

TIP #17 – APRIL 2007
OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES
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Purpose: I use this activity to teach Challenge the Process by combining individual reflection, small group brainstorming, and group commitments. I like that it creates a visual record of the participants' work, while also encouraging them to talk honestly about real challenges.

Materials Needed: 1 poster board, glue stick, markers, small paper bricks (red construction paper cut into 3 in. x 5 in. rectangles), small green leaves and a vine or small green ladder rungs, and other decorations if you like.

- 1.) Ask participants to individually reflect on a current obstacle that they are facing as a leader. Then, ask each participant to write his or her obstacle on a "brick."
- 2.) Divide participants into groups of 3 to 4. Ask participants to share what they wrote on their brick and then help each other by brainstorming creative "opportunities" to overcome each obstacle. The intent is for participants to ask each other tough questions about the obstacles and challenge and to encourage each other to think of new approaches. As a result, the answers go much deeper than what an individual participant would have come up with on their own.
- 3.) Ask each participant to write the best "opportunity" their group brainstormed for their particular obstacle on a green leaf or ladder rung.
- 4.) Bring the whole group together again. Direct participants to come up to the front of the room one at a time and glue their red brick (obstacle) on the poster board and share what it says. The bricks form a big red brick wall at the bottom of the poster board.
- 5.) Ask each participant to come up to the poster board again and commit to creating an opportunity for their obstacle. The participant glues their green leaf or ladder rung (opportunity) on top of the brick wall until the vine or ladder reaches well over the brick wall. After all the participants have finished quickly glue some pre-cut clouds and a sun at the top of the poster board.
- 6.) The finished picture is a red brick wall with a green ladder or beanstalk vine that leads over the brick wall up to the sun and clouds. The participants get excited when they start to see the picture!
- 7.) Debrief the activity. Overall we've shown how Challenge the Process requires creative thinking and effective leaders to find ways to turn obstacles into opportunities.

I think it works best with a group that of 8-20 people who meet regularly. Since you created an artifact (poster), you can look back on it as a group and discuss what happened with the obstacles and opportunities listed.