

Building the Tower

Objectives

Communication | Collaboration | Team Strategy

Illustrate the importance of collaboration among groups working to achieve similar goals.

Demonstrate how competition can be potentially destructive.

Group Size

Medium

Materials

1 pre-built tower made from:

15 Paper Cups

25 Popsicle Sticks

5 sheets of Construction Paper

enough Masking Tape to hold it together

3 packets containing the following items:

Packet #1

1 roll of Masking Tape

10 Paper Cups

25 Popsicle Sticks

4 sheets of construction paper

Packet #2

12" strip of Masking Tape

25 Paper Cups

15 Popsicle Sticks

8 sheets of construction paper

Packet #3

6" strip of Masking Tape

10 Paper Cups

35 Popsicle Sticks

3 sheets of construction paper

Set Up

The setup requires pre-building a tower and dividing the materials into each packet. There is no model for the pre-built tower - it can look like anything you want - the more complicated it is the harder it will be for the groups to replicate.

Directions

Big Picture: Participants will work in small groups to build towers that look like a pre-built tower. Each group will be missing some of the supplies necessary to build their tower, but between the groups they will have enough to build 3 towers identical to the pre-built tower if they decide to collaborate and share supplies. The facilitators should make sure this is not immediately obvious, and once it becomes more obvious, the facilitators should neither discourage or encourage collaboration.

The groups will be purposely set against each other through competition (and therefore they will be less likely to collaborate). Use appropriate additional debrief questions based on the groups choice to collaborate or not to collaborate.

Procedure: 15 min

Begin by randomly dividing participants into small groups and organizing the groups in different areas of the room. You should have the pre-built tower (hidden from view) e.g outside the room, or in a corner where not everyone can see it. Introduce the activity by saying: "Your goal is to build a tower that matches the pre built tower." Ask for one volunteer from each group to be their group's representative, and explain that only the representative will be allowed to see the pre-built tower. Announce that a prize will be awarded for the group that builds the tower that most closely replicates the pre-built tower. While one facilitator is showing the representatives the pre-built model, another facilitator should be distributing the supply packets to the group. The representatives should only have a short time (~30 seconds to see the model) and no one but the representative should be allowed to see the model. Answer any questions at this point, and then announce that the representatives will return to the groups, and once they return, the facilitators will not answer any questions.

[The facilitators should not answer any questions so that the groups are forced to figure out how to build their tower on their own. If the groups figure out they need to collaborate, the facilitators should neither encourage or discourage them (this will come up in the debrief).]

Send the representatives back to their groups and announce that each group has 10 minutes to build the tower. 5 minutes into the building, ask for the representatives to come to the center of the room and report to the other representatives one thing they are doing well and one challenge they are having. Then let them see the model again for a short time (~30 seconds).

[Again, the facilitators should not answer any questions, encourage or discourage collaboration!]

After 10 minutes of building, have a representative from each group present their tower to the other groups.

Report Back: 10 min Give some candy to everyone who participated, and debrief!

Debrief

The facilitators should ask the following questions of the entire group.

- Raise your hand if your group built a tower!
- Did you achieve the tower in the picture? Why or why not?
- What challenges did you encounter and how did you overcome them?
- How did competition add from or detract from what you were trying to achieve?
- What will you take away from this activity?
- How does building the tower in this activity compare to your daily work?
- How does this activity relate to being part of the larger company or organization, or group?
- How can we encourage collaboration and healthy competition among team members?

Additional Debrief (add the following questions if the groups did not collaborate):

- Why did you not to collaborate?
- Was it a conscious choice or did it not occur to you?
- What would have been possible if you had decided to share resources?
- (add the following questions if the groups collaborated):
- How did you come to the decision to collaborate?
- What became possible once you made the decision to share resources?

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These resources have been adapted throughout the years. If you know the origin of any of these activities, please feel free to let us know so we can list the proper citation. A special thank you to the students, faculty, and staff who have contributed over the years.



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