

Teambuilding Exercises

Puzzle

Give each member of a 4-person team roughly a fourth of the pieces of a 100 piece puzzle. When you divide the puzzle up, state firmly “this is yours, this is yours....etc.”

The objective: Complete the puzzle.

The parameters: 1. No talking. 2. No taking. If students want you to explain, don’t. Only restate: No talking, no taking.

This exercise takes between 20 and 40 minutes.

Sarong

Place a sarong on the ground strategically next to a chair and/or a table. Ask 4 to 6 students to stand on the sarong.

The objective: Flip a sarong over completely.

The parameters: No using your hands, no touching the floor. I model this by placing my hands behind my back or in my pockets. If students want you to explain, don’t. Only restate: No using your hands, no touching the floor. Students will begin to “think outside the box” and “take risks” like standing on the table or sitting on each others’ laps...etc. You can discuss the importance of this later.

Comic Strip

Find a 4-section comic strip, print it out, black out all of the dialog and cut each segment apart from the others. Give one segment to each student in a team of four. They are only allowed to see their segment. The four students have to communicate descriptively to determine the order of the comic strip and the storyline without showing each other their respective segments. They must reach consensus. The exercise is not about getting the correct answer but about communicating descriptively, listening actively, and reaching agreement. At the end, they tell their version of the story and the order and then lay them down. It helps to select a comic strip that has multiple characters or at least one change of scene.

Once you rotate all participants through 2 to 3 activities, you prompt reflection saying, “you had to think critically, you had to problem solve, you had to work around parameters and

limits, you had to think strategically, and you had to collaborate to complete these activities. What did collaboration in your team look like, sound like, and feel like?” They reflect together and then after about 5 to 10 minutes, you pull the team back together to share out. You synthesize what is said and write it down. Here is the tricky part; you have to deliberately change the grammar before you write it on the chart paper so that it will be correct after the words “we will” (which are not yet present). The participants won’t realize this until after you have scribed the entire list and you write the words “we will...” at the top and demonstrate that we can replicate this in the classroom as a way of cultivating student-driven, student-experienced collaboration norms. I have seen teachers hold discussions with students to create student-driven collaboration norms. This is good (and better than many classrooms), but using team-builders is even better because students identify the behaviors from this experience not from a concept of what one “should do” in school.

Helium Stick

This is a simple exercise in teamwork. Have the students form two lines, facing each other, and point their index fingers and hold their arms out. Lay a long, thin, lightweight rod on the team’s fingers. The students must lower the stick to the ground—easier said than done!

The objective: Lower the stick to the ground.

The parameters: All the students’ fingers must be in contact with the stick at all times. Students may not pinch or grab the stick.

This exercise takes approximately 20 minutes, including set up and discussion.

Toxic Waste

This exercise works best for more established teams, not newly formed ones. The setup and instructions are quite detailed, so refer to the link for complete information.

The objective: Teams must figure out how to transfer a bucket of “toxic waste” to a “neutralization” bucket.

The parameters: Teams must figure out how to move the waste safely while avoiding spillage and radiation zones.

This exercise takes about 30 to 45 minutes.

Mine Field

This exercise requires pair work. One team member is blindfolded and the other team member must successfully guide his or her partner through a “mine field” using only verbal instruction.

The objective: To safely guide a team member through a mine field.

The parameters: The walking member must remain blindfolded.

This exercise takes up to an hour including set up and debrief.

Pipeline

This exercise is fast paced and requires both problem solving skills and strong communication skills among team members.

The objective: To maneuver a marble from one end of pipe to another.

The parameters: Each team member only has a short piece of pipe. Other rules can include members being required to carry the marble at least once, or in different orders, or members must have both feet on the floor at all times.

This exercise takes about 30 minutes.

Keypunch

This exercise is not only about completion, but improvement. Working together, the team tries to better their timing as they complete the task. See the link for full details on setup and instruction.

The objective: In sequence, team members must touch randomly placed numbers within a set time frame.

The parameters: The randomly placed numbers are not clearly visible to the team. Within five attempts, the team must complete the task or improve on their time if they have solved the challenge.

This exercise takes about 40 minutes.

Great Egg Drop

This small team exercise is one that has been used widely. It is especially good for teaching project management.

The objective: To drop an egg from 8 feet high without breaking it.

The parameters: Teams can use any materials to build their container.

This exercise takes about 2 hours from start to finish.

You can find some of these and several other teambuilding exercises [here](#).