

NAME: Build a Tower

SOURCE:

- Tom Wujec TED talk (adapted)
- I have seen several variations of this exercise using different materials (paper, cardboard, popsicle sticks, straws, toothpicks, etc). Using suggested materials helps link it with the TED talk if you want to use this to process the exercise, but almost anything can be used.

INTENTION: This is a good activity to activate a group and help illustrate a range of concepts. I often use this activity to focus on chosen actions versus rule-governed behaviors, but it will elicit lots of material related to attention, perspective taking, fusion, and experiential avoidance.

MATERIALS:

1. Spaghetti (12 sticks per team)
2. Tape (1 yard per team)
3. String – optional (1 yard per team)
4. Marshmallow (1 per team)
5. Whiteboard

SCRIPT: (Written instructions for Group Leader)

It is desirable but not necessary to have multiple teams if there are 4 or more people in the group.

When I say “go” your team will have 15 minutes to work together to build a tower using the materials you have been given. While you complete this I would like your team to pay attention to 3 rules and 3 values (write on whiteboard).

RULES:

- The tower should be free standing (do not tape it or lean it against anything. Tower should be able to be moved across a table top)
- Everyone in the group should contribute something
- The marshmallow should be on top

VALUES:

- Make the tower as tall as possible
- Make the tower as stable as possible
- Make the tower as attractive as possible

“Go!”

As groups work, leader should give time announcements (10 minutes, 5 minutes, etc). Group leader may also want to take notes about what is said or observed. If groups ask questions it may be helpful to respond ***“The group has all the information it needs”*** to facilitate problem solving and negotiation within the teams.

DISCUSSION: Possible questions or topics to address

- How was that? (Start with an open ended question to explore group perceptions)
 - Notice competition or comparison of self to others showing up.
- How did your team decide that it was finished?
- How did your team decide what the rules meant (often there is some discussion of this, like do we need to use the whole marshmallow)
- How did your team prioritize the values of tall, stable, and attractive (competing values)
 - Did you make a decision about this or did it just kind of happen?
 - What influenced your choice?
 - In your life are there values that compete for your time and attention (family, work, self-care, leisure, etc.)
 - Do you make a conscious choice about this or does it just kind of happen?
- Show TED video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0_yKBitO8M
 - Why do kids do better in this task than many adults (judgment / fusion / experiential avoidance)
 - What kinds of things might you enjoy playing around with or experiencing but your judgments hold you back from taking the risk?
 - If we can't return to the kind of judgment free play that children enjoy, how could we have our judgments without getting so bogged down by them?
 - What do you make of the idea that incentive (high stakes) can result in worse performance?
- Use DNA-V to process people's experience:
 - What role did your advisor play?
 - What was helpful information?
 - What comments or predictions did your advisor make that were inaccurate or unhelpful?
 - When your attention was on your advisor how would you describe your emotional experience? (competitive, worried, frustrated, self-critical, etc)
 - What role did your noticer play?
 - What role did your discoverer play?
 - What did you need to learn through trial and error?
 - When you were involved in the active discovery experience of building with your team, how would you describe your emotional experience (playful, curious, interested, etc.)

This is a dynamic activity that can be adapted and processed in a variety of ways. It can be used to illustrate multiple areas of the ACT hexaflex.