

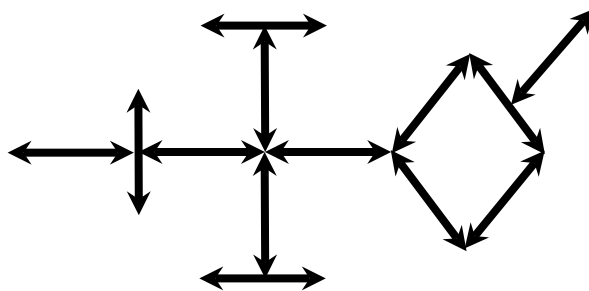
**TIP #36 – APRIL 2009**  
**THE TOOTHPICK ACTIVITY**  
**CONTRIBUTED BY MARY COOPER**

Objective: Promote the practice of Model the Way, with an emphasis on the two commitments: clarifying and setting the example

Audience: Any size group

Time Required: 10-15 minutes, including time for debrief

Materials Needed/Setup: 14 toothpicks per person and a specific pattern to be communicated to the group, such as the design below:



Process:

1. Instruct each participant to take 14 toothpicks.
2. Ask for a volunteer.
3. As the participants are taking their toothpicks, explain to the volunteer that her/his role is to provide instructions to the group on how to assemble the toothpicks in a specific pattern. With his/her back to the audience, show the volunteer the pattern.
4. Inform the group that the volunteer will be giving them instructions on how to create a specific pattern with their toothpicks, and explain that the following rules must be followed:
  - a. No questions can be asked of the volunteer
  - b. Only verbal instructions will be given
  - c. Instructions cannot be repeated
  - d. You have 3 minutes, go!
5. Allow the volunteer to give verbal instructions for creating the pattern, and ensure the rules are followed.
6. At the conclusion of 3 minutes, stop any instructions and have the participants compare the patterns they created with one another, and with the volunteer's pattern (this can be in view as an overhead or PowerPoint with a large group)

Facilitator Tips:

Debrief questions:

1. How did we all do?
2. Are there differences among your patterns? Why are they so different when the instructions were the same?

3. Now let's compare with the actual pattern. Do they match? Why not?
4. What would have helped you replicate the pattern successfully? (Note: look for responses such as "opportunity to ask questions" or "having a visual")
5. How does this exercise relate to the first practice of Model the Way and the two commitments (e.g., the necessity for clear, two-way communication and the benefit of an example)?

Key Points:

- In thinking about the practice of Model the Way and the first commitment, communication within the team and between teams and individuals is critical. It could be the communication of values, principles and standards, or shared ideals. It also could be the two-way dialogue of asking for and receiving feedback and building consensus on the team.
- In thinking about the practice of Model the Way and the second commitment, think about the necessity of a visual. This visual is you, setting the example by following through on commitments, acting on the feedback you have received, and being a behavioral example of "credible" leadership.
- Consider how you can better practice Model the Way and the two commitments.

Variations: You can change the pattern or change the debrief questions and key points to align with another practice, such as Challenge the Process.

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