

**TIP #16 – MARCH 2007**  
**ROPE-A-LEADER:**  
**EXPERIENCING THE EMERGENCE OF LEADERSHIP**  
**CONTRIBUTED BY JOHN W. PETERSON AND SHERRY R. MILLS**

Goals

- To provide the participants with the opportunity to experience and observe the emergence of leadership within a group.
- To discuss the emergence of leadership

Group Size

Twenty to thirty-five participants in subgroups of five or seven.

Time Required:

Forty minutes

Materials

- Twenty-five feet of ¼-inch rope, twine, or macramé cord for each subgroup.

Physical Setting

Any area large enough so that all the subgroups can work on the floor without disturbing one another.

Process

1. Ask the participants to assemble in subgroups of five or seven. (Odd numbers work best.) Once subgroups have assembled, place a rope on the floor near each group. (*Note:* You may place ropes in several locations prior to this activity.) (Five minutes)
2. Explain that the task of each subgroup is to use the rope to form “an absolutely perfect” circle on the floor. When finished, the rope should lie on the floor with no one touching it to hold it in place. Tell participants they may *not* talk to one another or to you during the activity and that you will be the final judge as to when they have accomplished the task. Tell them to begin, giving them no more than two or three minutes.
3. While subgroups are completing the task, walk around from subgroup to subgroup “judging” their work and being critical about the final shapes they have created.
4. After the circles have been completed, tell the subgroups to form a perfect square, then a triangle, a trapezoid, and an octagon. Remind the participants not to talk. (Ten minutes)
5. After all the shapes have been completed say, “On the count of 3, point to the leader of your subgroup. Ready? 1, 2, 3.” Ask members of each subgroup, in turn, how they selected that particular leader.
6. Reconvene the large group and lead a discussion based on the following questions:
  - How did the leadership evolve in your group?
  - How did other members of the group acquiesce to the leadership?

- Did conflict occur in any groups? Why or why not?
- How does what happened here compare to what happens in a typical work setting at your organization?

(Fifteen minutes)

#### Variations

- This activity can be used for team building
- At the end of the activity, the group can discuss what attributes of the leaders made the process work. List the attributes on a flip chart for a further discussion of leadership.

This excerpt reprinted from *The Pfeiffer Book of Successful Team-Building Tools*, edited by Elaine Biech, Pfeiffer, ©2001.