

The Process of Group Building



The Building Blocks of Team Development

****Self- Actualization** Relationship Building**Active Listening
TrustAttitude **Understanding the Task **Motivation **Preparation
Practice **Patience **Persistence **Concern for all**

Whenever you are working with a new group of young people, it is always a good idea to spend some time “group building”. Whether it is as simple as an icebreaker and name game for a short gathering, or as comprehensive as a day-long process for a week-long retreat, the time spent is always beneficial in creating an open and cohesive group. Keep in mind...this is not sports, and these are not “games”. The main purpose is to foster growth and communication within the group...it should not be “easy” and is not necessarily always “fun” (although it can be!).

It is a good idea to lay out guidelines and create an atmosphere of trust when you are team building. Use of a ‘Full Value Contract’ is one way to do that. You can actually write out the contract on a piece of paper and have all in the group sign the contract. Keep it with you and remind the participants throughout the activities if you find that they are not following the contract.

“Full Value Contract”:

- Agreement to work as a team and to work toward individual and team goals.
- Agreement to follow safety and behavior guidelines.
- Agreement to give and receive honest (but kind) positive and negative feedback, and to attempt to change behavior as appropriate.
- Agreement of a “challenge by choice”, meaning no one will be forced to participate, but are encouraged to challenge themselves.
 - i. It is good to look at your individual goals for the day.
 - ii. What is your greatest strength? Weakness? Good to select a goal around one of these questions.
 - iii. Select one group goal.
 - iv. Sample Individual Goals are: *I will ask for help when I need it... I will not put others down...I will attempt the trust fall...I will speak up when I feel uncomfortable.*
 - v. Sample Group Goals are: *We will honor the full value contract...We will confront each other if anyone is messing around...We will encourage each other to do our best.*

Safety:

- All facilitators have the responsibility to ensure the safety of all those participating in your group building.
- This should be at the forefront of all other goals for the day.
- The physical and emotional safety of all participants, including those with disabilities, should be constantly monitored and re-evaluated throughout the day.
- Remind the participants of safety as often as you can.

- During debriefing, there is an opportunity to talk about safety, especially if there is an issue that goes far beyond the abilities of the facilitator.

Discussion points before starting:

- Ask the group why each of these points are so important (it's like working together as a positive family).
- Talk about the importance of trust in all that will be done.
- Talk about the importance of spotting in some of the activities.
- Discuss how the group will resolve conflict.
- What are some attitudes or behaviors that should be avoided as individuals and as a team (no name calling, no put-downs, everyone is involved, etc.)?
- What is each person looking forward to?
- What is each person expecting to get out of this experience?

Other Important Points to remember:

- **Modifying:** Struggle is good...the initiatives should be difficult if you want growth to happen. However, change the rules of an activity to make it easier if the group is starting to lose focus or become overly frustrated.
- **Refocus:** If you notice that the group is losing focus, stop and tweak whatever they are doing. Ask the group to take a step back and re-discuss the solution.
- Avoid using phrases like, “*Ok, now we are going to play a game.*” Use the term ‘activity’ or ‘initiative’, etc.
- In creating a positive environment, conflict is possible. It's normal! Use it as an opportunity for people to grow and learn to work better with one another.

It is important that group building activities are done in a specific order to enhance the safety and effectiveness of the team dynamics and trust.

1. **Name Games**– These activities are opportunities for the participants to learn each other's names so that they are not saying, “Hey you!” to one another. The first step of building any group is for people to refer to one another by name.
2. **De-inhibitizers** – This means getting the group to do something out of the ordinary, to act silly, and to loosen up. The objective here is to get participants to begin taking some risks. Remember to choose de-inhibitizers that are appropriate for the group. It is not the intention of de-inhibitizers to embarrass or make participants uncomfortable. On the contrary, de-inhibitizers are to get participants comfortable and ready for the rest of the activity.
3. **Trust Exercises** – The purpose of trust building is to allow participants to speak freely and honestly, to take new risks (such as getting on new high element, changing behavior, etc.), and to feel comfortable enough with the group to share their thoughts and feelings. A classic example of this is the trust fall. Spotting is an important element of trust exercises. The sequence of spotting is as follows: Explain the meaning of spotting* Demonstrate and explain basic position- stance, arms, hands, and eyes (focus) * Practice

in a controlled, contained context- Partner trust fall, wind in the willows* Emphasize the relationship between good spotting and trust*

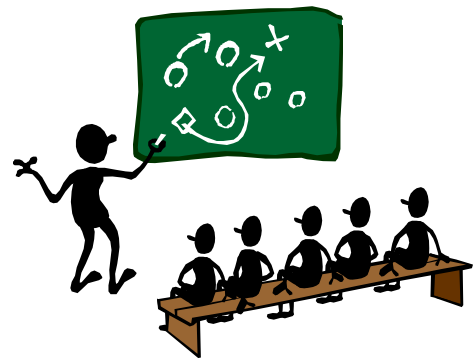
4. **Problem Solving** – These activities should be done after your team has developed a level of trust. A problem is presented to you as a team and, as a team, you are asked to solve it.
5. **Debriefing** – This is the final and most important step in the group building process. After each activity or initiative, debriefing will provide an opportunity for the teams to talk about what they experienced, and how they grew as a group. Discuss the positive growth, and what they can continue to work on. Let them think about the answers – don't dictate the conversation. Also, if you have quiet people, gently ask them if they would share with the team their own thoughts. Methods include: The go-around (asking each group member to contribute a sentence or word reflecting the activity answer a question such as "how did you feel?")*** Sentence completion (providing one or more incomplete sentences such as "I find ____ difficult," or "Some qualities I like about myself are ____")*** Direct questioning (asking an individual a question by name, maybe if they are not contributing as much, and making sure to thank them by name as well).

Some Basic Debriefing Questions

1. What was most enjoyable about the activity?
2. Did the team get frustrated? Why?
3. What is something that the team is doing very well?
4. What can the team improve on? How should the team do this?
5. Was everyone heard in the planning phase?
6. Was there a plan before all of you got started?
7. What is the advantage of having a plan ahead of attempting the task at hand?
8. What can the team do to make sure that everyone is heard?
9. Were there any surprises?

Main Roles of the Facilitator

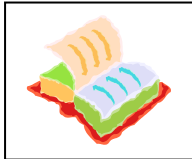
- A helper
- An individual who respects diverse values
- An observer
- A storyteller and creator of perceived risk
- A teacher
- A conflict mediator
- A listener
- A role model



A Good Facilitator...

- Creates a program that provides growth and safety for all.
- Familiarizes him/herself with any special needs among participants and helps tailor activities and exercises to include each young person.

- Allows the group to make their own decisions.
- Is sensitive to the personality and mood of each individual and overall group.
- Functions in an enabling role for all participants to reach their highest potential.
- Leaves his or her personal agenda aside.
- Relates to each member on their level.
- Knows when to intervene and stop what is going on and refocus the group.
- Gives just enough information to start the task, and can change the rules to make it harder or easier depending on what is best for the group.
- Encourages cheering, clapping, and enthusiasm to positively influence the group.
- Monitors subtle comments during the experience for either immediate address (if off-track) or to bring up later in debriefing questions.
- Knows what is possible for the group, by way of both challenging them and knowing their limits.



Resources used for this article:

Hemlock Overlook Packet

Bill Gavin's Tips on Team building

Facilitator Preparation for Challenge Course, by Brethren Woods

Other Resources for Team Building - by Karl Rohnke:

Quicksilver: Adventure Games, Initiative Problems, Trust Activities and a Guide to Effective Leadership, by Karl Rohnke & Steve Butler (Publisher: Project Adventure)

<http://karlrohnke.com/quicksilver.html>

Silver Bullets <http://karlrohnke.com/silverbullets.html> (Publisher: Project Adventure)

Cowstails and Cobras II: A Guide to Games, Initiatives, Ropes Courses, and Adventure Curriculum (Kendall Hunt Publishing) <http://www.karlrohnke.com/cowtails.html>

Websites: EGAD! Ideas - <http://www.egadideas.com/>

The Source for Youth Ministries - <https://thesource4ym.com/games/>

Youth Worker's Idea Station - <http://bradzockoll.tripod.com/youthworker/>