading him through sticker bushes or inflicting some other form of excessive horseplay.

Transfer of Learning

Some of the blindfolded participants will find that the simplest of activities reveal profound meaning. Trusting their physical well-being to an associate and letting themselves be trusted in turn can be a significant and radically different experience. Because the activity is kinesthetic, a sense of trust is created that the exchange of words would never create.

During the debriefing, look for ways to integrate the essence of the experience into daily life by asking:

What was it like?

What did you notice?

Did anyone step outside his or her comfort zone by participating in this activity?

What did your partner do that helped build and maintain the trust you needed to do this exercise?

If you were back in the office, what behaviors would you ask for from your coworker(s) that would increase your level of trust?

What behaviors do you think they would want from you?

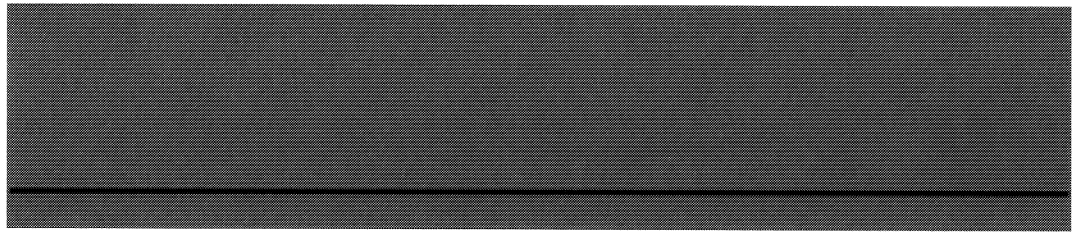
When something that we take for granted is taken away, how does that change impact us?

What can we do to help ourselves deal with that change?

Personal Notes

One of the members of a team I worked with had been totally blind most of her life. When the team did the blind trust walk she enjoyed the role of subject matter expert. Her explanation of how to lead a blind person and how to be led as one gave the team a new level of appreciation for what she had to deal with every day. It was not a mile, but for once others walked a while in her shoes.

The team had some people who expended a lot of energy complaining about how they were being treated at work. It was ironic that this blind person on their team who had the most reason to complain did not complain at all. In fact she radiated an inner peace that was inspiring those who chose to notice. Given the contrast in attitude, one wondered who was really the most blind.



COMMUNICATION

Facilitated discussions can help raise the level of trust in a group. The more people get to know each other in terms of their values and life experiences, the more the kind of understanding is built that deepens the sense of mutual connection and trust.

Expectation Management

People generally come to a corporate training program because someone told them to. They may not be happy to be there as they fret about all the work that is piling up on their desks. As you might expect, no one has answered that age-old question for them: What's in this for me?

Paradoxically, it's the act of deciding for yourself what you want to get out of a program that makes it worthwhile. There is a lot of truth in the old saw: Any road will get you there if you don't know where you are going. This exercise can help people decide where they want to go and remove some of the self-imposed road blocks that keep them from getting there.

Set-Up

Divide the group into four teams. Give each team a flip chart and one of the following questions:

What do you *not* want to get out of the training (any concerns or considerations)?

What can you do to help make this training a success?

What have you heard about this training?

What do you want to get out of this training?

Include directions with each team's question, such as:

Please form a team and discuss the question.

Interview other teams concerning the question.

Present your findings to the entire class.

After the teams talk to each other have them present their findings. Respond to any concerns that come up. If this is done at the beginning of the training, people are likely to participate more fully during the rest of the program.

ACTIVITY

28

Tiny Teach

Theme

Peer learning.

Task

Teach another team member something new.

Set-Up

Ask the team members to pair up. Ask them to teach each other something that will take only a few minutes to learn. The lesson could be a skill, like how to use a blade of grass as a whistle, or it could be intellectual knowledge, like a motto in Latin. After they teach each other ask the pairs to demonstrate to the group what they learned.

Time

5–10 minutes.

Transfer of Learning

Knowledge has been considered power since the time of the Greeks. In some organizations some people try to gain power by hoarding knowledge. In a healthy organization people are willing to share their knowledge and expertise freely. People realize that the more they learn from each other the more productive they are as a team.

ACTIVITY

29

Four Corners

Theme

Appreciating different styles.

Task

Go stand near the word that you most relate to.

Set-Up

Four different words are written on poster board or flip charts. The words are:

Structure.

Relationship.

Meaning.

Action.

Ask the participants to go stand near the word that they most relate to. When everyone has selected a word ask each group to discuss among themselves why they chose the word they did and how that word relates to the way they prefer to work. After several minutes of discussion ask each team to report what they came up with.

Equipment

4 signs with the 4 words.

Time

20 minutes.

Debriefing

If you have taken the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) or some other personality inventory, it may be apparent that the four words relate to four different ways of relating to the world. For some people order and structure are important parts of how they live their lives. As a reflection of this inclination they often chose careers in organizations like the armed forces. For others developing and maintaining relationships is their primary focus. Frequently they choose careers in training or sales. There are people who make analyzing and understanding the nature of things a priority. They are attracted to fields like engineering and science. Others with a just-do-it attitude are more focused on action. People who drive race cars have this orientation.

Even if the group is unfamiliar with any of the many topological indicators on the market, the four words can stimulate a useful discussion about the different ways people approach work. To paraphrase an old saying, diversity is more than skin deep. Ask:

Was anyone surprised by the preferences expressed by the other groups?

Which group do you work best with? Why?

Why did you choose the word you did?

How does this choice reflect the way you work or deal with others?

Which group do you find the most challenging to work with. Why?

What questions would you would like to ask the other groups to help you better understand the way they think?

It is tempting to believe others are just imperfect versions of ourselves. But people act differently, in ways we couldn't expect or predict, because they think differently. When you can understand where the other person is coming from and why she acts the way she does, it is easier not to take difficult differences so personally.

ACTIVITY

30

Culture Shock

Theme

Developing cross-cultural awareness.

Task

Attend a gathering and interact with people from different cultures.

Set-Up

Divide the group into 4 teams. For example, a team of 12 members would have 4 subteams with 3 people per team. Talk to the teams separately, out of earshot of each other, and give them their assignment. Each team has a different cultural norm and no awareness that the rest of the world does not share this norm.

In fact, the norm is so ingrained in their societies that they are hardly aware of it themselves. The different norms are:

- One group waits 7 seconds before responding to any question, no matter how trivial. Answering any sooner is considered very impolite.
- One group has a personal space of 6 inches when engaged in a conversation with another person. Standing more than 6 inches away when talking to someone indicates a lack of respect.
- One group requires a personal space of 4 feet for any personal conversation. Maintaining that space is a sign of good breeding.
- One group never looks at the face of a person they are conversing with. Looking at someone's feet shows you accept them.

Once they know their cultures the teams mingle with each other and converse about a common topic chosen by the trainer. Let the interactions go on for 5 or 10 minutes or till the energy starts to ebb. If you have a large group make up other categories. For example, one group could be the “sunshine blowers” while the another might be the “doubting Thomases.”

Debriefing

This exercise raises awareness of the impact of cultural differences and the validity of that well-known dictum: Seek first to understand. Have the members circle up by their assigned groups and ask questions such as:

What was it like to talk to someone who waits 7 seconds before responding?

What was it like to wait 7 seconds before responding to a question?

What did you notice?

How did you react?

What do we assume when people act in ways we do not understand?

Personal Notes

Talk to someone who has lived overseas and you can almost always count on a good story or two. Anyone who has lived in another culture has usually experienced an incongruity, usually a humorous one. One classic example is the Arab and the Englishman who had dramatically different norms for personal space. When they met to have a conversation the Arab practically chased the Englishman around the room as he tried to close the gap between them. Each was irritated by the other's behavior but neither was sure why.

More than ever America is the proverbial melting pot. However, nowadays the pot appears to be on low heat. The cultural diversity in many work groups makes the Tower of Babel look like a gathering of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Culture Shock provides an opportunity to look at how cultural norms and assumptions affect our ability to communicate. The power of nonverbals is such that no matter what we say, the message sent may not be the message received if “how” we send the message is ignored.

ACTIVITY

31

Back-to-Back

Theme

Coaching for results.

Task

Help your partner draw a picture like the one you have, without being able to see it.

Set-Up

Ask team members to pair up and sit back to back. One member is given a pad and pen, the other a piece of paper with a figure drawn on it. The person with the paper is the coach who guides his partner in drawing the figure without letting him see the original.

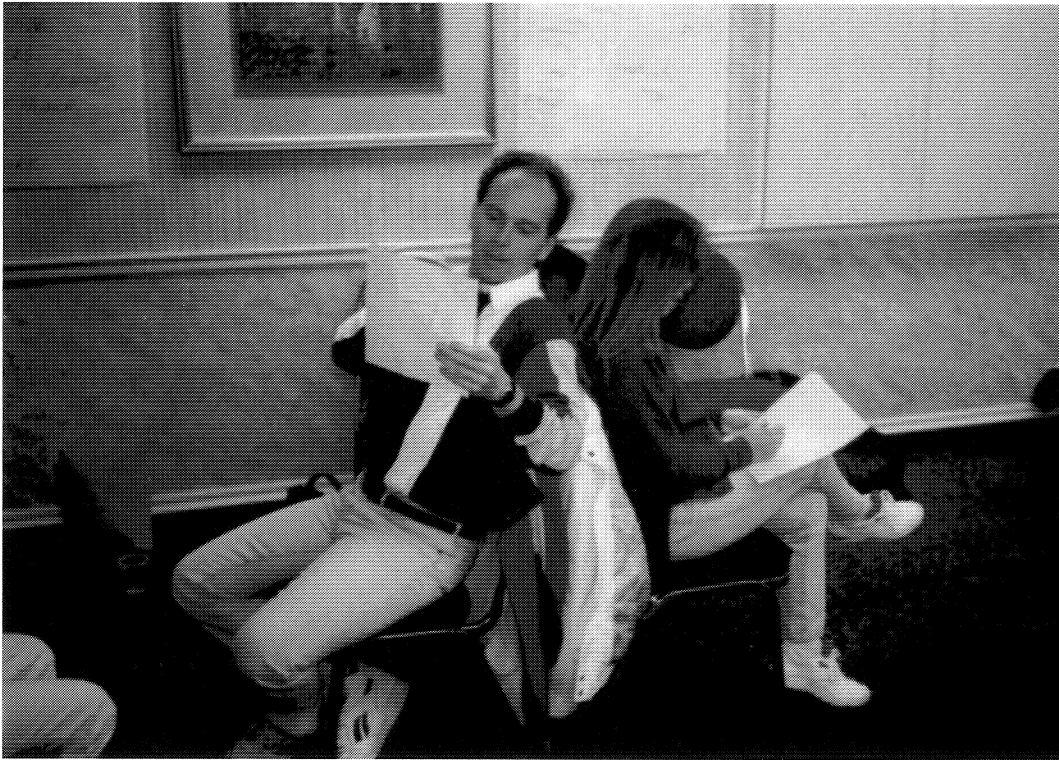
The language the coach uses can include symbols and metaphors but not a geometrical description of the figures. For example, if you are using a figure of a square with a circle through it, do not use the words “square” or “circle” as you explain how to draw the figure. Instead use words like box or orange-shaped. When the time is up let the pairs compare what was produced to the original drawing and discuss the results. If appropriate, have the pairs switch roles and try their hand at a new drawing.

Equipment

Paper.

Felt-tip pens.

One drawing—You can copy the one provided or make up your own. It's best to keep it simple.

**Time**

About 10–15 minutes per drawing. The time allowed for the second round should be less than the first.

Transfer of Learning

This exercise emphasizes some of the challenges in communicating a vision. The difference between what one person says and what the other person hears is graphically and often dramatically represented. This exercise also brings out the challenge of giving directions. No matter how clear they are to the giver, if the directions are not clear to the person receiving them, the results will be something other than what was desired. Being concise and checking for understanding are two of the keys to success. Good coaches know the importance of giving step-by-step directions and lots of encouragement.

Debriefing questions include:

What did your partner say that helped you draw the figure?

What did you ask or tell your partner that helped you get the information you needed to draw the figure?

Is there any situation at work where communication is critical yet it is not possible to do it face-to-face? How can you make sure you get the results you want?

When giving direction to an employee, how do you check for understanding?

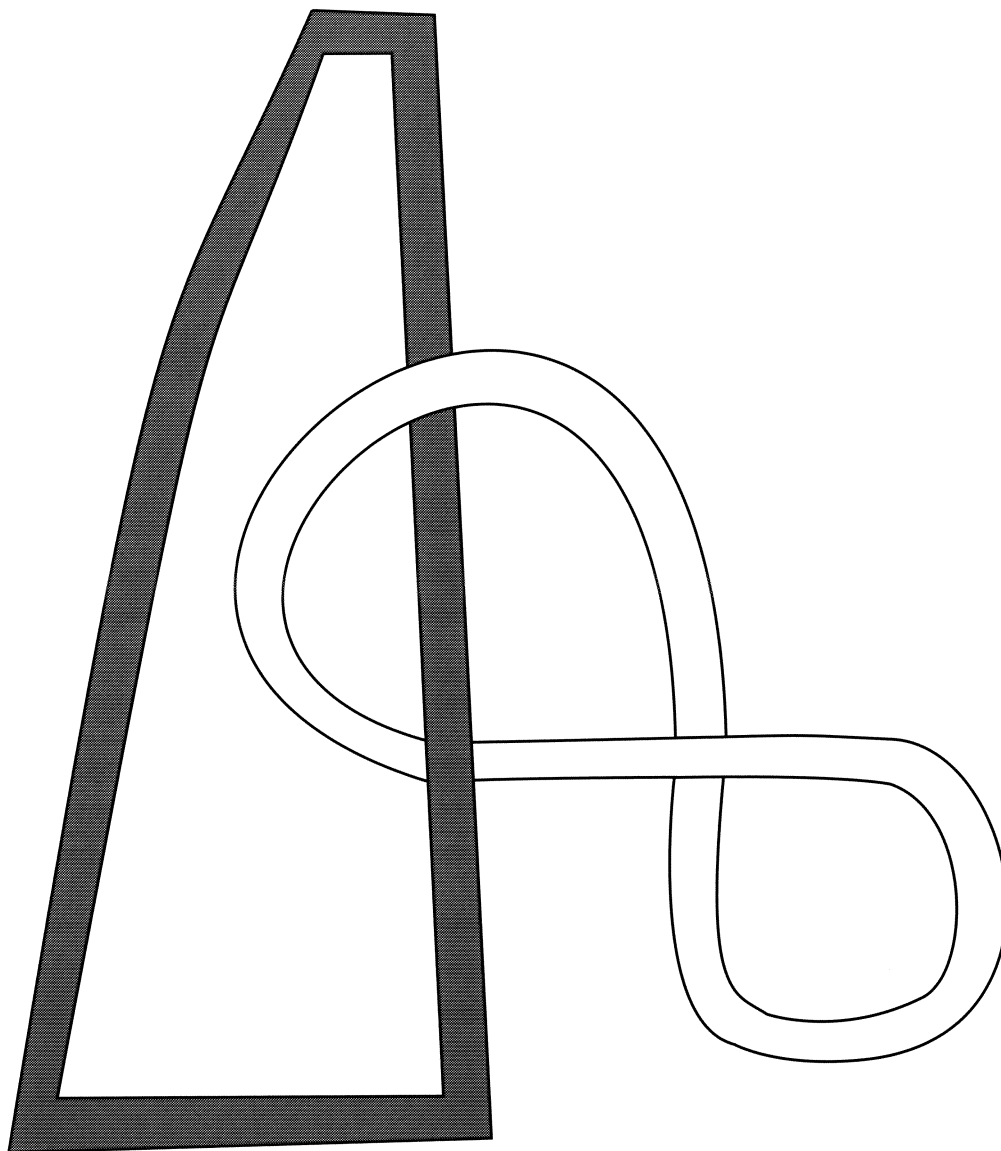
What are the characteristics of a good coach?

Personal Note

Some pairs will do a beautiful job of reproducing the drawing. A few will not. Since people often compare themselves with others, the pairs that had trouble reproducing the drawing may feel a bit disheartened. This is a good time to focus on the lessons learned. If the pairs who came up short learned something from the exercise, then they had a significant success no matter what their drawings looked like.

Team Builder

Back-to-Back Drawing



ACTIVITY

32

Persuasion

Theme

Practicing the art of persuasion.

Task

Persuade a teammate to come back into a room.

Set-Up

Ask half of the team to go out of the room and wait in the hall or another room. If you are outdoors ask them to move out of earshot of the rest of group. Tell the group in the room that their job is to go and persuade the group outside the room to come back in. They cannot use any physical force or threat, real or make-believe.

Tell the group in the hall their job is to be fair and to go back into the room when they find themselves sincerely persuaded by the other group. Tell both the groups the key words for this exercise are fairness and sincerity.

Time

15–20 minutes. Watch people. When the energy ebbs or the participants are deadlocked, bring everyone back in the room.

Debriefing

How did the subgroups plan their strategy? Did they plan at all?

Did the groups work as groups or in pairs?

What was done or said that motivated people to do what they were asked?

What was said or done that failed to motivate people to do what they were asked?

What values or beliefs did these actions reflect?

Personal Notes

Given the simple nature of the task it seems logical that this exercise would be over in less than a minute. Do not be surprised if that is not the case. Some groups never complete the task even when the time is extended.

Despite the emphasis on fairness and sincerity in the initial instructions, the persuaders in one group saw the task as a competition. They thought they won if the others returned to the room. Even more important, they believed the people outside the room saw the task the same way; returning to the room would somehow be a defeat. Given this win/lose scenario the only way to win would be through trickery. They hatched a complicated scheme and proceeded to try to outwit their "rivals." The outsiders, however, sensed a hidden agenda and refused to budge.

During the debriefing the two groups compared goals. Some of the outsiders said they would have come back in the room if they had been asked to. Other outsiders said they saw the exercise as a competition. So they would have resisted any request had one been made. Together the team realized that without trust even the simplest of tasks can become terribly difficult.

This exercise points out that people are more likely to be persuaded to do something when they are first asked what would motivate them. As obvious as this might be, many persuaders instead try to overwhelm their target audience with inducements. Asking a few simple questions to find out what people want is the more effective approach. Anyone who wants to develop their motivation or selling skills will find this activity instructive.

ACTIVITY

33

Minefield

Theme

Communication reduces missteps.

Task

Verbally guide your blindfolded partner through a danger zone.

Set-Up

Form the team into pairs. One person will cross the minefield. The other will guide her by voice. The minefield is a large circle on the ground about 30 feet in diameter marked off with a rope. Inside are any number of objects: LEGO blocks, mousetraps, carpet squares, and other items that represent the mines.

After the pairs plan their communications have them position themselves on opposite sides of the circle. At the starting signal each guide verbally directs her blindfolded partner through the minefield to the opposite side.

If you want to bring out the issues of dealing with change do the following: Halfway through the activity announce that a major reorganization has occurred. Shift the guides on the outside of the circle 90 degrees to the right or to the left around the circle. Or take it a step further and change everyone's guides.

Conditions

- The words left/right/stop/go are no longer in the team's vocabulary.
- The person crossing the circle wears a blindfold. If she steps on one of the "land mines" she has to return to the starting point for another try.
- Unless there is a safety reason, only blindfolded people enter the circle.

Time

15–20 minutes is enough for most teams.

Equipment

Rope or surveyor's tape.

Blindfolds.

30 or more assorted objects such as LEGO blocks, carpet squares, mouse traps, rubber chickens, rubber snakes.

Safety

Blindfolded people should keep their “bumpers” (hands) up as they cross the circle.

Transfer of Learning

Teams that are geographically dispersed usually spend a lot of time on the telephone with each other. This exercise will help them make some useful connections to the workplace. Salespeople who spend much of their time talking to customers, subcontractors, and support staff on the phone will also discover a number of parallels to reflect on. Gather the team in a small circle and ask:

What did your partner do or say that helped you deal with the unknown?

What did your partner do or say that helped you deal with the unexpected?

What are the “land mines” in your organization?

What can you do to help each other avoid them?

If you step on one, what can you do to help each other recover?

What are some ways to deal with unexpected change?

ACTIVITY

34

Cross-Cultural Sherpa Walk

Theme

Dealing with ambiguity.

Task

Conduct a blind trust walk using a new language. (Use this activity in groups whose level of trust has been built.)

Set-Up

This event is similar to the Sherpa version of the blind trust walk except for the issue of language. Two team members are designated as “guides” for the rest of the group. The two members are shown the potential route selected by the trainer that includes a few obstacles to negotiate.

The guides, off by themselves, are given a few minutes to make up a language consisting of several words (the local dialect isn’t very complex), which they will teach to the rest of their team. Using just this language (usually a few words that mean stop and go, left and right), they will guide the blindfolded team along the chosen route. Because locals would take offense if any other language was spoken, only the local language can be used by the team. Once the team learns the language they put on their blindfolds and follow the guides.

Scenario

Your team is touring a foreign country when your bus breaks down. You can reach your destination after a short walk but first you must traverse the

security zone of a militarily sensitive area. The natives are highly suspicious of foreigners. After a number of heated phone calls to the capital city the authorities have agreed to let you traverse the area instead of waiting several days for the bus to be repaired. However, they have set two conditions: Everyone in your group must wear blindfolds and speak only in the local dialect while they are traversing the sensitive area.

Equipment

Blindfolds.

Time

20–30 minutes.

Safety

Spot the team members, especially when they come to an obstacle like crossing a log or going through a doorway.

Transfer of Learning

An interesting parallel can be drawn to what it is like to operate in an environment where you have little mastery of the situation, such as a major change or reorganization. Ask the group:

What frustrations or stresses did you experience?

How did you deal with those frustrations?

What was it like to have to rely on others whom you had difficulty communicating with?

How is being led in the dark with little information like a major reorganization?

How might you deal with it? What questions would you ask?

What did the guides do to communicate (verbally or nonverbally) the fact that you could trust them?

How could trust be built back in the office when you have to rely on others during a stressful situation?



PROBLEM-SOLVING INITIATIVES

Team problem-solving initiatives are conducted after group members have loosened up with several ground games or icebreakers, established a degree of trust through trust-building activities, and developed a “contract” or agreement about the norms of the team. As cohesion and confidence build within the team more challenging problem-solving initiatives are conducted.

The trainer adjusts the difficulty and time allowed for each initiative to fit the size, capability, and stage of development of an individual team. If the team fails to complete an initiative when “time” is called, you can allow them to negotiate for the additional time they think they need.

After each initiative the team reflects on how they worked together. The three questions mentioned in the section on debriefing are worth repeating. They are:

- What worked?
- What didn’t work?
- What do you want to do differently?

Based on the answers to these questions the team makes adjustments that will improve its productivity when it goes on to the next activity. The activities presented in this section work best with small groups of 10 to 12 members.

ACTIVITY

35

Group Juggle

This exercise is an engaging way to learn the names of the team members. The group stands in the usual circle. A Kush Ball, beanbag, or similar device that is soft and throwable is tossed around from person to person till a sequence is established.

Everyone gets the ball once. Only the first person to toss the ball gets it twice. The person about to toss the ball calls out his or her name and the name of the person the ball is going to. After the first round ask the team if they think they can toss the ball in exactly the same sequence. Some doubt will be expressed but it will become apparent that the task is easily done if each person can remember who they tossed the ball to.

Send the ball on another round. The fun starts as more balls, rubber frogs, and plastic heads are tossed into the fray. As the bric-a-brac fills the air, the biggest challenge becomes catching a ball between bursts of laughter.



Continuous Improvement

A follow-up to Group Juggle is to time the number of seconds it takes the group to move one ball around the circle in the same sequence. Just about everyone has heard of Total Quality Management (TQM) (or Demming's lemmings according to disbelievers). A TQM approach to continuous improvement of a process is to establish a baseline. The baseline for moving the ball around the circle is time. The only rule the team has is to keep the same sequence. After the initial time has been established, challenge the group to do it faster.

Throwing the ball harder may lead to incremental improvement, but it may also result in more dropped balls. Teams that drop their time dramatically are the ones that also drop their self-limiting assumptions.

By thinking "outside the box" a team can take a task that took 8 or 9 seconds and complete it in half a second. This activity illustrates one of the key concepts of teamwork: interdependence. You are depending on others so that you can do your job, and others are depending on you so that they can do their jobs. Ask questions that bring out the learning process, such as:

How was the dramatic improvement in productivity achieved?

What keeps a team from this kind of improvement?

What helps a team achieve greater productivity in any area of work?

What is it like to receive a good toss from another team member? What is a good or bad toss back at the workplace?

ACTIVITY

37

Raft

Theme

Cooperative problem solving.

Task

The entire team must stand together on a small board without anyone touching the ground.

Set-Up

Raft is a good introductory initiative that provides both laughs and insights. Depending on the size of the group, a piece of tarp or plywood is placed on the ground and designated the raft. The team is told that their cruise ship hit a reef and they had to abandon ship.

A number of large and hungry sharks are expected very soon. The group must get everyone aboard the raft so they can be rescued by a Coast Guard helicopter. The helicopter can only pick them up if no one touches the ocean (ground) for at least 10 seconds.

If the first attempt is easy for the team, let them know that the helicopter had to fly back for repairs. Fold one or more of the corners of the tarp or use a smaller piece of plywood and challenge the team to try again.

Time

Since this is usually one of the first activities for the team, there is no time limit.



Equipment

You can start with a 3' × 3' piece of tarp and simply fold it into smaller sections to increase the challenge level. Carpet pieces also work well. Plywood is less portable but adds more “pizzazz” to the problem.

A 20" × 20" piece of 3/4" plywood is a good challenge for a group of 8 to 10 adults. For a larger group or an easier challenge, start with a piece that is 23" × 23". You can elevate the plywood by nailing four sections of 2" × 4" studs to the bottom.

Safety

- The team will need to be spotted by the trainer since it could collapse on the side that is unbalanced.
- It is safer not to let anyone ride on another person's shoulders or back.
- Start the day with a few stretching exercises before you conduct this activity.

Transfer of Learning

Watch to see if the team organizes itself before jumping into the task. Questions include:

Was there a plan that people understood and followed or was it a free-for-all of individual effort?

Were various options tested or at least talked about?

Did the team step back from the task and consider the best approach?

How was the solution discovered?

Did people work with a partner of equal size and weight or did they just hold on as best they could?

Were people sensitive to quality or were feet touching the floor during the 10-second count-off?

Did the team celebrate the successful accomplishment of the task?

Were the contributions of team members recognized?

Personal Note

I often do this activity after Continuous Improvement. After enjoying their initial success most teams are eager for another victory. The Raft works well indoors or outside. You can continue to build the team's confidence by starting with a large piece of plywood or tarp. A team success, no matter how small, motivates people to get aboard and commit to the common effort. As you up the level of difficulty by using a smaller board, allow the team the time they need to come up with the solution. Like many problems in life the solution is counterintuitive: Team members need to counterbalance each other by leaning out from the center instead of inward.

ACTIVITY

38

Keypunch

Theme

Continuous improvement.

Task

Touch in sequence items numbered 1 to 30.

Set-Up

The team is briefed at a line drawn 30 feet from the Keypunch. They can see an area marked by a rectangle about 20 feet long and 12 feet wide. Inside, scattered at random, are 30 placemats numbered from 1 to 30. The team has 5 tries or 20 minutes, whichever comes first, to touch each mat in sequence. The goal is to touch all the mats and return to the starting line in the least possible time.

Scenario

A new computer network has been installed in your organization. Because of its complexity, booting up the system is not easy. The information systems manager has asked your team to develop a start-up procedure that will take the least possible time.

Conditions

- When the team crosses the line the time starts. The time stops when the entire team returns across the line.



- There is no talking when the team is across the line.
- If more than one team member is in the rectangle at any one time a penalty of 10 seconds is added to the team's time.
- If the mats are touched out of sequence a penalty of 10 seconds is added to the team's overall time.

Time

20 minutes or 5 tries, whichever comes first.

Ask the team to keep track of its time and any penalties incurred on each try. This will help you avoid the role of quality police.

Equipment

30 plastic mats about the size of placemats, numbered 1 to 30.

Surveyor's tape or rope—enough for a 12' × 20' rectangle.

Stopwatch.

Transfer of Learning

Teams love to compete. In this exercise they can compete against the clock. The first try establishes the baseline.

Ask the team questions like:

How much did the team improve on its time?

What adjustments did the team make in its approach to the task?

When the restraint to talking was lifted (you can do this on the second or third try) did the members communicate more?

Did the team add in the penalties to its time or did they hope that the errors were not noticed by the trainer? (Is quality built-in or added on?)

Like any project a team might be assigned to, there is the trade-off of planning versus just doing it. How much time did it take for the team to get organized?

Was time spent getting organized through trial and error or was it spent in planning? Which is a better approach?

Time is a resource. How wisely did the team use its resource?

ACTIVITY

39

Airmail

Theme

Bridging the communication/supply gap.

Task

Deliver as many supplies as possible to another group by air.

Set-Up

Unlike most of the activities in this book, Airmail is an outdoor exercise best done in warm weather.

One group in an isolated area with no access roads is in need of supplies. The only way to get supplies to them is by air. Ask the team to divide into two groups.

Take one group to a “drop zone” that is out of sight of the other group. Give the “sending” group the equipment and the balloons.

It is up to the two groups to figure out how to send and receive the supplies. The sending group can use the markers to put messages on the balloons. Offer the opportunity for a 5-minute planning session between representatives of the two groups at the beginning of the activity.

Conditions

- The receiving group can only receive the supplies if they are safely caught with the sheet. The towels are included in case that does not happen.
- Except for an initial “heads up” when launching a balloon, there is no other means of communication between the two groups.

Time

20–30 minutes.

Equipment

20–30 water balloons filled with water.

Magic markers.

2 towels.

1 sheet.

1 large slingshot (you can make one out of surgical tubing, two handles, and padding).

Safety

It takes 3 people to fire the slingshot: 2 to hold either end and 1 to pull the balloon back. Remind the “slingshooters” not to let anyone get in front of the device when it is being fired. The “drop zone” must be free of people passing by.

Transfer of Learning

For some groups this may turn out just to be a way to cool down and have fun on a hot day. Others may find that some interesting points for discussion were raised by the reliance of one group upon the other.

What did the two groups do to make the task easier for each other?

How did they increase the rate of successful balloon/information transfer?

In what ways does this activity parallel how we transfer information to another department back at the workplace?

ACTIVITY

40

Moonwalk

Theme

Progress through communication.

Task

Traverse a maze of contiguous circles as a group.

Set-Up

Place 8 or more plastic hula hoops on the ground next to each other. The hoops can be almost touching or up to a foot apart. Assemble the team in a tight group on one side of the hoops. Using large rubber bands connect the members to each other by their ankles so that when one person moves everyone has to move.

Conditions

- The team must traverse from one loop to the next without stepping outside the loops.
- The team must determine what route it will follow in moving from hoop to hoop.
- Penalties could be assessed (loss of time, starting over, muting) for stepping outside the loops.

Time

10–20 minutes.

Equipment

8 or more hula hoops.

Large, heavy-duty rubber bands.

Safety

- Do not tie ankles together with bandannas. They do not provide enough give if someone falls down.
- Be ready to spot the group in case someone does lose balance.

Transfer of Learning

The key to this activity is communication, both verbal and nonverbal. Team members need to inform each other when they get ready to make a move; otherwise some could lose their balance. Agreement on a common direction is also essential. The team will make little progress if the members try to go in different directions. These and other parallels to workplace dynamics can provide plenty of grist for the group debriefing.

Questions to ask include:

How did the team coordinate its movement?

How did the team decide which circle to move into?

What was it like to be in the front, back, or center?

What was frustrating about this activity? Why?

Does the team ever get bogged down in this way back at the workplace?

Balance Beam

Theme

The leadership perspective.

Task

Balance the entire team on a plank that is balanced on a cinder block.

Set-Up

Stand on the plank while you brief the team. Show them how a slight shift in weight turns the plank into a see-saw so that either end touches the ground. After 10 minutes of planning, the team must mount the plank between the “V” marked on the ground and dismount it in the same place without either end of the plank touching the ground.

Give the team two tries. The first try can be just for practice. On the second try put an egg under each end and challenge the team to go for zero defects.

Conditions

- When the 10 minutes of planning time are up or when the team crosses the starting line, there is no talking.
- The team can only mount and dismount between the inverted “V” marked on the ground in front of the cinder block.
- The entire team must be on the plank for at least five seconds before beginning to dismount.
- The task is complete when the entire team has gotten off the plank.



- The fewer the touches of the plank to the ground the higher the quality of work.

Time

10 minutes to plan, 15 minutes to do the task.

Equipment

2 10' × 2" × 8" planks taped together with duct tape.

1 cinder block.

Surveyor's tape.

Safety

- This activity should be done outdoors in a level, soft grassy area. A 10' board can hold 12 or 13 average-size adults.
- Spot the team. Teams of older, less athletic participants should have at least two spotters.
- Caution people that if they are about to lose their balance they should simply step off the plank. Locking one's legs and holding on desperately will pull others off the board.
- Jumping off is not a good idea since that could spin the board and cause others to fall off.

Transfer of Learning

More than most initiatives, this activity calls for leadership to emerge in the team. As the team members mount the board they cannot see how they should move toward either end to keep the board balanced. One member needs to direct the others using hand and arm signals.

Highlight this and other issues by asking:

How did the team organize itself for the task?

Did the members pair up by size and weight?

Additional Questions

Did leadership emerge?

What did the leader do that led to success?

Did the team celebrate too early?

It sometimes happens that everyone applauds and jumps off the plank just after the last person gets on—forgetting that part of the task is to dismount the plank without either end touching the ground. If this happens it's an opportune time for the team to discuss the concept of beginning a project with the end in mind.

How focused was the team on not breaking any eggs?

How did that level of focus affect the outcome?

What are the "eggs" back at your workplace?

Personal Notes

More than once it has been mentioned in this book that how a team works in the office will be replicated on the course. A common complaint in one organization was the tendency of management to micromanage. During a

program a team leader from that organization was guiding his team on and then off the beam. A couple of people had dismounted and everything was, so far, going well; no eggs had been broken and a big success was within reach.

The leader noticed that some people needed extra help stepping down. He moved closer to lend a hand and stayed there as each person dismounted. A team member a few steps behind him could see that no one was guiding the remaining members on the board. The edges on either end began to see-saw. He tried to warn the team leader, but since talking was not allowed and the leader's back was to him he soon gave up in frustration. Before the last two people managed to step down, the eggs were history.

During the debriefing it was made clear that the team achieved the best results when management provided guidance based on the big picture. Stepping in to micromanage, even with the best of intentions, was not always the best response if no one was tending the overall direction of the team. Both management and the team members realized they needed to improve the ways they gave each other information and feedback.

ACTIVITY

42

Trolley

Theme

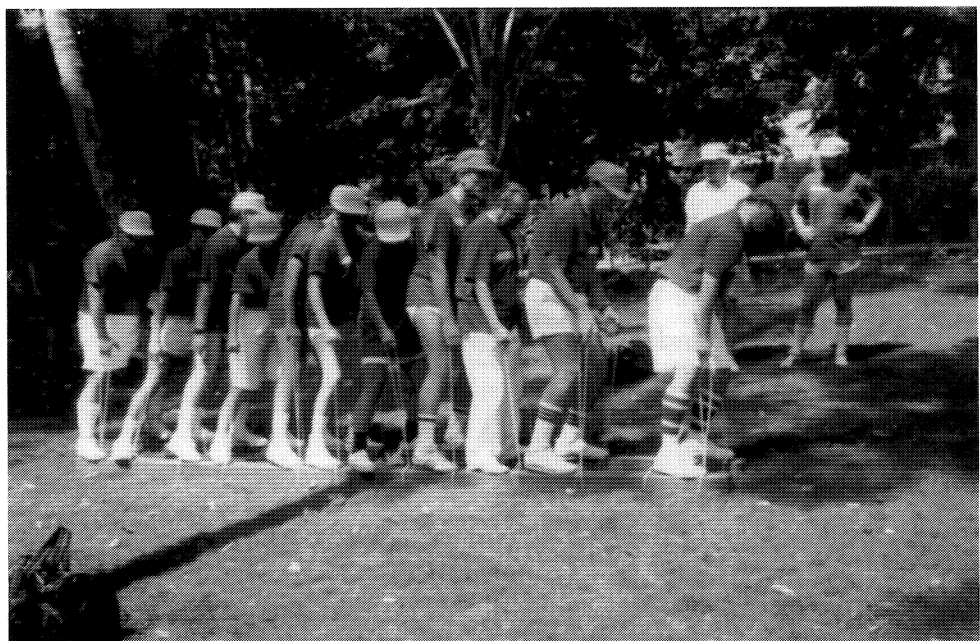
Matching resources and ideas to develop a solution.

Task

Assemble a device and use it to move everyone across a toxic area.

Set-Up

The team needs to cross to the other side of a swamp that is not passable by foot. Using the materials provided in their emergency transporter kit the team members must build a device that will carry everyone across the toxic area in one trip without touching the ground.



The materials in the kit are unassembled and it is up to the team to figure out how to put the device together. Tell the team their survival transporter was built by the lowest bidder so “some assembly” is required. Pack a “red herring” in the kit to raise questions.

Conditions

- No tying feet to the boards (if someone tripped it could result in a twisted ankle).
- No picking up the boards with hands once the team has begun the crossing.
- No using the boards as a bridge or as a walkway.
- If you touch the ground during the crossing it could result in a grievous injury. Potential consequences include blinding, muting, or having to remount the boards backwards.

Solution

After inventorying their resources most teams will take the ropes and tie them on the boards. Each member should have a set of ropes to hold on to, although it is possible to do the activity with just a few ropes. Knots are not needed since the weight of a person's foot on the ropes will keep the rope attached to the board. One person in the rear should act as the coxswain and call cadence.

Time

If this is the team's first problem-solving activity it may be best not to time it. If the team has already had several successes, 20–30 minutes is a suitable challenge.

Equipment

2 2" × 6" × 12' wood boards.

10 pairs of thick cord each 7 feet long.

Surveyor's tape to mark the boundaries of the swamp.

“Red herrings” like bolts and pulleys.

Safety

- Conduct the activity on flat ground.
- Be ready to spot the people in front. They are likely to fall forward if the boards come to a sudden stop.

- Do not allow anyone to tie his or her feet to the boards.
- Watch out for other people when picking up and moving the boards.

Variation

To reduce the problem-solving component drill twelve equally spaced holes in each board. Fasten a rope to each hole by putting it through the hole and tying a knot in the end. Enlarge the bottom part of the hole so the knot does not tilt the board while it is on the ground. This version is the traditional Trolley or Ski Out that most ropes course trainers are familiar with.

Debriefing Questions

There are two parts to this problem—building the transport and then using it. Watch how the team organizes itself for each task. Debriefing questions include:

- Did the team inventory all its resources before tackling the problem?
- Did one or two people start putting things together before others really knew what was going on?
- Were all ideas and options heard and considered?
- Was there any testing of a prototype or practicing as a group before crossing the line?
- Did anyone coordinate the team's efforts? How critical was leadership to the team's success?
- What other roles did team members take on?
- Why did a person(s) fall off the boards?
- How did the team deal with setbacks?
- What was it like being in the front? In the middle? In the rear? Did you know what was going on?

Personal Note

One team found a powerful metaphor in the different perspectives the members had on the trolley. The people in the back didn't know what was going on because they could not see past the person in front of them. Progress was very slow and discontent high. Recent changes in the workplace had created a similar situation. The team realized that keeping people informed was important. However, they also agreed that if you cannot see what is going on, it is your responsibility to ask.

ACTIVITY

43

Group Grope

Theme

Paradigm shift and productivity.

Task

Find 3 objects as a group while blindfolded.

Set-Up

Ask the team to form a compact group. Show them the objects that it will be their job to find. Ask them to step a little closer to each other and then put on their blindfolds. Let them know before they put on their blindfolds that you will be running masking tape around the group several times.

Tell the team that the 3 objects they were just shown are within 30 feet of their location.

Each object is about the size, shape, and texture of something that can be held in one hand.

Without breaking the masking tape or removing the blindfolds, the team's job is to find the objects and identify what they are (for example, a plastic dinosaur).

Time

15–20 minutes: The trainer can act as timekeeper if requested to by the group.

Equipment

Masking tape.
3 small toys or other objects.
Blindfolds.

Safety

- Conduct the activity in an area where the ground is level and free of holes or rocks.
- Frame the activity in terms of challenge-by-choice to maintain psychological safety.
- Remind individuals wandering away from the group to keep their “bumpers” (hands) up.

Transfer of Learning

By leaving the taped circle the team can form a line and quickly sweep in a circle to find the objects. You may have to repeat the rule a few times about not breaking the tape, but at some point most groups realize that they do not all have to stay bunched up inside the tape. Notice the assumptions that drive how the group attempts to complete the task.

Were different ideas considered and evaluated or did the group slowly grope its way around the area?

Were rules followed that were never stated? Where did these rules come from?

Did the group realize that not breaking the tape did not mean they had to put up with an uncomfortable situation?

How often do our assumptions determine how we organize ourselves to perform a task?

What assumptions back in the workplace are keeping the team from the optimal approach?

What kind of breakthrough thinking is needed to find that optimal approach?

Variation

Instead of finding objects in the desk, just give the team the task of moving to another location. Time is scarce and the team needs to get there “*muuy pronto*.” Keep urging the team to move as fast as they can without breaking the tape. At some point the light bulb will go off and the team will remove the tape without breaking it. During the debriefing discuss how deadlines and time pressures affect the problem-solving process.

ACTIVITY

44

Blind Man's Cure

Theme

Thinking outside the circle.

Task

Retrieve an egg from the middle of a toxic area without touching the ground around it.

Set-Up

A large circle is marked off on the ground next to a tree. In the center is an egg of a very rare and very endangered species. Because the area in the circle is toxic no one can enter it unless they are blindfolded and wearing a helmet. No person or thing (besides the egg) can touch the ground inside the circle.

A climbing rope, webbing, blindfold, and helmet are lying nearby. The team has 20 minutes to retrieve the egg before it is destroyed by fumes.

Equipment

Climbing rope.

15 feet of webbing.

Blindfold.

Egg (a cup of water or a rubber frog also works).

Surveyor's tape (enough for a 15' diameter circle).

Climber's helmet.

**Time**

20 minutes, depending on the group.

Conditions

- Anything that touches the ground inside the circle will be weakened or destroyed.
- Anyone who touches the ground inside the circle will suffer a grievous injury.
- Because of the toxic fumes people who go inside the circle must wear a blindfold to protect their eyes and a helmet to protect their head.
- Use only the resources provided.

- Only the first 6' of any tree can be used by the team. Branches overhead cannot be used.

Safety

- The person transported on the ropes must be spotted when she is off the ground.
- The trainer always checks the knots tied by the team to make sure they will hold.
- The transported person is never much more than a foot or two off the ground.
- This activity could be too much of a strain for a team of fewer than 10 members, especially if the members are not physically fit. Groups of 12 or more are better able to handle the weight.
- Watch out for wet or slippery ground.

Transfer of Learning

This activity illustrates the importance of brainstorming ideas, selecting a good one, and testing it out. The first solution most teams hit upon, tying the rope to the tree and sending a person out hand-over-hand, is not the best.

Some questions to ask include:

How did the team conduct brainstorming?

Did some people jump into setting up the rope while others were still trying to plan?

Was everyone with an idea heard from?

Were all ideas considered?

How was the approach used selected?

Did the team practice its solution before implementation?

Was any thought given during planning about how to guide the blindfolded person so she could pick up the egg without touching the ground?

What was it like as the blindfolded person to rely totally on others?

Could the team have done this task without everyone's full participation?

Personal Notes

This activity is an excellent confidence builder. Just about every group will save the egg one way or another. For larger groups it can bring up issues around communication and coordination. The people at the back of the

rope will not know what is going on or how their work is affecting teammates near the egg unless someone keeps them informed. Directing the person with the blindfold on is also an essential task. This exercise draws attention to a number of points about the importance of keeping each other informed back at the workplace. Any major project involves some risk, especially for the person taking the lead. The insight that the quality of support in a team is dependent on the quality of communication may be common sense, but seldom is it common practice.

ACTIVITY

45

Canyon Crossing

Theme

Problem solving under pressure.

Task

Move the team from one side of an impassable area to the other by constructing a bridge.

Set-Up

In an area known for the presence of quicksand, poisonous muck, acid spills, or any combination of the above, six boulders masquerading as cinder blocks are scattered about. The boulders happen to be in an alignment that allows them to be used as platforms for the bridging materials located nearby. The task of the team is to move itself from one side of this dangerous area to the other by building a bridge. The team has to move quickly because hostile locals are expected to show up soon.

Conditions

- Touching the toxic muck could blind, maim, or otherwise injure a person.
- Difficulties such as time penalties could result if one of the planks touches the muck (ground). For example, a board that touches is damaged and has to be dried out for a minute before being used again.
- All three boards used in building the bridge must be brought across to the other side with the team. (Otherwise the hostile locals will come right after you.)

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- The cinder blocks have been there since the Jurassic Period and they cannot be moved by the team.
- Use only the materials provided.

Time

15–20 minutes for planning and execution.

Equipment

2 2" × 6" × 10' wooden planks.

1 2" × 6" × 6' plank.

6 cinder blocks.

Rope or surveyor's tape.

Safety

- Spot the participants as they make the crossing or as they move the boards around.
- Advise everyone to be careful with their fingers and backs as they pick up or lay down the boards on the cinder blocks.
- Some teams may need a rope to help them lift the boards without undue strain. Evaluate the capabilities of your group and provide one if needed.

Debriefing

The exercise calls for good planning as well as execution of the plan since the way the boards are deployed is critical to successfully completing the exercise.

Some questions to ask include:

What process did the team use to come up with a workable solution?

Who played the lead role(s) in solving this problem?

How did they convince others their solution would work?

How did the time pressure affect teamwork?

What were some of the attributes of teamwork displayed by the team?

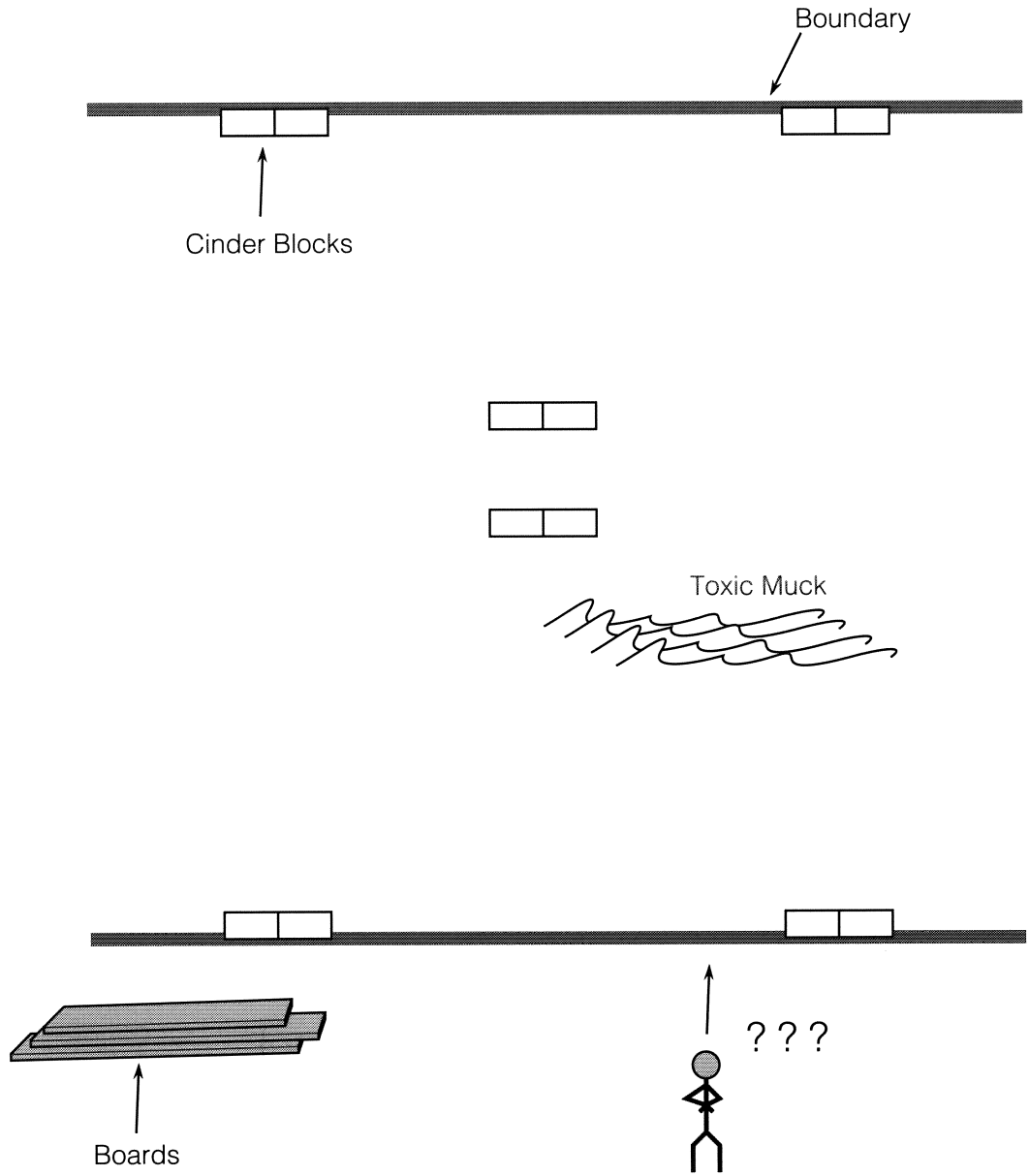
What are some attributes that should be strengthened?

Layout

The blocks are aligned as shown in the diagram on page 143. In this arrangement the longer boards will bridge the first two cinder blocks but they are just an inch or two shy of reaching the cinder blocks in the middle of the canyon. The trick is to use the two long boards in a “T” fashion. Building a “T” with the two long boards will enable the team to reach the cinder blocks in the middle. That’s where the shorter board comes in handy. It is placed over the two cinder blocks in the middle which are just three feet apart. This allows the longer boards to span diagonally the distances between the boundary cinder blocks and the middle cinder blocks. Voila, a bridge.

Team Builder

Canyon Crossing



ACTIVITY

46

Hot Stuff

Theme

Planning the work and working the plan.

Task

Pour the contents of one can into another.

Set-Up

Inside a radioactive zone (a circle with a 4' radius) sits a container of excess radioactive material looking suspiciously like a number 10 can half-filled with colored water. The radioactive material must be neutralized within a given period of time or the resulting meltdown could produce an ecological disaster.

In another containment area nearby sits the neutralization receptacle. The device for moving the radioactive container was built by the lowest bidder; consequently it has to be assembled by the team before it can be used. The only way to neutralize the radioactive material in the container is to construct the device and use it to move the can and pour the material into the neutralization receptacle. It is up to the team to figure out how to assemble the transport device. After clarifying questions are answered, hand the team the inner tube (or bungee cord) and the nylon cords and let them go to work.

Conditions

- People who step inside the containment area or come closer than 4' to the radioactive material will have awful things happen to them because of radiation exposure (blindness, muteness, loss of arm or leg, etc.).



- Everyone must help operate the device for it to work properly.
- Spilling any of the radioactive material could incapacitate some of the participants.
- The neutralization receptacle cannot be moved.
- Use only the materials provided.

Time

Anywhere from 15–30 minutes depending on the group and how you frame the problem.

Equipment

Suggested equipment includes:

- 2 number 10 cans.
- Bicycle inner tube or bungee cord (4' long).
- 12 nylon cords (4–5' long).
- Water bottle with extra water.
- 2 ropes each 60' long or surveyor's tape.
- Bottle of food coloring.

The number 10 cans can be procured from the back door of most restaurants. Large coffee cans also work well. The nylon cord and surveyor's tape can be found in any hardware store. Use the tape or the ropes to outline two circles and put a can in the center of each one. Put colored water in the can that should be moved. The water bottle is handy when you want to give the team a second chance if they spill the first load. The piece of bungee cord is more of a challenge than the inner tube in building the device since it is not as obvious that the bungee has a different function than the nylon cords.

Transfer of Learning

This exercise is a favorite of many trainers. It clearly illustrates how the team makes decisions and solves problems. The consequences of poor planning or fragmented teamwork are swift, sure, and hard to hide from.

Teams that lack the planning ethic will not resist the temptation to jump right into this activity. If they fail to gather everyone's input and ideas or make sure everyone understands and supports the plan, you can expect another "Three Mile Island." This offers the trainer the opportunity to make a powerful teaching point, that teams that "fail to plan, plan to fail."

Constant communication is also essential to success in this problem. Most "cans" get dropped because the team members do not keep visual or verbal contact with each other. Watch how the team plans, makes decisions, and performs.

Debriefing questions include:

Did the team jump right into the task without considering different options (the ready, fire, aim approach)?

Did the team practice before it implemented? Were different ideas tested?

Did the team check out the route from one can to the other?

What adjustments were made as the team tried to do the task?

Were all the resources provided used effectively?

Did every member have an opportunity to voice ideas or opinions?

Were all ideas voiced by the different team members really considered? Did everyone understand and support the plan?

How were decisions made? By consensus, by an expert, or by the most verbal person in the group?

Did the team show attention to detail and time?

Did the team practice quality control or were they careless about stepping into the radioactive zone? (Keep a few blindfolds handy for those that do misstep.)

Did someone take a directive role during the crucial stages of transport and pouring of the can?

Variations

Instead of outlining two circles, put the receptacle next to the first container. Give the team an assembled device with the cords already attached to the inner tube. Both actions make the exercise easier to solve.

To make the exercise harder put the second circle out of sight of the first one. Put some obstacles in the way of getting to the can. For example, place the second circle next to a wall, between trees, or near a picnic table. Observe whether the team reconnoiters the route and makes plans for dealing with the obstacles.

Have two radioactive containers in two different circles, two devices, and one receptacle. Require that both containers be poured into the receptacle at the same time. Observe for the following: Did the team form subteams? Did the subteams share information and ideas? Did someone coordinate the efforts of the two teams?

If you are conducting the activity indoors, use hard candy instead of water as the radioactive material. Use chairs and desks as obstacles. Add a few “red herrings” to the materials provided for the task.

Personal Note

Skillful group problem solving is not always a function of formal education. One group was at a point in their development where they needed a “win.” Most of the members had advanced academic degrees, yet Hot Stuff had them stumped. Each member was good at intellectualizing and conceptualizing, but no one was good at listening and building on each other’s ideas. The more they talked the more they were stuck in that hole dug with words—analysis paralysis. As time ran out the possibility of “failure” looked like a certainty. In desperation, one of the members commanded everyone to be silent. Clutching their cords the members mutely looked at each other for a very long minute. Somehow, guiding each other with looks instead of words, the group spontaneously attempted one last time to pour the contents of the can into the receptacle. To their surprise (and the relief of the trainer), they were successful.

ACTIVITY

47

Traffic Jam

Theme

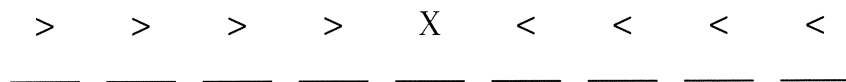
Problem solving; the cognitive versus the intuitive approach.

Task

Two sides trade sides.

Set-Up

Spaces are marked on the ground with chalk or tape or anything else that is handy. Small square pieces of wood or plastic placemats can also be used. The same number of spaces are created as there are team members, plus one more.



The team is divided into two sides. Both sides face the middle unoccupied space (X). The task for the two halves of the team is to move past each other so that all members on the right side of the empty space end up on the left side and vice versa.

The rules are:

- It is illegal for anyone to move around someone facing the same way or to move backwards around someone.
- You are permitted to step forward into an empty space or to step around someone who is facing you into an empty space.

Equipment

10–15 placemats or a roll of masking tape.

Time

Usually not timed.

Transfer of Learning

This is one of those events that groups either zip through or struggle with until they run out of time or patience. If there is a mathematician in the group or someone who is good at checkers the team is likely to complete the problem quickly. If they do complete the task quickly challenge them to do it again in the same amount of time. If the first time was beginner's luck the second try will take a while longer.

Questions to ponder include:

How did the group approach the problem?

Did they take a trial and error approach or did they discuss potential solutions first?

How did the group generate ideas that would lead to a solution?

How were the ideas implemented?

Did an "expert" take charge?

Did the team step back from the problem and work out the best approach using a model (such as coins or pebbles)?

ACTIVITY

48

Blindfold Polygon

Theme

Teamwork and leadership under challenging circumstances.

Task

Form the shape of a polygon.

Set-Up

In a suitably open area the team is blindfolded and given their mission. Somewhere nearby on the ground is a length of rope. Once they find the rope they must organize themselves into a structure with six equal sides.

Conditions

- The rope must be extended to its full length.
- Everyone must be touching the rope.
- Time checks can be obtained from the trainer.
- The corners should be equally distant from each other.

Equipment

1 length of rope, 60–100' in length. (Shorter ropes are used when space is limited.)

Blindfolds for all members.

**Time**

Approximately 20–40 minutes. Vary the time limit to fit the size of the group and its capabilities.

Safety

- The ground should be free of holes or other obstructions.
- Spot the team to keep them from walking into each other or into any obstacles.

Variations

There are a number of interesting twists that can be added to this activity. See Landing Zone for one variation that is fairly complex. If the team is looking for a challenge lay out two ropes and ask them to put a roof on top of a house—a square with a triangle on top. Or have them form the shape of the house with a slot for a garage and then park a car (another square) inside that slot.

Another variation brings out the pitfalls of giving direction in a hierarchy. The leader of the team can see, however, he is located some distance from the team. A messenger is appointed to carry the leader's commands to

the team. The messenger can only relay what the leader wants to tell the team and what the team replies to the leader. As the team is struggling with its task messages will fly back and forth; so the messenger needs to have some stamina. This variation sets the stage for a lively discussion about the role of headquarters and the field and the inherently different perspectives of the two.

A third variation is used by trainers to highlight the issues around information sharing, team goals, and roles. Before they put on their blindfolds each team member is given a 3" × 5" card with a specific instruction. Six of the cards have written on them the words, *You are a corner*. One card reads, *The resource for the task is on the ground*. Each of the other cards has a message such as: *You have 20 minutes to do the task*, *The resource must be fully extended*, *You are a team motivator*, *You are the timekeeper*, *You are the team skeptic*, *Your task is to form a six-sided figure*. *Everyone must have at least one hand on the resource*, and so forth. Immediately after the team reads the cards, the blindfolds go on and the problem solving begins.

Debriefing

The process of decision making is highlighted when the team is asked by the trainer if they are ready to take off the blindfolds and assess the results of their efforts. Some groups argue like the blind men did over the description of an elephant.

Bring out the lessons in leadership and communication by asking:

Have you been in similar situations where it was difficult to coordinate a common project because one member could not really tell what the other members were doing?

What team members were left out of the decision-making loop? How did that affect them or the task?

What was it like not to know what impact your actions (or the actions of others) were having?

How did you know your contribution, verbal or physical, was being responded to by the group?

What was the most frustrating part of this problem?

How did you deal with your frustration?

What adjustments did you make to get the job done?

How did you clarify roles and goals?

Was there a plan? Did everyone understand it? Did everyone support it?

ACTIVITY

49

Blind Object Assembly

Theme

Working in the dark.

Task

Reassemble large LEGOs in the original order.

Set-Up

Two sets of large plastic building blocks are placed inside a circle marked off with rope. Ask those who are willing to work wearing blindfolds to step inside the circle. Even up the groups so that the number inside and outside the circle are about the same.

Ask everyone to study the assembled blocks. They cannot take notes or draw a sketch. After they have committed the arrangement of the blocks to memory ask the people inside the circle to put on their blindfolds. Disassemble the blocks and scatter them around the circle. With limited help from their sighted teammates, it is up to the blindfolded people to put the blocks together in the original order.

Conditions

- When planning time is up and the blindfolds go on, the people outside the circle can communicate with the people inside the circle only by using noisemakers.
- The blindfolded people can talk to each other and ask questions of the people outside the circle.



- The sighted people cannot touch anything inside the circle. Once the blocks are disassembled the sighted people cannot talk to each other except at a designated area away from the circle.
- No one may take notes or draw a sketch.

Time

10 minutes to plan and 15 minutes to reassemble the blocks.

Equipment

12–20 large LEGO blocks.

150' rope or roll of surveyor's tape.

6 different types of noisemakers.

1 diagram of the assembled blocks by color and size as well as position in the structure.

Use the rope or tape to form a circle 15–20' in diameter. You can buy the large plastic blocks at any toy store. Two assembled sets of 7 or 8 blocks each is enough of a challenge for a team of 10 people.

Transfer of Learning

When the task is done give the team a sketch of the assembled blocks and let them evaluate their performance. Their success level, as in many other tasks, is usually determined by how well the team organized itself. The blindfolded members were dependent on others for information and that information, in most cases, came only in the form of yes or no. In this situation, as in others, you have to ask the right question in order to determine the right answer. Questions to ask include:

Did the team break the task down into subtasks?

Did each person inside the circle have a partner outside the circle? How did they work together?

Did the members who were finished with one subtask help others who were not?

Were the communication signals uniform and understood by the entire team?

Was there competition between team members?

How difficult was it to ask the right question so you could come up with the right answer?

Variation

One interesting variation to Blind Object Assembly tests a person's ability to deal with ambiguity. Start by dividing the group in half. You may need to ask who is willing to work blindfolded. Have half the group find a comfortable place to sit away from other people, and when they are ready, put on their blindfolds. A sighted person takes a small set of four or five LEGO blocks and places them in front of a blindfolded person. Using only hand claps or a noisemaker the sighted person guides the blindfolded person in putting the blocks together in the correct arrangement. Naturally, the blindfolded person has no idea what is going on. Only by asking questions that establish some kind of communication standard for "yes" and "no" will he be able to figure out what the task is and how to do it.

This is an excellent activity to bring out issues attached to starting a new job or dealing with an unfamiliar situation in a foreign environment. The ability to deal with ambiguity is a helpful, some say essential, trait in today's changing world. This variation to Blind Object Assembly is a good way to start a discussion about how we can best strengthen and utilize that trait.

Personal Note

This version of Blind Object Assembly can be highly frustrating for people who are not given to asking questions. Correctly defining the problem is half the battle in any problem-solving activity. The way to define the problem is by asking the right questions. As stated earlier, you have to ask the right question in order to get the right answer. There is also the issue of being the last of the pairs to figure out the solution. One person in a pair that had that distinction related that the exercise reminded him of an assignment he had been sent on. The task was highly ambiguous. He didn't know what he was supposed to accomplish and no one else knew either, except that something needed to be done. In this kind of situation not only asking questions, but asking the right questions, is the key to getting the job done.

ACTIVITY

50

Landing Zone

Theme

Planning, communication, and decision making under challenging circumstances.

Task

The blindfolded team finds a length of rope and uses it to form a polygon.

Scenario

This activity combines two different exercises, Blindfold Polygon and Cross-Cultural Sherpa Walk, to create a complex initiative that will challenge most teams.

During a trip overseas the conditions in the country the team was visiting suddenly became unstable. The airport was closed and the streets were unsafe.

The team was forced to hole up in a run-down hotel outside of town. Luckily, a helicopter rescue was arranged by friends back in the States.

The team can only leave the hotel at night. Two friendly locals will guide them to a landing zone. Other locals in the area are hostile; so talking in English is not permitted while the team is en route to the landing zone. Before leaving the hotel the guides teach the team a few essential words (stop, left, right, step up, etc.) in the local dialect. These are the only words they will use to lead the team through the darkness.

At the landing zone the team must find the “field expedient” antenna material. In this area it is safe to use English, however, it is still too dark to see anything. The team must use the materials to set up an emergency satellite antenna up-link so that they can direct a rescue helicopter into the

makeshift landing zone. If the team cannot build a usable antenna within the allotted time frame they have a long trek ahead of them to the border of the nearest friendly country. Note: This escape and evasion scenario may be a little too much for some groups. Adjust the scenario to fit the needs of the participants or dream up an entirely different one.

Set-Up

There are seven stages to this exercise:

1. Select the guides.
2. Brief the team indoors.
3. Brief the guides and show them the route.
4. The team plans while the guides dream up a language.
5. Guides teach the team their language.
6. Guides lead the blindfolded team to the landing zone.
7. The team finds the ropes and builds the up-link.

The details for each stage are:

- Ask for two volunteers who are good at languages.
- Brief the team on the exercise in their break-out room and let them start planning.
- Brief the guides apart from the team. Take them outside and show them the route you want them to use in guiding the blindfolded team and where the ropes are on the ground. They should guide the team to within a few feet of the ropes. Keep the route fairly short—10 minutes can seem like forever when you cannot see. Make sure the guides understand how to guide the team in a careful and safe manner. Ask the guides to make up a few words or use a language other than English to lead the team. Suggested words include: stop, slow, left, right, step up, and careful. Encourage the guides to ham it up when they teach the team their local dialect.
- Give the team and the guides enough time to plan. A flip chart is a useful planning tool. The guides can also act as observers during the team's planning and implementation.
- When the team and guides are ready introduce the guides to the team.
- When the team has learned the foreign words and is ready to go outside have them put their blindfolds on. Keep a close watch on their move-

ment. They should be moving Sherpa walk style (holding on to each other in one line) or you and the guides are going to be very busy keeping people from walking into obstacles.

- Have the guides lead the team to within a few feet of the ropes. The ropes should be uncoiled and free of tangles. At the landing zone the guides no longer help the team as guides, but they do continue to help maintain safety. Some teams will think to ask the trainer to keep time. If they don't, call time when time is up. If the team needs more time then let them negotiate for it. For example, give the team five more minutes in exchange for the three most vocal members losing their voices.

Conditions

- The team is blindfolded when they leave the hotel.
- While en route to the landing zone the team cannot use any language but the local dialect since this might alert unfriendly nationals. English can be used in the landing zone area.
- The team must find the antenna materials. The materials will be in the area they are led to.
- The antenna/rope must be extended to its full length and everyone must be touching it.
- The antenna up-link should have six equal sides.
- Once the team reaches the landing zone the guides become observers and continue to keep the team members safe while they search for the rope.
- It is okay for anyone to call "Stop Action" to maintain safety.

Time

Approximately 20 minutes to plan, about 10 minutes for movement, and 20 minutes for implementation. Vary the time limit to fit the size of the group and its capabilities.

Equipment

1 100' rope.

Blindfolds for all members.

Flip chart and markers for planning.

Transfer of Learning

The process of decision making is highlighted when the team is asked by the trainer if they are ready to take off the blindfolds and assess the results of their efforts. Watch the leadership and communication within the group. Groups that do this task well are usually strong in these two areas. Appointing a leader/coordinator and making sure everyone understands the plan add greatly to the chances of success. Draw the parallel to the difficulties of “working in the dark” when you don’t know what other team members are doing. Questions to ask include:

What was the most frustrating part of this problem? How did you deal with the frustration?

Have you been in similar situations where it was difficult to coordinate a common project because each team member could not really tell what the other member was doing? How did you make the necessary adjustments?

Were any members left out of the communication/decision-making loop? How did they respond? How did that affect the team effort?

What was it like not to know what impact your actions (or the actions of others) were having on the rest of the project?

If different groups had different tasks at the landing zone how did they know what the others were doing? How did they coordinate their efforts?

What style of leadership was used—directive, consultative, or anticipatory? Was the leadership style used key to the success of the mission?

Personal Note

Developing a scenario that the participants find relevant can increase the level of intensity people bring to an activity. More than once, Foreign Service officers have been faced with the situation where hostile locals are “coming over the wall.” Not surprisingly, in training conducted for the State Department this particular scenario increases the overall intensity of the activity. Even though it is just a made-up story the pressure a relevant scenario adds to the decision-making and problem-solving process can seem very real.

ACTIVITY

51

Star Wars

Theme

The problem-solving power of a paradigm shift.

Task

Put your two feet in a circle.

Set-Up

Lay out the circles of varying sizes on the ground. Tell the group they are now going to do a problem-solving initiative. There are three rules to this initiative:

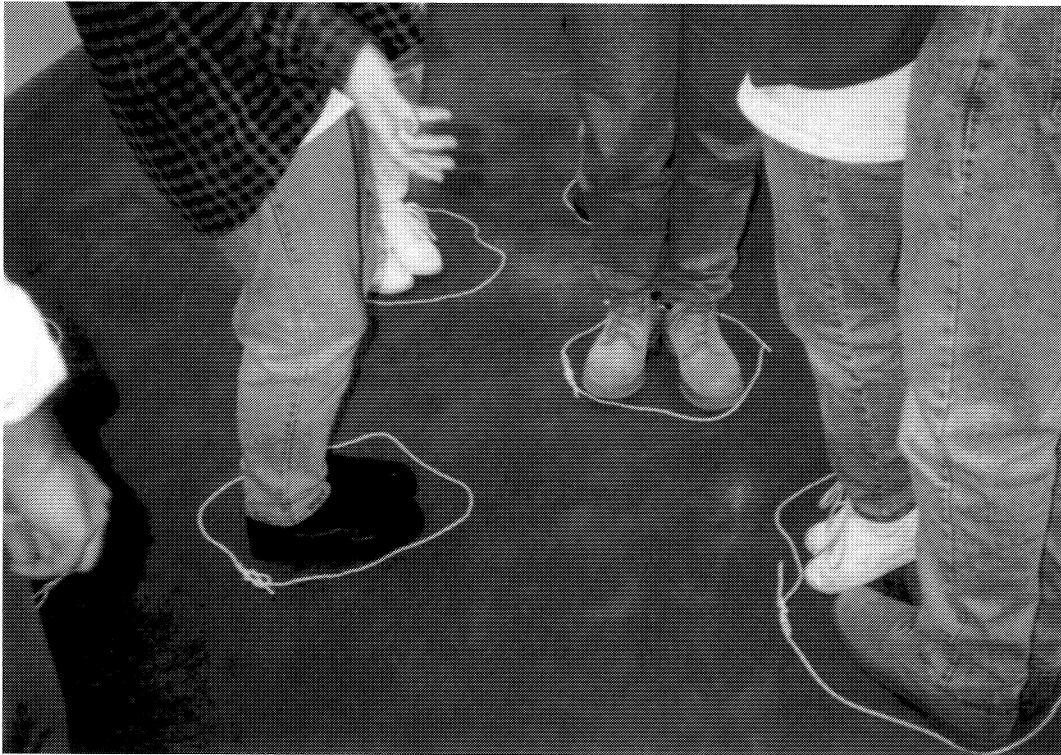
1. Put your two feet entirely in a circle.
2. When I say “Change!,” if possible, move to another circle and put your two feet entirely in it.

That’s enough rules for now so we’ll hold the third rule until we need it.

After each time you say “Change!,” casually pick up one or two of the circles. As the number of circles decreases the speed at which people dash about will increase. A group that has worked together for a while may start to fight you for the circles. When that happens invoke the third rule:

3. Do not move or alter or fight the trainer for the circles.

When the last circle or two are left people will be struggling to cram their feet into it. As you feel inspired, repeat the rules and the fact that this



is a problem-solving initiative. At some point the lightbulb will almost visibly flash over someone's head and that person will sit down with her feet in the circle. Others will follow and the problem is solved. Sit down with them and let the debriefing begin.

Equipment

15 rope circles or more, depending on the group size.

The circles should be 1–3' in diameter.

Time

5–10 minutes.

Transfer of Learning

I've often been amazed by the number of insights that come out of such a simple activity. According to some it was invented by a class of fourth graders. Talk about bright kids! Start the debriefing by looking at assumptions. Ask:

What assumptions did you make when you first heard the rules?

Did you unconsciously make up rules that were not there? (Some people jump from circle to circle.)

How did that limit your options?

Before you could increase your options what did you have to do? Was there a risk of looking foolish? (Innovation has its price.)

Did anyone think about requesting a time-out for brainstorming? (Often the pressure of the task holds us hostage to the same way of doing things.)

Did each person approach the problem on his own or was there an effort made to use the team approach?

Was the problem-solving approach used one of habit or conscious choice?

How did a breakdown lead to a breakthrough? (With just two circles you have to do something different.)

Was the constant "Change!" in the problem anything like the changes you are dealing with at work?

What assumptions or unstated expectations cause problems in the workplace?

Personal Note

This activity works well with groups as small as 10 or as large as 30. The solution to what at first appears to be an unresolvable situation comes out of a shift in perspective. That shift, also called a "paradigm shift" by the futurist, Joel Barker, is as simple as it is profound. You will find participants referring to this activity throughout the training and even back at the office.

While you are sitting on the floor with the group, discuss the differences between a high-performance organization and one that isn't. One major difference is how the two groups respond to a problem. One group spends most of their time jumping on the fire engine and rushing off to deal with the latest "crisis." They keep doing things the same way because they never stop to consider all the facts and what their options might be.

This is also a good time to introduce the model, presented in the back of this book, about assumptions. Ask the group what assumptions they made when the rules were first presented. Most groups conjure up an amazing assortment of "rules" that were never imposed by the trainer. Ask the group to look at how their own assumptions and preconceptions affect their actions. In general, to what extent do unfounded assumptions skew the results they obtain as a team? To what extent are they aware of these assumptions?

Twenty-four hundred years ago Plato coined the famous dictum that only the examined life is worth living. Perhaps if he were around today and working as a management consultant he would say that only an organization (or team) that examines itself is worth belonging to.

ACTIVITY

52

The Pyramid

Theme

Many heads and hands—one solution.

Task

Pick up and move an item with a device that is manipulated with cords suspended from a pyramid-shaped frame.

Set-Up

Assemble the Pyramid device indoors or outside. Place the object or objects to be moved on the ground. Make sure they can be reached by the grabber. Give the team their task and offer a short “school session” to explain how the Pyramid works. The number of operators can range from 8 to 16.

For more enterprising groups give them the device still in its box and two or three copies of the instructions for assembly and operation. Let the group figure out how to set up and operate the device as part of the problem-solving effort.

Conditions

- Once the device is set up no one may put more than one foot inside the boundary cord without suffering dire consequences. (Keep your blindfolds handy).
- Only the “grabber” can be used to pick up and move the designated items.
- No grabbing the “grabber.”

Time

If the device is already set up, allow at least 30 minutes. For each additional object allow an additional 10 minutes, especially if the objects have to be stacked on top of each other. Provide 30 minutes for assembly of the device if that is part of the task.

Equipment

The Pyramid can be purchased from Interel, Inc., 140 Carl Street, San Francisco, CA 94117. Phone: 415-566-0554.

Transfer of Learning

You can expect all the usual issues about working as a team to come up during this activity. What is different about the Pyramid is the number of people who can have an active role in solving the problem. Sixteen people working together in the same place at the same time is a lot. The key concern in any larger group is how we get organized so that our efforts are coordinated instead of confused. As with most large group activities, you can expect a certain class of behaviors to emerge.

To discuss the impact of these behaviors on the team effort, ask:

How did the team organize or reorganize itself?

How did the team approach the task: piecemeal or systematically?

Did anyone feel their ideas were not heard?

Were there gender issues?

Did you find yourself losing focus and "checking out?"

What did you do to help yourself reengage in the team effort?

Was an effort made to encourage everyone's participation?

Was there ambiguity or confusion about the task? How did the team deal with ambiguity or confusion?

How did you keep track of what other people were doing? Who kept track of what everyone was doing?

ACTIVITY

53

The Sentinel

Theme

Multidimensional problem solving.

Task

Discover a path through a three-dimensional maze and move as a team on that path from one side of the maze to the other.

Description

The Sentinel consists of 8 free-standing devices. Four of the devices are battery-powered motion detectors, the other 4 are nonactive decoys. The active devices contain an alarm, detector control switches, and a battery. The range of motion detection for each device is fifteen feet. The Sentinel is basically a high-tech combination of some of the best features of the Corporate Maze and Spider Web.

Set-Up

By placing the devices in a designated space you can create an invisible, three-dimensional maze. When a person crosses one of the detection zones an alarm sounds. The zones can be set at a variety of levels and directions. This enables the trainer to vary the degree of complexity of the maze to fit the capabilities of the group. Each Sentinel comes with templates for 10 different arrangements. Four to 24 people can participate in the activity.

Conditions

- The team must go through the maze to get to the other side.
- When the alarm sounds the person who set off the alarm should return to the start of the maze.
- The fewer the alarms that go off, the higher the quality of the team's work.
- Optional: No talking once the planning time is up.

Time

20–40 minutes; vary the time depending on the size and ability of the team.

Equipment

The Sentinel can be ordered from Interel, Inc., 140 Carl Street, San Francisco, CA 94117. Phone: 415-566-0554.

Each Sentinel comes with 8 3" dia. × 5' ht. identical appearing columns. Four columns are programmable motion detectors and 4 are decoys.

Debriefing

The issues that arise are likely to be similar to those that come out of doing the Corporate Maze or the Spider Web. The fact that the team is dealing with invisible obstacles could make for some interesting discussions around dealing with the unknown.

ACTIVITY

54

Journey to Kanostan

Theme

Analyzing and operationalizing information.

Task

Dismantle as many nuclear weapons as possible.

Set-Up

Brief the team on the exercise using the information provided in the write-ups. Then give them the write-ups, except the ones marked Trainer Notes, so the team can study the details. The exercise can be done indoors using a sheet of flip chart paper or outdoors using ropes to mark off each region.

Time

2–3 hours.

This exercise can easily take up half a day. It is longer and more involved than the others in this book. The longer time frame and detailed content move the degree of challenge to a higher level.

The Purpose of This Activity

This exercise offers an opportunity for the team to develop individual and collective skills in:

- Processing, analyzing, and prioritizing information.
- Conducting a situation assessment based on available information.

- Developing a coherent strategy to implement a team objective.
- Allocating resources and developing plans in order to achieve the team's objective.
- Operationalizing plans and making midcourse adjustments.
- Mastering the intricacies and issues inherent in any process of small group problem solving and decision making.
- Dealing with ambiguity and setbacks that are outside the realm of personal control or influence.

Journey to Kanostan Scenario

You have been asked to take your team to Kanostan in the newly created republic of Motavol. This new republic has nuclear weapons. It is your job to make contact with the new leaders of the provisional government and follow up on their promise to dismantle the weapons in exchange for American aid. Because of chaotic conditions within the country your team has been granted a visa that expires after 24 days. The visa expires on the same date as the mandate of the provisional government; so the chances for an extension are small.

Each day you spend at the capital the experts on your team can dismantle and render useless two nuclear weapons. The total number of weapons held by Motavol is still a state secret. The latest reports you have seen estimate they have 10 to 22 weapons. Certain interests from the Middle East are rumored to be in the country trying to buy these weapons.

Because of the current unrest the airport at the capital is closed. The only port of entry is at the border city of Potstan. The port of exit is Gladstan. From Potstan you must procure supplies, gas, and vehicles and choose a route to Kanostan. Since conditions are unstable it is difficult to determine beforehand with much certainty which route is the best. You can determine the conditions in a region only after you have traveled to it.

You have a secure transceiver and can communicate with the embassy by teletype. Once you enter Motavol it will be difficult to procure any additional supplies or gas except in the urban areas and the capital city. Because of shortages any supplies you obtain outside Potstan will cost twice as much. The exchange rate is generally 2 mopecks per \$1 U.S.

Resources

- You have a budget of \$1,000 cash for your trip.
- Your expenditures are for food, vehicles, and gas.
- The exchange rate is 2 mopecks per \$1.

- One day of food supplies for your team = 15 mopecks.
- Transport to a new region requires a jerry can of gas costing 25 mopecks. (It also takes one day's time). You can carry up to 20 days' worth of gas. Gas must be bought for each vehicle.
- One transport vehicle costs 100 mopecks. Each vehicle carries 5 people plus their gear. You can purchase vehicles in Potstan but choices are limited. Once you cross the border they are rarely available even at a very high premium.
- There are no charges for lodging since you will be camping out or staying at local government guest houses.

General Conditions

There are three conditions that will affect your travel to and from the capital of Kanostan: civil war, riots, and general strikes. When there is stability in a region your travel will not be hindered. These conditions are likely to change from day to day and region to region. However, you hope that the region you choose to travel in will be stable and your travel will not be delayed.

Riots can occur only in the rural areas. You can buy more supplies, gas, and vehicles but only in the urban areas, and you will be forced to pay twice as much as you did in Potstan.

After you travel to a new region you will discover the conditions in it by receiving an intel-report. When you are in the capital city of Kanostan your work could be hindered if there is a general strike but otherwise conditions will be stable.

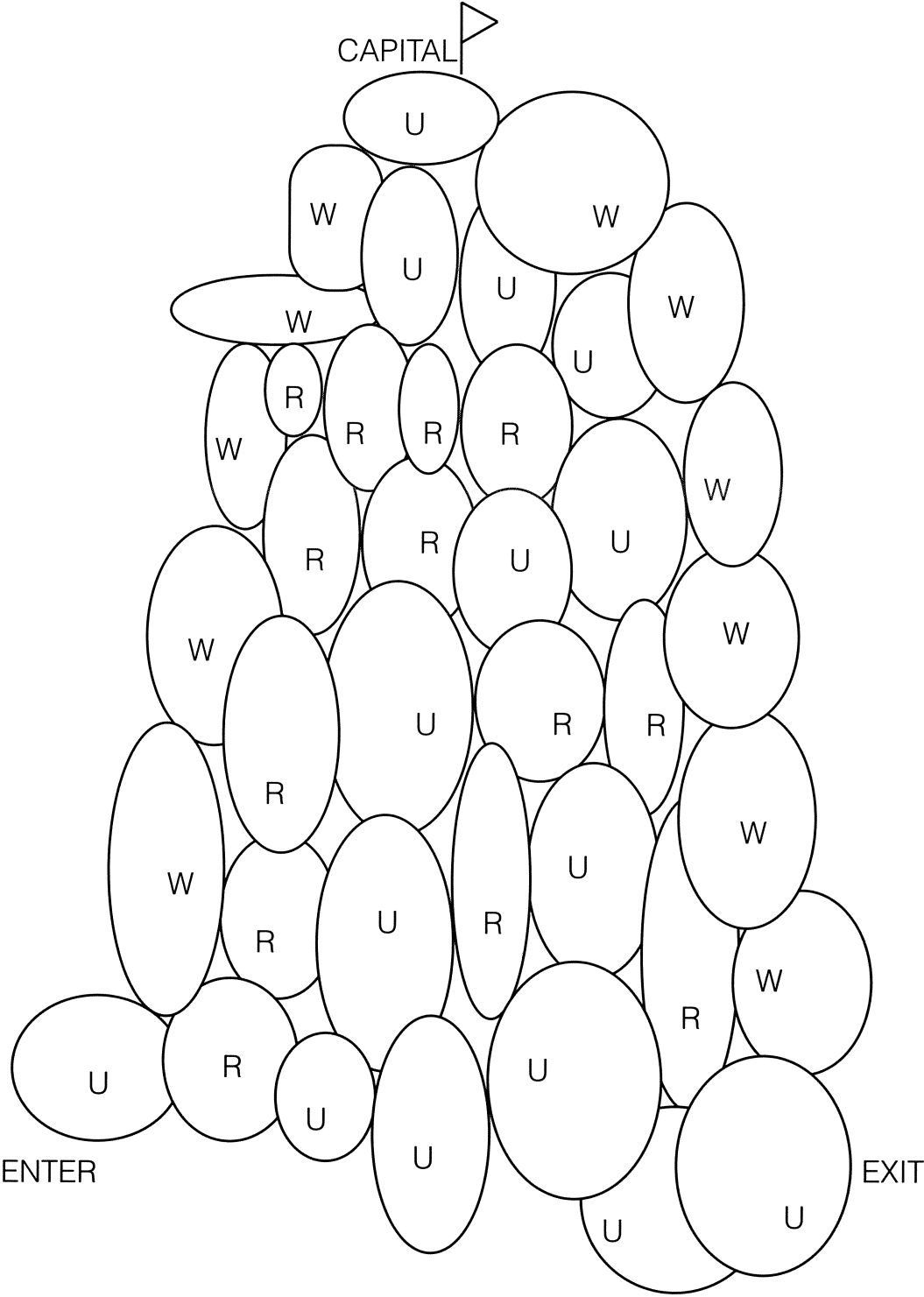
General Regions

There are approximately 35 regions laid out in a large map in the shape of a triangle.

- Urban areas are marked by the blue circles or a "U." They are in the interior of the country.
- Rural areas are marked by the red circles or an "R." Most are found between the border and the center of the country.
- Wilderness areas are marked by green circles or "W." They are along the border of the country.
- The capital is at the apex of the triangle. The ports of entry and exit are at either side.

Team Builder

Corporate Maze



Time

The team has to transport itself from the port of entry to the circle marked with a flag as the capital, do its job, and then travel to the port of exit within 24 days. Each day equals 3–5 minutes. Days at the capital can be counted off more quickly.

Given the amount of time needed to explain, plan, play, and debrief the exercise, the total time required should be between 2 and 3 hours.

Transportation Problems

When fighting occurs in a region one of your vehicles will be damaged. You can leave it behind if you have enough vehicles in your convoy to give everyone a ride. If you don't have enough vehicles you must take refuge for two additional days and not move during that time while the vehicle is repaired. You will consume food but not gas during those days.

During a riot you will be delayed two days and consume two days worth of food supplies and gas. In exchange for surrendering one vehicle to the local authorities they will escort you out of the region and you can avoid being delayed the extra two days.

When a general strike occurs you will be forced to wait two additional days at your location till the strike ends. No work can be accomplished during a strike. You can leave the area without that delay or accomplish some work by paying local authorities three day's worth of food that would have been consumed by the team.

The local authorities will accept money but at twice the rate it would take to buy these items at Potstan.

Intel-Reports

During the planning stage the team will use its budget to buy items in the amounts it deems necessary and plan its route.

Once the trip starts you have several minutes to move from one space to another and change your route if you decide to. Each move to an adjoining space equals one day of mission time.

After the team has moved to a new region (circle) an intel-report will inform them about the local conditions in the region for that day. Money and/or cards representing food and gas will be collected by the trainer depending on the penalties inflicted by fighting, riots, or strikes. Two consecutive days of trouble (fighting, riots, or strikes) are always followed by a day of calm.

Rolling the Dice

The intel-report is determined by rolling dice:

- Three dice are rolled in the wilderness.
- Two dice are rolled in the rural areas.
- One die is rolled in the urban areas.

What Each Roll Means

- All even numbers indicate the situation is calm.
- All odd numbers indicate there is heavy fighting.
- One odd and one even number indicate riots.
- One odd and two even numbers indicate a general strike.
- Two odd and one even number indicate calm.

Other Roles and Responsibilities

To add more realism to the game, designate beforehand the roles certain team members will play. Some suggested roles are listed below. Feel free to make up informal roles with engaging duties such as “team cynic” or “team cheerleader” that will enliven everyone’s experience of the game.

- **Team Leader:** The team leader organizes and directs the team toward fulfilling its mission. His or her leadership style can range from authoritarian to participatory depending on the situation.
- **Deputy Team Leader:** Assists the team leader in carrying out official team duties.
- **Operations Officer:** Responsible for message traffic, special assignments, intel-reports, and route planning.
- **Intel-Specialist:** Advises the Team Leader on intelligence issues that impact the mission.
- **Logistics Specialist:** Purchases, maintains, and issues supplies and equipment.
- **Finance Specialist:** Keeps track of the budget, calculates the exchange rate, and advises the team on the impact of proposed expenditures on the budget.

Trainer Notes

The team's real goal is to spend the amount of time at the capital they need to in order to dismantle all of the nukes and make it back to Gladstau before their visas expire. Planning, a judicious budgeting of resources, and some degree of luck are all keys to successfully accomplishing the mission.

Hopefully the team will be able to spend enough time at the capital to do its job (there are only 16 nukes to dismantle at the rate of two per day) and return safely.

Teams that run out of certain items needed to survive (food) or move (gas, transports) should deal with the consequences. After a discussion of what happened (the problem is not always based on luck) the trainer can keep the group in play by providing some form of emergency assistance, i.e., money, food, or vehicles donated by an allied government agency also in the region.

It's a good idea to have another trainer be your assistant. His or her job is to take care of and keep track of all the administrative requests and transactions.

On leaving the port of entry, the team may request more information or supplies. Negotiate in good faith. Ask what they are willing to offer in exchange for their request. If you are representing the embassy you may want to conduct the message traffic in writing. Naturally the team will not get everything it asks for. Extending the visas of the team members is particularly unlikely since the new government coming in is very unhappy about losing its nuclear capability. Fighting does not occur in the capital city, and riots do not stop them from disarming the nukes.

You can add some color to the exercise by designating an area as Omar's Bazaar. Omar is the local dealer in used cars, canned food, money changing, and gasoline sales. Naturally, the number of cars available for local purchase is limited and gas must be purchased for each car. Have your assistant take on the role of Omar and ham it up when the team comes to get outfitted for the trip. All sales are final!

Equipment List (Per Team)

- 1,000 funny money U.S. dollars (exchange rate 1 U.S. dollar = 2 mopecks)
- 7 toy cars or blocks that pass as cars.
- 40 chips or cards, each representing one jerry can of gas.
- 30 chips or cards, each representing one day of food for the team.
- 1 flip chart with regions marked.

Paper, pencils, and magic markers.

35 rope circles of three different colors for the regions if the exercise is done outside.

3 dice

Be sure to collect the chips or money that represent the consumption of gas and food each day from each team.

Debriefing

The two to three hours invested in the exercise will be time well spent if the point is made that the chances of success are best if human considerations (team dynamics) are not forgotten in the rush to deal with the tactical and logistical considerations.

A team that is in alignment as to its real goal will be more likely to survive and accomplish this mission. Some members may have wanted to take what appeared to be the safest route (low risk–low return). Others may have wanted to go straight for the capital (high risk–high return). The initial challenge for many teams is to discuss this issue and reach some kind of consensus on its overall strategy without becoming gridlocked in analysis paralysis. Bring out this and other issues by asking:

What was the team's approach to the assigned objective(survive or go for it)?

Was group gridlock avoided? How?

How did the set roles evolve?

What options were developed and considered?

Did everyone on the team understand the plan and at least agree to support it?

Were team meetings held to keep things on track?

How did the group deal with setbacks?

What adjustments were made or what actions taken by the team to deal with the setbacks and move on?



MULTIGROUP PROBLEM-SOLVING INITIATIVES

The initiatives in this section are often used to give two separate groups the experience of working together. Putting two groups on the same task will increase the level of challenge and make for an interesting debriefing especially around the issues of competition versus cooperation. The initiatives also work well with one group.

ACTIVITY

55

Team Culture

Theme

Who we are determines how we work together.

Task

Define your team's culture.

Background

The purpose of this exercise is to help the team define the way they want to work with each other back at the office. An intact team will bring an established culture to the training. However, even just a few hours of active learning could bring about a substantive change in the old culture. A team that is formed for the first time at the beginning of the training program will quickly develop its own way of doing things.

In either case, new or intact, teams that make conscious choices about how they are going to work together are much more likely to create a productive and enjoyable workplace.

Set-Up

What do we mean by team culture? In this case it's not about the books the team reads or the operas they watch at the theater. Team culture is how the team members work together and relate to each other. Obviously this is a topic that could easily fill an encyclopedia. Ask the team to define its culture based on the development that has occurred after a day or two of team-building activities.

Questions that narrow the focus include:

What are the norms of the team?

What are the stories that keep getting told or would be told to any new members that joined the team?

Additional Questions

How does the team celebrate “wins”?

How does the team deal with setbacks?

How does the team make decisions and solve problems?

What are the roles of various team members?

What are the shared goals?

What are the shared values?

What are the established processes and procedures that define the team?

What are the shared assumptions and expectations?

What are the important technical and nontechnical skills?

What does the team take pride in?

Can everyone live with or support this culture as it has been defined? What changes are needed?

If there is another team in the program ask the teams to present their cultures as they defined them to each other. Then have the teams do a joint project together such as Spider Web or Corporate Maze. Ask the teams to assess during the debriefing the extent to which they made use of their understanding of each other. Did the team members follow the norms they agreed upon in their teams?

ACTIVITY

56

Stepping Stones

Theme

Multigroup collaboration.

Task

Cross the proverbial acid river, burning desert sands, alligator-infested swamp, or toxic area without touching it.

Set-Up

Divide the group into equally sized teams. Everyone is on one side of the river and must get to the other side. Each person has a stone (carpet square) to help them cross the river. The distance to cross is at least 30'.

Conditions

- No one else can carry your stone.
- Each person can stand on his or her own stone for as long as they want.
- You cannot stand on any other person's stone for longer than 3 seconds.
- The stones cannot slide.
- If you step into the water (floor) or use another person's stone for more than 3 seconds you must return to the shore you started from.
- Everyone on all the teams must arrive at the opposite shore at the same time.
- The teams are responsible for monitoring and evaluating their own quality.

Time

20–30 minutes, depending on the size of the group and the distance they must cross.

Equipment

One carpet square per participant. Most carpet stores have discarded samples (one square foot in size) you can purchase. The smaller the “stone” the more challenging the activity.

Tape or rope to mark the starting and ending points.

Transfer of Learning

As with the other multigroup activities the theme of competition versus collaboration is sure to emerge. The difference here is that the successful accomplishment of the task requires that everyone cooperate, at least on the final move.

Questions to consider are:

Did the teams race to the other side?

Did one team grow impatient waiting for another team?

Was there conflict between teams? Why?

What are some options for resolving the conflict?

Would the task have been completed more quickly if the teams had helped each other out?

ACTIVITY

57

Egg Drop

Theme

Team spirit through competition.

Task

Build a device that will allow an egg to drop safely from a specified height.

Set-Up

The group is divided into subteams with 4 or more members each. The teams are given the task of building a protective device that will allow an egg to drop safely to the ground from a specified height. Before the subteams launch their eggs they each give a marketing presentation on their devices to the entire group.

Conditions

- The drop zone is an area marked out on grass or carpet.
- The height of the drop is specified by the trainer (10'–20').
- Each team gives its presentation and then drops its egg to applause or groans, depending on the results.
- The categories for the applause by the large group are best marketing presentation, most innovative design, and successful operation.

Time

40 minutes.

Equipment

Straws.

Masking tape.

Raw eggs.

Debriefing

This activity gives team members the chance to have some fun working together in a small group. If some specific learning comes up, that is great. However, Egg Drop does not lend itself to a long or involved debriefing. In most cases a few brief comments will be sufficient before going to the next activity.

Variation

You can create a more complex version of Egg Drop by making a few simple adjustments. Potential adjustments include:

- Vary the amount and kind of materials given to each subteam so that the teams will need to share among themselves in order to build a workable device.
- Designate a common meeting place for the teams. They cannot visit each other's sites, but they can meet at this place to confer with each other.
- Create a scenario in which the teams have a common objective; for example, each team is saving the egg of an endangered species from nests scattered about the jungle.
- During the debriefing look at the impact of competition versus collaboration on the task. What was the original goal? Did that goal change for some of the teams? Did that change result in competition or collaboration? How did that affect the outcome of the project?

Negotiation Square

Theme

Win/Lose versus Win/Win.

Task

All teams reach consensus.

Set-Up

Bring the teams together. If you have one large group divide it into 4 teams. Have the teams stand around you in the form of a square. Announce that the teams represent different departments within the organization. The president of the organization has given the teams the task of reaching consensus.

Consensus is defined as the teams presenting the same stance at the same time. Each team will spend a few minutes determining (within their own team) what stance they will present to other teams. When the signal is given, the teams present their stances at the same time. Each presentation by the entire group is one round. The number of rounds it takes to reach consensus is determined by the entire group.

Conditions

- There is no talking between the teams while planning the stance or presenting it.
- Consensus is reached when all teams present the same stance.
- Planning time between rounds is one minute.
- The number of rounds the activity can go on without reaching consensus is limited by the trainer's patience.

Transfer of Learning

I've seen this activity done at various stages of a team-building program. In my experience (not to mention opinion) you will get the most mileage out of it if you use it at the end of a program. Introduce this activity after the team, or group of teams, sums up the values they will take back to the workplace. In keeping with the principles of action learning, the exercise offers teams the opportunity to test the integration of the values they developed during the team-building program.

If you use this activity midway through a program allow plenty of time for a small group debriefing after the large group comments on what happened. You will need the time if the group does not reach consensus, especially if the holdouts appeared arrogant to others in their unwillingness to compromise.

Questions to ask include:

What happened?

Were you successful?

Was any other team successful?

What is your reaction to the other team's approach to the task?

What was your interpretation of the other team's nonverbal behavior?

Was the message sent the message received?

What was the goal? Did it change?

Personal Note

I once had a participant object that negotiations are verbal activities and therefore this exercise was misnamed or misguided or something even worse. However, part of the program's curriculum included the well-known pie chart that diagrams communication as being 94% nonverbal. That figure may seem a little high, but if you think about it most negotiations that flounder or fail are strongly affected by the nonverbal aspect of communication, an aspect that few people are aware of even after the damage is done.

ACTIVITY

59

Puzzle Place

Theme

Interteam cooperation.

Task

Trade puzzle pieces and put together a puzzle.

Set-Up

Divide the group into 3 smaller teams. Provide each subteam with a puzzle box. Each box has 24 pieces. However, only 8 of the pieces belong to the box. The other pieces belong to the other boxes. A common table is set aside for exchanging the pieces between teams.

Conditions

- Only 3 pieces can be exchanged per team at one time.
- Each team member must take a turn exchanging the pieces until all the pieces belonging to the team are obtained.
- The exchange can take place only when representatives (one per team) from all 3 teams are at the table.
- The teams can talk to each other only at the exchange table.

Time

15–25 minutes.

Equipment

3 24-piece puzzles. Sesame Street puzzles work fine.

Transfer of Learning

Often competition will take precedence over cooperation, even when this problem is framed as a collaborative effort among teams belonging to the same organization. Some issues to explore are:

Did the teams compete or cooperate?

Which approach created the highest level of success?

Why did the teams choose the approach they took toward working or not working with the other teams?

Does that approach model the way the teams work or don't work with each other in the office?

What are the results of that approach?

What are the pluses of the way we work together? What are the things that should be changed and improved?

ACTIVITY

60

Corporate Maze

Theme

The importance of organizational memory.

Task

Move the team through a maze by discovering and remembering the correct path.

Set-Up

The maze is represented by a pattern of 48 (or more) squares marked on a tarp that is laid out on the floor or ground. The mission of the team is to move everyone from one side of the maze to the other by finding the proper route from square to square. The route is known only to the trainer. You can use the diagram provided or draw one of your own to monitor the team's progress.

When someone steps on an incorrect square, use a noisemaker to indicate that the square is bad and the explorer must return to the starting point by the same path. Coming or going, remembering the correct route is challenging since it is too complex for one person to recall without help.

Conditions

- No talking after the planning time is up.
- Stepping only to any adjacent square.
- No skipping over a square.
- No writing down the route.
- No marking the route on the maze by leaving a trail (the Hansel and Gretel technique).

- Participants must exit the maze after a bad square has been stepped on. The exiting must be done on the squares that have been determined by the team to be safe.
- No touching a person on the maze or the maze itself by others not on the maze, except for safety reasons.
- One team member on the maze at a time.
- The team must establish a sequence so that everyone in turn has a chance to explore the route.
- Whenever a bad square is stepped on, the horn blows.
- If a bad square is stepped on more than once, a penalty could be incurred (see Variations).

Time

10 minutes for planning and 15–20 minutes for execution are a suitable level of challenge.

Equipment

- 1 6' × 8' tarp clearly marked with 48 squares.
- 2 noisemakers (anything from a party shop will do).
- Diagram with the route marked on it.
- List of conditions to give to the team (optional).

You can find a precut plastic 6' × 8' tarp at any hardware store. It is a good idea to measure the tarp first because what is sold as a 6' × 8' could be off by a half-foot or more on both sides. Spread the tarp out and mark the squares using strips of 1" masking tape. At equal distances apart, put 5 strips of tape along the width and 7 along the length, creating 48 squares. Another option is to paint the lines on the tarp.

For a 6' wide tarp the distance between the strips is 11 inches. Put the first strip 11 inches from the edge of the tarp. Lengthwise on the tarp the distance between strips is also 11 inches. If you are working indoors, strips of masking tape on the carpet work just fine.

Transfer of Learning

A team with good planning skills will ask if stepping to an adjacent square includes going backwards. Naturally, it does, but often teams do not take that possibility into consideration (a point that shows how assumptions can trip up a team effort).

Like other problem-solving activities success is often a function of people being clear on what the plan is and their roles in carrying out that plan.

Trial and error is essential to solving this problem. Even when this point is acknowledged by the team notice how the anxiety about making mistakes can generate confusion and stress. Draw a parallel to how “corporate history” or “organizational memory” is lost when “team learning” does not occur. Teams in which the members tackle the task on their own without helping each other almost inevitably fail.

Remember to “bust your cards.” Teams have been known to distract the trainer and peek at the route marked on the diagram.

Ask the team:

During planning, did you come up with a system that enabled the team to remember who did what?

Was there any confusion or conflict over determining the correct route? How was it resolved? What other way might it have been resolved?

Was stepping on a bad square a “mistake” or just part of a learning process that required trial and error?

Is there such a thing as a “good mistake”?

Did fear of making a “mistake” slow down the learning process?

Is there any correlation between learning and the willingness (or permission) to make mistakes?

Did the language used to describe this problem mean different things to different people? For example, did the word “maze” suggest that there must be more than one route or that there might be blind alleys?

What created confusion on the maze? What words or phrases create confusion in the workplace?

What behaviors/attitudes led to a successful effort on the maze? Would these behaviors/attitudes have the same impact back at the workplace?

How was this activity a metaphor for the “learning organization” or “team learning” that Peter Senge made famous in the *Fifth Discipline*? (Draw a parallel to the often-told story about the executive who thought he was going to be fired for an expensive mistake. His boss replied, “Not after I’ve invested so much money in your education.”)

First Variation

This is an excellent variation for any corporate group that needs more of a challenge. Turn up the intensity of the problem by giving the team a \$2,000 budget. No cost is incurred by stepping on a bad square for the first time. However, if a bad square is stepped on more than once it costs the team \$100. If a person on the maze does not exit properly it also costs the team \$100. Additional planning time costs \$50 per minute.

Second Variation

You can put two separate teams on the maze by starting them at opposite ends. Use the same pattern except that the starting square for one team becomes an exit square for the other. Two people will be needed to keep score with the diagram. During the debriefing, discuss the level of cooperation or competition between the two groups. Some teams are so competitive they will try to sabotage the other team's effort even though they are both working for the same organization. This can create the opportunity for a debriefing that is as challenging as it is rich. Be prepared.

Personal Notes

If I had to choose one activity for a corporate group, it would be this one. Most groups do well and take pride in what they accomplish, making this activity an excellent confidence builder. One team I worked with was divided into two subteams for this activity. Not only did the subteams fail to help each other, but the subteam members tackled the problem as individuals, not as a team.

Both subteams failed to get through the maze. As you might predict, this group was also having trouble adapting to the team approach back at the workplace. The lights went on during the debriefing when a few people realized what the team approach was and what it was costing them not to use it. Old habits fade slowly. Employees who had spent years working with each other as isolated or competitive individuals were not necessarily going to jump to embrace the interdependent approach that was forced on them through a reorganization. For some of the members on that team, the Corporate Maze was a powerful metaphor that encouraged a different perspective.

Team Builder
Corporate Maze

		X			
	X				
X					
X		X			
	X		X		
				X	
				X	
			X		

ACTIVITY

61

Spider Web

Theme

Quality is built in—not added on.

Task

Pass team members from one side of the Spider Web to the other.

Set-Up

Whether a team is providing a service or producing a product, the quality of the work is what wins and keeps customers. To produce a high-quality “product” in this event demands both collaborative planning and plenty of trust. A few of the holes in the Spider Web are large and roomy for an easy passage. Most are just big enough to pass through with the assistance of the rest of the team.

The trainer should avoid taking on the role of quality police. Ask the team to take responsibility for monitoring the quality of its work. Teams with predominantly large or heavy adults may need to negotiate the number of touches and the amount of time allowed.

Before doing the Spider Web it's best if the team has done some stretching activities, followed by spotting instruction, a trust circle, and a group levitation. This gives the members a skill base they can draw upon to lift each other safely.

Conditions

- Each hole can only be used once.
- Going over, under, or around the Web is not allowed.



- A “touch” dictates a return for another try.
- Once a person has passed through to the other side she may not return except to spot another teammate.
- The team members are responsible for quality and monitoring for touches. The fewer touches, the higher the quality.

Time

20–30 minutes. Teams that are less athletic will need more time or a Spider Web with larger holes.

Equipment

Building a Spider Web requires a few simple items:

Colored string.
Tape.
Scissors or knife.

Find 2 trees about 11' or 12' apart. Run a base string about a foot off the ground between the trees. Tie another string about 5' above the base string.

Run string diagonally between the trees creating a web-like pattern. Run string from the top to the bottom string and back to form the holes in the web. Use tape to tighten up any slack. Build at least one usable hole per team member. Use slip knots instead of tape if you want to make some of the holes adjustable in size. When you build the web think about the size and age of the people who will be going through it. Older groups generally need larger holes closer to the ground.

Safety

The trainer should closely monitor the group to insure that safety is maintained at all times. For groups with an especially large person or two, you may want to adjust the web so that there is a hole big enough for them to get through. Depending on the group you may want to make a couple of holes large and roomy enough for an easy passage. Most should be just big enough to squeeze through with the assistance of the rest of the team. Safety points to consider include:

- Prepare the team for Spider Web with spotting and lifting activities like Trust Circle and Levitation.
- No diving through the holes.
- Spotters can go anywhere to maintain safety. They do not actually help anyone except when necessary to keep them from falling. Every person going through the web should be spotted from both sides of the web.
- Maintain psychological safety. If someone decides not to go through a hole, have him find another way to contribute.
- Build the web on flat ground free of rocks and holes.
- Maintain spotting till the person being passed is securely on his feet.
- Use string that is weak enough to break if someone falls while going through a hole.

First Variation

Use Spider Web to bring two teams together. The teams face each other with the web between them. The same rules apply except that a hole is not closed off until a member from each team has passed through in either direction. Give one team some surveyor's tape for marking off the closed holes. Brief the teams separately and observe for the following:

- When the teams began their task on opposite sides of the web did they compare the information they were given?
- As the teams passed people through the holes, did they help each other or did they compete?
- Did the teams ignore each other or did they give encouragement and support?

Second Variation

A variation of Spider Web is to set the web up horizontally about 3 or 4 inches above the knee. To liven things up several members of the team can be blindfolded or gagged. The horizontal web has the same guidelines concerning touches and time. Each member must traverse two or three or more spaces before finally occupying a hole. The event is completed when every team member is safely in a hole within the allotted time. As with the vertical Spider Web, careful spotting is essential to maintain safety.

Third Variation

Assign a cash value to each hole. The higher and smaller the hole, the larger its value. A touch costs the team a certain amount of money. Getting through the hole without a touch adds money to the bottom line. Challenge the team to produce a high-quality, highly profitable product line.

Fourth Variation

If you have an imaginative group, play up the escape theme. The team is been interned by a hostile government while on an inspection tour in the Balkans. The camp is surrounded by an fence that is monitored electronically. Unknown to the guards, there is a section of the fence that has a number of holes in it. In this area it takes one "touch" to alert the guards. If the team does touch the fence everyone has to wait one minute while the guards check the area before making another attempt to get out. Have the team plan where they cannot see the web. The time starts when they begin their escape.

Transfer of Learning

Spider Web can be used to demonstrate the difference between internal versus external quality control. When the trainer takes on the role of quality inspector, some teams tend to cut corners, hoping the inspector will not notice. When the team takes responsibility for calling quality it is usually

more likely to think of ways to improve the “production” process. Ed Demming, the father of TQM, made this point when he advised manufacturers to do away with quality inspectors. According to Demming, quality cannot be added on as an afterthought. It has to be built in by the people who are responsible for putting the product together.

Some questions to ask include:

Did the team monitor its quality? When was quality most likely to slip? Who was responsible for calling quality?

Did the team make any adjustments to improve quality?

Were the standards of performance defined and agreed upon?

Did everyone understand the plan and their role in it?

Did the planning take into account the best person to go first or last?

Were resources (time, holes, people) allocated wisely?

Did team members keep each other informed?

Was feedback (e.g., “You’re about to touch.”) part of the production process?

If so, was the feedback regarded as helpful or critical?

Personal Notes

During a recent training program, a group of research scientists were going through the Spider Web. Like many older groups they found it difficult not to touch the web while passing a teammate through it. During the debriefing the ethics of reporting a “touch” became a major topic of conversation, revealing an undercurrent of strong convictions.

Some scientists held that the web was just an exercise. A slight touch did not impact upon the task enough to warrant doing it over. Others in the group stated that every detail of their work had to be complete and totally honest. They charged it was unethical to touch the web, however slightly, and not report it. Back at the plant, if they cut a corner to get the job done then someone else down the line would pay the cost for their inattention to detail. This sometimes happened with the specifications for new products their department sent to manufacturing. There was no incentive to send a thoroughly rigorous specification. But manufacturing had neither the time nor understanding to do the drudge work of completing the specification. The result, some scientists asserted, was an excessive number of poor quality products that had to be rejected.

The issue, for one reason or another, had not been talked about. The discussion triggered by the exercise helped the scientists develop a shared set of standards.

ACTIVITY

62

Building Bridges

Theme

Bridging the communication gap.

Task

The job of each team is to build half of a bridge to the other team on the other side of a barrier.

Set-Up

Divide the room in half with some type of barrier so the teams cannot see each other. Both teams are provided with a supply of building materials. Brief each team separately. Without talking to each other, except at a designated site outside the room, the two teams must construct two halves of a bridge that meets when the divider is removed.

The two groups will evaluate the resulting span between them using the following criteria:

- Alignment.
- Strength.
- Ingenuity of design.
- Beauty.

You could also ask the two teams to come up with their own set of values and, based on those values, define their own criteria for a successful project.

Equipment

An assortment of LEGOs, paper, cardboard, wood, sticks, tape, paper plates, and cups.

Time

45 minutes.

Conditions

- The bases of the initial bridge spans must be behind the tape that is several feet away from the barrier.
- Each team can communicate with the other team only at a meeting site designated by the trainer. Team members should not look at the other team's work while en route to that site.
- No more than two representatives from a team may go to the meeting site at the same time.
- The length, width, and height of the bridge are up to the builders.

Debriefing

This is a good exercise for observers. Ask for one volunteer from each team. Their job is to watch how the teams operate both internally and with each other. They make no comments or suggestions until after time is called. As insiders they often will have valuable observations and insights that the trainer, as an outsider, might have missed.

Some questions to ask include:

Based on the evaluation criteria, how successful were the teams?

To what extent did the team cooperate?

How did that level of cooperation or the lack of it affect the outcome of the project?

How effective was communication between the two groups?

How did the level of communication or miscommunication affect the outcome?

Did the teams come up with the same values and evaluation criteria? To what extent did the differences or similarities in these two areas affect the outcome?

ACTIVITY

63

Academy Awards

Theme

Creativity builds teams.

Task

Create a 2- to 3-minute video on a given topic.

Set-Up

Each team is provided with a video camera, assorted props, and a film topic. The topic could be a commercial about the team's products or services, a more general topic about customer service and quality management, or a theme that depicts the good guys (our organization) against the bad guys (the competition). The more opportunity there is to ham it up the better. Each team must script its film, assign roles, film the script, and turn in the final product in the allotted time.

Time

2–4 hours.

Equipment

Home video cameras with audio capability. If you want to be fancy, include sound booms for better audio.

Props such as period costumes, cowboy hats, and cap guns.

Color TV and VCR.

Transfer of Learning

Have the teams turn their videos in at the end of the allotted time. After the evening meal is a good time for viewing the tapes. There will no doubt be a roomful of laughs that everyone can enjoy. Although the activity could be debriefed for serious learning, it is best done as a team spirit exercise. Who knows, maybe your team will produce a tape that will make it to a TV show like *America's Funniest Home Videos*.



FINDING CLOSURE

When people gather together they look for rituals that mark the beginning or ending of the event. Theaters have curtains, television shows have commercials, and schools have graduation ceremonies. The next set of exercises presents ways a group can sum up their experiences on a course and take what they found useful with them. Much of team building is making deposits in an “emotional bank account,” a handy term that Steven Covey coined in his book *Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*. These activities will help the participants clarify what they have deposited in both their intellectual and their emotional accounts—accounts they can draw upon when they return to the workplace.

ACTIVITY

64

Solo

When busy executives show up for a team-building retreat, they often come armed with cellular phones, laptop computers, and pagers. Even during the drive to the conference center they are on the car phone, doing at least two things at once. The retreat, packed with intense interactions among colleagues, offers no let-up. In a successful retreat a great deal of learning will have occurred in a short period of time. Sometimes this learning can be life-changing. Before going back to the office, a period of quiet for shifting gears and integration can ease the transition.

Solo is best saved for one of the last activities. Ask the participants to go off by themselves and find a place where they can sit quietly and undisturbed for 20 minutes. During that time, invite them to reflect on the day (or days) of the program. During this period of reflection, ask them to be aware of any thoughts or images that come to mind.

With so much focus on “doing” in our society there can be great benefit in shifting to a few minutes of “being.”

Gather the group back together and allow people to share whatever they care to. For some the few minutes of quiet creates an opening for profound inspiration.

ACTIVITY

65

Inner/Outer

Theme

Learning in the fishbowl.

Task

Develop a list of learned insights about teamwork.

Set-Up

Bring two teams together for this exercise. Conducting one or two ground games before you brief the teams will help meld the group.

Tell the participants they will have the opportunity to play two roles in this activity, one as a participant and one as an observer. They will take turns playing these roles. As a team they have two tasks:

1. Be the best team you can be. Try to function in the most optimal manner possible.
2. Develop a personalized list of approximately 35 ways you will apply what you learned in this program in your career.

The entire group will have 20 minutes to complete this task, broken into 5-minute segments. Every 5 minutes, the teams will change roles from participant to observer. Halfway through, a time-out will be called. For 5 minutes, consult with a member of the other team to get feedback on the functioning of your team.

Time

30 minutes.

Equipment

Pens and paper.

Conditions

- Seat the teams in two circles, one inside the other.
- The outer team must be quiet as the inner team brainstorms its list. It doesn't matter if the lists have some of the same items.

Debriefing

Ask the group to comment on their lists. After discussing the lists, discuss the process for generating the lists. Questions include:

What did you learn from watching the other group?

Was the feedback of the other group helpful?

Were you the best team you could be? In what ways?

In what ways did your group fall short of being its best?

How could you help a team back at the office be the best team it could be?

Team Values

Listed below are some questions that are useful for a group to ponder at the end of a program. Select four or five questions or more and write each one at the top of a flip chart. Put the flip charts around the room. Review with the team what they did during the program. What experiences and insights did we gain? What goals did we set? Did we reach them? Arm the team members with magic markers and turn them loose.

You can also assign questions to subteams and have them report back to the entire group. Ask the subteams to flesh out their responses with stories that illustrate the points they are making. This is one way to avoid a glib list of words like “teamwork” or “communication” that mean little if there are no details to bring the concepts to life.

Questions to choose from include:

Our team works best when ...

Our team works poorly when ...

The characteristics of my ideal team are ...

What I need or want from my teammates is ...

What I bring to the team is ...

What I am proud of about my team is ...

The strengths of our team are ...

The deltas (things to change/improve) are ...

What we expect from top management is ...

Trade the magic markers for paste-on stars and ask people to star three statements under any question that they most agree with. Compile the most starred statements on one sheet. Go through the list and clarify what

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each statement means. Ask the group if these statements define the kind of team culture that people want to have. If everyone says yes, then the team has developed an agreement that defines how everyone is going to work together back at the workplace.

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Snapshot

We all take snapshots with our minds of the events that make an impact on us. Put the group in a circle and ask:

What mental image from the program stands out in your mind?

If you could make a postcard out of that image, whom would you send it to?

What would you write on the back?

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Highs & Lows

Another way of summing up at the end of a program is to ask the questions:

My low point was ...

My high point was ...

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Take-Aways

At the end of a training program, whether it's been one day or one year, it is useful to reflect on what you learned and, even more important, what you will do with what you learned. Go around the group and give each member a turn to speak to one or more of the following questions:

Name one thing you will do differently back at the workplace.

What is the most important thing you are going to take away from this experience?

What will you commit to doing to make sure that what you learned and achieved here is not lost?

For some groups it will work better to have people discuss these questions in pairs before discussing them with the entire group.

Strengths Feedback

You hear the bad news about a goof you made pretty fast. However, the feedback about the good things you do, day in and day out, often travels so slowly it seldom arrives at all. This activity offers a team the opportunity to speed the process considerably. Many of us find it hard to take in any amount of appreciation from others. To make it easier, this exercise has three rules:

1. The person receiving the appreciation can make no comment other than saying thank you at the end of his turn.
2. Focus your feedback on positive things about the person, especially anything you saw her do or say during the program that you appreciated.
3. Start with one person and go around the circle (if the team is sitting in one) so that everyone has a turn in the “hot seat.”

Another way to encourage this type of feedback is to have team members randomly pick names out of a hat at the beginning of the program. If someone picks his own name, he puts it back in and tries again. Tell people they are to observe the person whose name they drew without letting her know it. The object is to look for the good things that this person does or says—things that inspire others and help the common effort. At the end of the training program, they give that person a good dose of positive feedback.



MODELS FOR TEAM LEARNING

During the debriefing, it is useful to relate the experiences of the participants to a model of team dynamics. The right model provides a framework for understanding those experiences from a different perspective. It can also be a catalyst for a deeper inquiry by the team into two questions:

What is working?

What should we do differently?

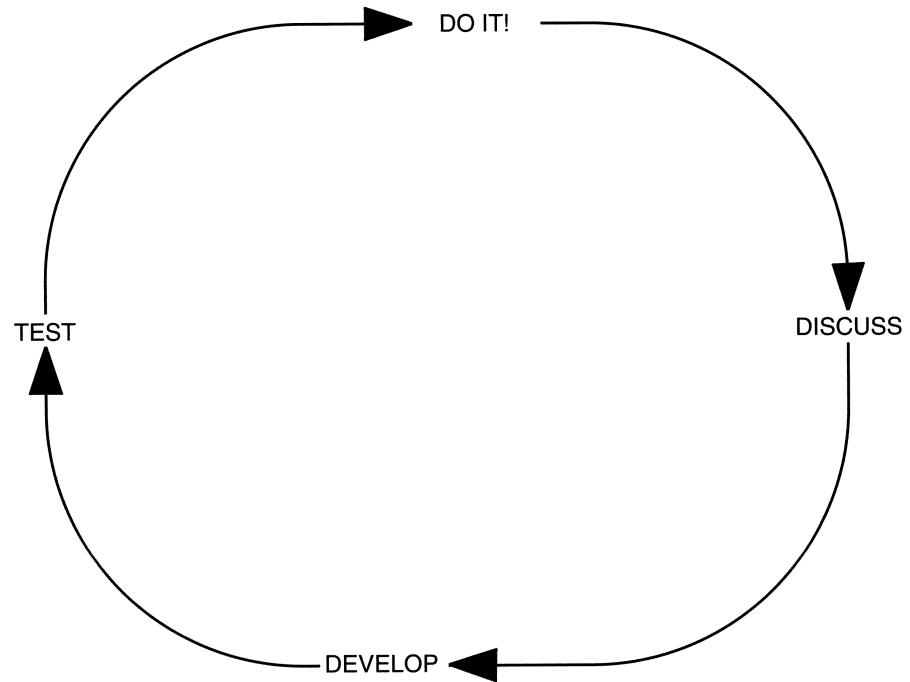
Action Learning

The essence of any team learning program is action learning—learning by doing. It has been said in the traditional, didactic approach to learning that the limit of the mind is the endurance of the butt. In an action learning program, the learners are on their feet. The mind, body, and emotions are all engaged. Action learning takes people outside and challenges them with a variety of tasks that require a collective approach that is at once physical, mental, and social.

The participants conduct an initiative. Review the results in a group discussion. Develop ideas about what they can do to improve their performance as a team. Test those ideas in the next initiative. With each activity, the team continues to improve its approach to team problem solving and decision making.

Team Builder

The Cycle of Action Learning



EIAG—The Action/Reflection Model of Learning

EIAG stands for Experience–Identify–Analyze–Generalize. It is a more detailed version of the active learning cycle discussed on the previous page. Recent research has shown that successful people have a learning ability that is highly flexible and adaptable. What they learn in one area of life they make connections to and apply in other areas that may not seem directly related. Innately or as an acquired skill, they know how to leverage their learning.

The EIAG model is used by trainers to facilitate the learning process for individual participants and for the team as a whole. It helps you to ask the questions that guide the discussion to the areas of greatest insight and understanding. Successful teams, like successful individuals, know how to leverage their learning through the process of:

Action	Experience	Do	*&!#?^#@!
Reflection	Identify	Look	What Happened?
Reflection	Analyze	Think	So What?
Reflection	Generalize	Plan	Now What?

The time required to go through the cycle could be several minutes or a half-hour. The team might even go through the process several times during one debriefing.

Take the process one step at a time:

Experience

The team does an initiative.

* &!!@#\$\$%^ &*!!

Identify

Gather the team in a circle and check in with them. Use open-ended questions to find out how they think they did. Let them ventilate any feelings about the experience.

Ask for significant details: "What happened?" Gather the facts, remembering that facts are friendly. Encourage the team to identify significant behaviors in a nonjudgmental manner.

Question: What happened after the team received its instructions?

Answer: Everyone started talking at once.

Analyze

Look at the impact of these behaviors. Were they helpful or unhelpful?

Give everyone a chance to add their input. Encourage discussion and feedback. Discuss what worked and what didn't work and examine why.

Question: How did everyone talking at once affect the team effort?

Answer: No one knew what was going on.

Question: Why was everyone talking at once?

Answer: People were afraid they wouldn't be heard before a decision was reached.

Generalize

Make connections, draw conclusions, and seek agreement.

Question: Where else does this happen?

Answer: This is just the way we are at work when the team has a deadline.

Question: What could you do differently?

Answer: We could appoint a facilitator who gives each person a chance to speak in turn.

Question: Does everyone agree to try this idea?

Answer: Yes (from all team members).

If you get a "No," discuss the reasons why. Most issues are negotiable. Agreement can also include willingness to live with a decision and not sabotage it even if a person does not like the decision.

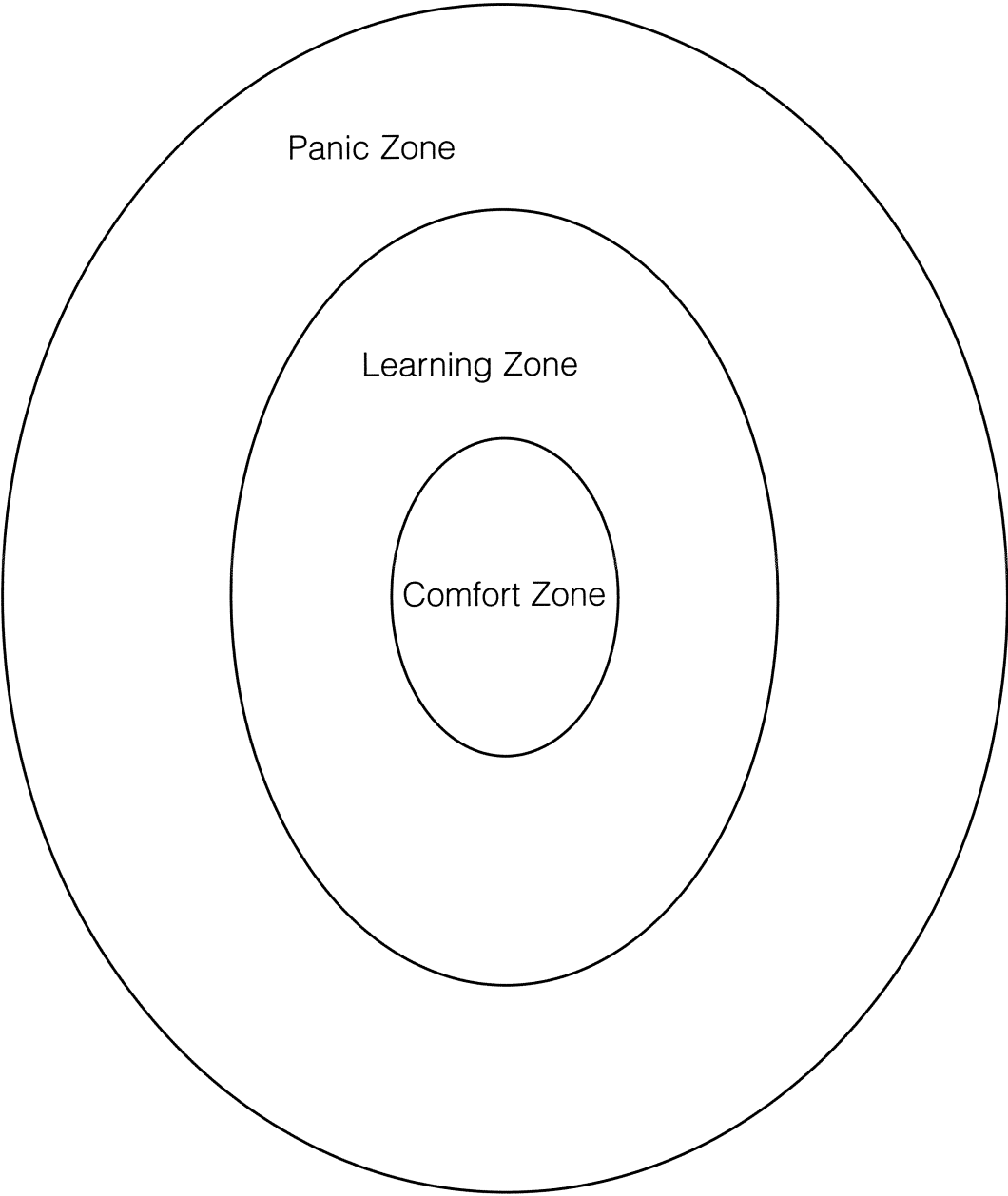
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Learning Zone

When we have something new to learn, we can respond in three different ways. Some of us stay in our comfort zone. There is little risk because we stick with tasks we have already mastered. It's comfortable, but not much learning takes place. The problem is, as one wag put it, when you always do what you always did, you'll always get what you always got. If we want to learn, then, we have to stretch ourselves in some way. That means taking a risk and leaving the good old comfort zone for something new and unfamiliar. If we stretch too far, it could put us in the panic zone. It is difficult to learn anything in that frame of mind. So pulling back a bit would be wise. In an action learning program the participants are asked to set goals for themselves that are in their learning zone.

Team Builder
Zones



Three Rings

The Three Rings Model offers a simple yet profound way to assess the dynamics of a team effort. *Team* deals with *who* is on the team. *Task* deals with *what* the team does and the goals or results that are sought. *Process* deals with *how* the team approaches work and working together.

The key questions to ask when looking at Team are:

- What do you need/want from the team?
- What do you bring to the team?
- What values/norms do we hold in common?

The key questions about Task are:

- What are the desired outcomes/outputs?
- What inputs(resources) are available?
- How do we define and measure success?

The key questions about Process are:

- What is working?
- What is not working?
- What should we do differently?

Using the Three Rings Model

Most teams spend all their time focusing on the task. Western societies are goal oriented.

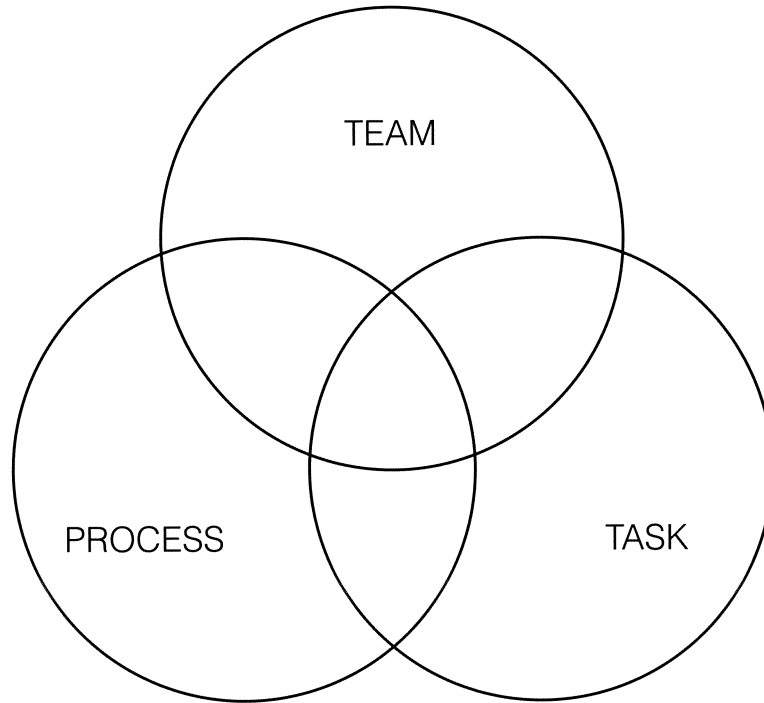
Getting things done is more important than developing relationships. This pragmatic approach has its advantages, especially in a global economy where the focus on the bottom line is relentless. However, it is also true that one's greatest strength can also be one's greatest weakness. The single-minded pursuit of getting the "what" done often neglects both the "how" of planning, evaluation, and adjustment and the "who" of building and maintaining relationships. As a trainer you will see this trend frequently. As we said before, not only does "failing to plan result in planning to fail," but failing to nurture relationships can have similar consequences.

A high-performance team (or any team for that matter) is not unlike a car. If you want it to run at its best, you have to conduct regular maintenance. If you defer maintenance for too long the trade-off will be poorer performance and maybe even a blown engine.

Teams need to go off-line periodically for some group maintenance. It might mean taking a few minutes out of the day or maybe a few days out of the year. During that time the team sits down together and looks at the issues of "how" and "who." This investment in time spent away from the task will pay off in a higher level of performance and job satisfaction.

Team Builder

Three Rings Model



Assumptions

There is a process that all of us go through in dealing with the world around us. It consists of four steps:

1. *We collect data:*

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2. *We draw conclusions:*

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3. *We take action:*

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4. *We get results:*

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Actually, there should be five steps. We never think to look for the missing step except when the results we are getting are not to our liking. The missing step is what takes place between the data we gather and the conclusions we draw from that data. Unless we check out our assumptions and unstated expectations, we cannot be sure that our conclusions are really valid.



Harrison D. Snow

Harrison Snow is an independent team-building facilitator living in Falls Church, Virginia. Mr. Snow has twenty years' of experience in management, training, and team-building activities. He has been designing and conducting team-building and management-training programs, both nationally and internationally, for the last nine years. His career includes work as an operations and marketing manager for a professional services firm and military service as an Army officer with extensive team leadership and training responsibilities.

Mr. Snow's first book, *The Power of Team Building Using Ropes Techniques*, won the 1993 Ben Franklin Award. Mr. Snow has a master's degree in International Management from the American Graduate School of International Management. He is a certified trainer in the Ropes Course and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and an adjunct program manager and trainer for Outward Bound professional development programs. For more information, contact Harrison Snow at 6521 Elmhirst Drive, Falls Church, Virginia 22043.

Outdoor Team-Building Books

Islands of Healing: A Guide to Adventure Based Counseling

Jim Schoel, Dick Prouty, Paul Radcliffe

Project Adventure, Inc., Hamilton, MA

1988

Cowtails and Cobras

Karl Rohnke

Project Adventure, Inc., Hamilton, MA

1977

Silver Bullets

Karl Rohnke

Project Adventure, Inc., Hamilton, MA

1984

The Power of Team Building Using Ropes Techniques

Harrison Snow

Pfeiffer & Company, San Diego, CA

1992

Play It! Over 400 Great Games for Groups

Wayne Rice and Mike Yaconelli

Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI

1986

The Game Finder: A Leader's Guide to Great Activities

Annette C. Moore

Venture Publishing, State College, PA

1992

Understand It—Do It

Chris Roland, Editor

Kendall/Hunt Publishing, Dubuque, Iowa

1995