

Communication Breakdown

Environmental Education Lesson
EDWARDS CAMP AND RETREAT CENTER

Summary

Students will participate in a communication exercise in small teams, where each team attempts to replicate a Tinker toy model. Each member of the team has a different role which only he/she may perform and whose actions affect the success of the team.

Usage

Grade level: 4th - 12th

This activity takes 60-90 minutes and works best with 10-40 people.

Objectives

On completion of this lesson students will work on...

- Individual communication skills
- Cooperation and team work
- Dealing with frustration

Materials

- Container of Tinker toys
- Kernels of corn or bean
- Name tags for each team that explains the different jobs
- Job layout chart.

Introduction

In communication breakdown, students work as a team to try and replicate a model built out of Tinker toys. Each team member has a specific job in the process. Students will be working on being a member of a team and being held responsible for particular tasks.

Warm-Up Activity

A good introduction activity is the telephone game. Have the group sit in a line. The instructor thinks of a sentence or phrase and whispers it in the first person's ear. Whatever that person hears is what he or she whispers to the next person. This continues until the last person in the group hears the sentence. Compare the end sentence to the original sentence. This activity illustrates how a message/ communication can change when passed through many people. The students should think about this when they are trying to build their model.

Activity

The goal of communication breakdown is to make a replica model out of Tinker toys that is an exact copy of the original. Each person will have a particular job. He or she is only allowed to do that job. Information and materials are passed between team members to build their model. Construction materials are bought from the store using kernels of corn.

Ahead of time build a model out of Tinker toys for the looker from each team to see. Make the model with two more pieces than what grade the students are in. For example if they are in 6th grade make an eight piece model, if they are in 10th grade make a twelve piece model. Have a place to hide the original model where only the “looker” may see it. Spread the work areas out for each team, so the teams can not look at what the other teams are building. Have the store (where building pieces are bought) in a central location.

Divide the students up into teams of five people (if there are extra students some jobs can be done in pairs). The different jobs are as follows:

Looker

Look at the original model and explain to the **buying runner** what pieces are needed and how they fit together

Buying Runner

Tell the **buyer** what pieces they need to get from the store and explain to the **building runner** how the pieces go together

Buyer

Go to the store and purchase the pieces that the buying runner describes. Pass these pieces on to the **building runner**.

Building Runner

You get the pieces from the buyer and the information on how they go together from the buying runner. This is the information that you pass on to the **builder**.

Builder

Construct a replica model of the original model using the information and pieces from the building runner.

Store Keeper

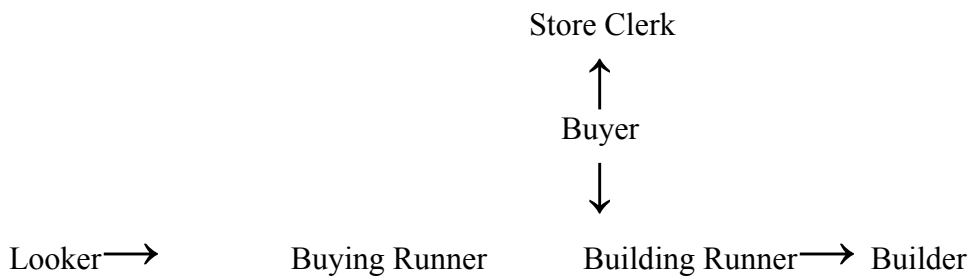
It is best if one or two adults run the store. The store keeper may charge what ever “prices” seems fair. One thing to keep in mind is that at the beginning of the activity parts should be easy to buy in order to get parts to the builder quickly, that way he or she has something to work on.

As the activity runs on and the buyers run out of corn, the store keepers may ask students for other things as payment. Be creative ask for answers to question, have them tell a joke or sing a song etc. Challenge the students on their ability to communicate accurately. Encourage them to be as specific as possible. If they do not describe well enough, give them a wrong piece.

Explain to the students the different jobs and how they are allowed to communicate with each other and their specific task. At first it might be hard for students to follow all the different steps. Walk through the first piece or give an example of one. (The looker sees

a round wooden wheel and tells the buying runner who goes and tells the buyer. The buyer goes to the store to get the piece the buying runner described. If the buyer does not describe the piece accurately he or she may not get the right piece, details are important. While the buyer is getting the piece, the looker tells the buying runner what to do with the piece and the buying runner passes that information to the building runner. The building runner receives the wooden wheel from the buyer and takes it to the builder telling him or here what to do with it.)

Give the teams 25-30 minutes (or more if needed) to work through the communication chain to build to build their models.



Conclusion

When all groups are finished with their models begin a discussion about the activity. Here are some good discussion questions to ask the students:

- 1) How did you feel about the activity?
- 2) What was the hardest job? Easiest? Why?
- 3) Did anyone get frustrated?
- 4) How could you tell others were frustrated?
- 5) How did you deal with the frustration? Quit? Cheat?
- 6) What were some specific words that you used that were helpful?
- 7) Did your team improve in strategy as you went along?

End discussion with the advantages and disadvantages of working in groups. What skills have they learned to help them work better together? How is this activity helpful in everyday life? Name some situations in school or work where people have different jobs that depend on each other.

Now the moment everyone has been waiting for... bring out the original models, so each team can compare how they did.