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Title: THE MARSHMALLOW CHALLENGE FINDINGS

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The [marshmallow challenge](http://marshmallowchallenge.com/) has been spreading in the creative thinking space quite rapidly recently. For those who don’t know the goal of the marshmallow challenge is to build the largest tower that can support a marshmallow on the top. The challenge is gaining popularity because an interesting observation, kindergartners on average build taller towers than business school graduates. Over the past month or so I have done the challenge with 40 children ranging from seven to sixteen years old.

During this challenge I realized that not all of the finding I have heard echo chambered all over the internet are accurate, and some that I can confirm:

1. **Younger does not always equal better** - Tom Wujec and the internet lemmings would have us all believe that short of a couple outliers (architects & engineers) younger participants will on average build taller towers. In my tests with kindergarteners through high schoolers I found that age often helps more than it hurts. I don't think this is directly opposed to the original premise that business school graduates are worse than kindergartners. I would just like to propose a new theory: *Business school makes you bad at the marshmallow challenge*. Since the drop in potential height of tower comes AFTER high school
2. **Enthusiasm outweighs all** - 100% of the teams that finished the challenge were extremely excited to participate. From the moment we started they were involved, and all participating. Other teams had superior plans, ideas, and social skills. In spite of their shortcoming the enthusiastic teams all finished towers that met the criteria, even if they looked like a breeze could easily knock them over.
3. **Building and testing are more important than politics.** - At the beginning of the challenge every team had squabbles over building supplies, and approaches to the towers. Some teams tried to take a step back and take turns, or work out a sharing system as they are taught in school. This contrasted sharply to the other tables that didn’t acknowledge this as an issue and kept working. In the end the tables that kept some conflict fared much better than those who chose to fix the “problem.”
4. **Adjusting team dynamics can be a costly choice.** - The team that had the first tower standing got persuaded by a team member to restart the tower with a new design. This shift in power greatly altered the team dynamic, at the beginning the entire team was working together, but after new leadership took over things changed. Instead of 4 sets of hands building there was only one. While everyone else just watched.
5. **Define your Goals** - Within the first 6 minutes two of the teams had a working prototype of their tower, they tore down these prototypes in order to build something greater. For both these teams they never got around to finishing the taller tower. When the final bell rang both teams ended with a 0 for their height, and literal tears in their eyes. If your goal is perfection, understand that as you are passing good in search of great, you may end up with nothing.

As the marshmallow challenge seems to be growing in popularity I encourage everyone to join in or host a workshop. It is a great opportunity to teach people about prototyping and the importance of testing ideas!