

TIP #38 – SEPTEMBER 2009
HOT STUFF
CONTRIBUTED BY JULIE TROY AFZALI

September 2009: Hot Stuff

This is an activity that can be used in many different ways. I love it because it takes the group (seemingly) so far away from their everyday work environment and yet the reality is that all of the individual strengths, weaknesses, and unique group dynamic, inevitably come out. You may have seen or heard of this activity as “Toxic Waste” which was what I first heard it as years ago. The materials are simple and can be found around your house. You can also go to the Project Adventure website (www.pa.org) and buy all of the materials under the **Equipment, Props, Publications** tab. The “Challenge Packs” are a great way to stock up on everything you need for experiential activities.

Debrief topics can include:

- Model the Way
 - Which behaviors were most effective in moving the group forward?
- Inspire a Shared Vision
 - What visionary leadership (if any) existed?
 - How did this vision become shared within the group?
 - How was it articulated?
 - Through words or actions (or both)?
- Challenge the Process
 - When did the group begin to challenge the process?
 - Who did this? How? How was the new idea(s) received?
- Enable Others to Act
 - Who took on the role on enabling others?
 - What effect did this have on the group?
 - Was this point of view listened to?
 - Why or why not?
- Encourage the Heart
 - What did people do to encourage others?
 - How did these actions make others feel?
 - What more could have been done?

Objectives:

- To observe the elements of leadership in the group process
- To review the factors that inhibit and enhance effective group decision making
- To explore effective interpersonal communication
- To examine how each group member contributes to the final result

Suggested Time: 25 – 35 minutes – you can change the time to fit your needs and the needs of the group

Materials Needed:

- ½ of a bicycle tire tube
- Twelve 10 – 12 foot lengths of rope
- 2 large coffee cans or small buckets
- Rope or masking tape to form a circle with a 10 ft. radius
- Something to fill one of the cans/buckets 1/3 - ½ full (small balls, dried beans, etc.)

Number of People: 6 – 12 - If you have a large group, you can run two sessions side by side or in different parts of the room. This typically brings up issues of competition and collaboration which can be a great debrief topic.

Physical Setting: Choose a relatively flat area, with room outside of the circle for practice. This activity can be done either inside or outside.

Advance Preparation: Create the circle with the rope or tape. Larger circles make the activity more difficult. Place the half filled cans in the center. All other materials are outside of the circle.

Presentation of Activity: Give the task, rules and resource. If dividing time into planning and execution phases, explain.

The Activity: The goal of this activity is for the group to transfer the contents from one can or bucket into the other while both canisters are in the middle of the large circle. They must achieve this without spilling any of the contents. The group can use any of the materials provided (or others in the room if you want to give them this option), but they cannot step inside of the circle at any time. This is a challenging activity which requires a high level of communication and teamwork. There are many ways to achieve the goal, but most groups figure out a way to use the 12 ropes and the bicycle tire tube to create a tool where they can lift and tip the bucket with the contents into the other bucket.

Rules: You can make the rules as simple or complex as you want depending on what you are trying to focus on with the group. The one rule that must always be observed is:

- No one can move inside of the circle at any time

Other rules can include:

- There is a time limit – You can divide the time into planning and execution phases if you want or see where the group goes on its own
- If anyone breaks the plane of the circle (e.g. their arm goes over the boundary when holding a rope) they lose the use of that part of their body (e.g. they can no longer use that arm)
- You can have the group execute the activity in silence. This forces them to plan differently and raises issues of non-verbal communication

You are limited only by your own imagination when determining the rules. Remember, however, don't make it so complicated that they get frustrated and give up.

You can assign one participant to be an observer or process consultant which creates an environment where they start to pay attention to individual and group behavior and begin to understand how that behavior effects the group's effectiveness.

Additional Debrief Topics:

- Effective/Ineffective leadership behaviors
- Was everyone involved in the planning process? In the execution? If not, why not? Who was involved? Who wasn't? Were all ideas voiced and considered?
- Did the group work together in planning or did they jump right into the activity? How did this effect the outcome?
- How did individuals feel during the activity? What they would do differently?

Julie Troy Afzali is the Director of Design & Organizational Effectiveness for Dynamic Perspectives, an Organizational Success Strategy firm. Julie can be reached at j.afzali@dynamicperspectives.com.