

**TIP #49 – FEBRUARY 2011**  
**TWO WORDS OR LESS: LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUE**  
**CONTRIBUTED BY NANCI APPLEMAN-VASSIL**

**Activity Summary**

A fast-paced activity that allows participants to experience communicating with others when their words are limited.

**Goals**

- To figure out how to get a point across using only two words.
- To identify the challenges and opportunities of communicating with limited words.

**Group Size**

Minimum of 12 and a maximum of 18 persons.

**Time Required**

25 to 30 minutes.

**Materials**

- One (small to medium - sized) plastic bowl for each participant.
- A large container with at least six each of a variety of small items or toys, such as firemen, dice, paper clips, mini cars, poker chips, rubber bands, mini binder clips, or other items, several items for each participant.
- Small index cards with the names of items that are in the container, such as “ paper clips, ” printed on them — one card per participant.
- Copyright - free music and sound system.

**Physical Setting**

A room large enough for 12 to 18 people to walk around and connect with each of the remaining participants.

**Facilitating Risk Rating**

Low to Moderate.

**Process**

1. Introduce the activity by explaining to the participants that they will be learning about leadership and communication by experiencing how effectively they can communicate with others, even when they can only use a few words and are under time pressure.
2. Distribute the small plastic bowls and randomly distribute all of the items from the large bowl. Place one index card face down beside each participant. Tell participants to not share with anyone what is written on their index cards.
3. State that they will have fifteen minutes to collect the items written on their index cards from all the other participants. Other participants can only show their own items

*one at a time*. They must work individually, moving from one person to the next, but they may communicate by using only two words ( “ cool ” or “ bummer ” ) when others pick items from their own bowls to show them. “Cool” indicates that is what they need. “Bummer” means “that’s not it.” They may only touch items in their own bowls. After everyone understands the process, let them begin.

4. Monitor to ensure that the participants are only using the words “cool” and “bummer” and that they are not clustering into larger groups or showing each other more than one item at a time. Have music playing as background.

5. When thirteen minutes have passed, give the participants a two – minute warning before calling time.  
(15 to 20 minutes.)

6. Ask the participants to return to their seats with their bowls. You will notice that most of them have only the items they were seeking, but some with still have a few of their original items besides the ones they sought.

7. Lead a total group discussion to debrief the exercise. Start by asking these questions:

- What did you experience while you worked on this task?
- How effective were you in communicating your needs?
- How difficult was it to communicate just using two words?
- What other tools and techniques did you use to communicate?
- What leadership skills did you observe from others?
- How does this relate to life in the workplace? What situations are similar to this activity?
- What leadership communication guidelines can you glean from what happened?
- How can you better communicate with your team, your peers, and your boss as a result of this activity?

(10 minutes.)

**Nanci Appleman-Vassil** is president and chief learning officer of APLS Group, a training, recruiting, and consulting firm that specializes in working with clients in developing core competencies to optimize performance. Nanci has recently contributed chapters for several books, including the e - book *World’s Best Public Speaking Secrets*. She recently created the 18 Common Mistakes Small Business Owners Make workshop and is past president of the North Carolina RTA Chapter of ASTD.

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