

Five (5) Team building exercises for CVIF 2005 Orientation

Helium Stick

Equipment: 1 Helium Stick, approx. 8 ft. Tent pole is ideal, or broomstick or cardboard/plastic tube/roll.

Time: ~15 minutes of trying until success & ~10 minutes discussion

- Deceptively simple exercise for small to medium sized groups (6 to 14)
- Line up in pairs, facing partner
- Introduce the Helium Stick - a long thin, light rod
- Ask students to point out each index finger and then lay the Helium Stick down on people's fingers
- The challenge is to lower the Helium Stick to the ground
- The catch: Everyone's fingers must constantly be in contact with the Helium Stick at all times
- Warning: At around this point the Helium Stick may start floating off - much laughter. Jump up and pull it down!
- Reiterate that if anyone's finger is caught not touching the Helium Stick, the task is restarted at shoulder height.
- Let the task begin....
- The Helium Stick will mysteriously have a habit of floating upwards rather than down.
- Often the more a group tries, the more it floats (because they get anxious and their fingers collectively jitter it upwards)
- The group needs to eventually to calm down and slowly, patiently lower the Helium Stick - easier said than done.

The Blind Polygon

Objectives: problem solving, communication, teamwork

Group size: Groups of 10-12 (need at least 2 groups)

Materials: Approximately 40 inches of string or twine for each group of 10-12, with ends tied together to form a circle. Optional: blindfold for each participant.

Directions: blindfold each member of the group (or ask them to close their eyes and keep them closed). Arrange the group into a rough circle. Hand the group the circle of string. Each person must grab the string with at least one hand. After everyone has grabbed the string, no one may let go. No one may 'switch positions' with another person. (Sliding hands along the string is acceptable). Ask the group to form a perfect square with the string, without letting go. Allow enough time for participants to be satisfied with their 'square'. Remove their blindfolds (or ask them to open eyes) and examine their shape.

Toxic Swamp

Time: 15 to 20 minutes activity, 10 to 15 minutes discussion

Goal: Strategic planning, teamwork, communication, problem solving

Physical setting: If inside: a large room with unobstructed floor space,
If outside: unobstructed flat field

Materials:

- o "Hover Boards" - pieces of 18"x18" cardboard or carpet squares - enough for at least 3 pieces per small group - could use flip chart paper;
- o Boundary markers - use rope, chairs, or landmarks;
- o Bandannas

Directions:

1. Divide large group of participants into equal groups of 6 to 10 persons per small group. Each group is given 3 Hover Boards (if small groups are 8-10 people, then give 4 Boards). Trainer uses rope to set up boundaries of the toxic swamp; swamp should be approximately 25 feet in length and 15 feet wide (wider depending on number of small groups).

2. Trainer shows participants the boundaries of the toxic swamp, and tells participants the antidote to this contamination is on the other side of the swamp. All participants must cross this zone to obtain the antidote and save the world. Trainer states,

- a. "You are a team of emergency specialists and you must reach the other side of the swamp.
- b. To obtain the antidote, no one may be left behind!
- c. The Hover Boards are made of a special material that is resistant to the toxic sludge. Therefore, only Hover Boards can touch the floor.
- d. If any part of a participant touches the toxic swamp, the entire team must return to the start area.
- e. The Hover Boards can only travel in one direction; i.e. they cannot be shuffled back and forth but can only travel towards the safe zone opposite the start area.
- f. You will have 10 minutes to reach the safe zone."

4. Trainer starts activity and announces time remaining every 5 minutes. Group(s) are given 10 minutes to cross the toxic zone.

Note: Some groups may elect to pool resources and use all the pieces of cardboard to create "stepping stones" across the field, so that everyone works together. Most groups will think that because they have been put into smaller groups, the goal is to get just their small group across. The field participants might even create a false sense of competition between groups. Trainer's instructions should not influence these interpretations one way or another. Trainer merely divides the group into smaller groups and explains that the task is to get everyone across the toxic swamp.

At the end of 10 minutes or when all groups reach safety, trainer instructs groups to stop and processes the activity as follows.

Toxic Swamp Discussion:

1. What feelings surfaced among participants? What happened in your group?
2. Were you successful in accomplishing your goal? How well did you work together?
3. What was challenging about this activity?
4. Did the individuals given an increase in difficulty at the beginning contribute to the group process - why or why not? How did you feel about your contributions? How did the rest of the group treat you?
5. Was this a positive or negative experience for you individually? As a group? What could have made it more positive?
6. What parallels are there between this activity and a group/work situation (any examples?)
7. Did anyone consider pooling resources with the other group(s) to accomplish the task? Why or why not?

Toxic Swamp variations:

- o Trainer may increase the level of difficulty by selecting individuals in each group to be blindfolded or muted using bandannas. Trainer may also impose these challenges midway through the activity
- o Trainer may "bargain" with participants throughout exercise. For example, if someone steps on the ground, trainer can offer to blindfold 2 participants and make 2 participants mute, rather than sending them all back to start again. These deals can be offered at the discretion of the trainer, who should determine the stakes of the deals based on the group and its level of frustration. Try to challenge and push the group without causing them to feel defeated.

Pitching a Tent, Florida Style

Equipment: tents (have each one in a bag), blindfolds

Object: To pitch a tent within a given time period. Excellent outside activity.

Rules: Divide the group in half. Blindfold one side. Seeing people may not move or handle any parts of the tent, nor may they call people by their proper names.

Directions: The group has 25 minutes to pitch their tent by working together. Afterwards, process with questions similar to the toxic swamp above.

Variation: If you divide the large group into 2 groups of ten, and therefore use 2 tents, consider putting both tents, poles, pegs, etc in one bag. As a large group, they need to separate out the tents, and then work in their smaller groups to pitch it. Facilitators decide beforehand if they are going to make this a competition bwtwn the 2 teams or not. Even if not, the groups may create competition where there is none, leading to a good discussion afterwards.

All Aboard

Lay out a sheet or blanket on the floor. Instruct the group that their mission is to fit everyone onto the sheet. Once achieved, challenge them to turn the sheet over without having anyone touch the ground. *Variation:* After all are on the sheet, congratulate them and have them step off. Then fold the sheet in half and challenge them to repeat their success. See how far they can go.