Bring Teams Together

Team Building and
Team Retreat
Resource Book

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my two children Michaela and Riley, my wife Diane, and to all the student-athletes with whom I have had the honor to share many amazing experiences. They have taught me more every day than I ever imagined. Thank you for sharing, and helping me grow.

This book is in memory of Shannon Potter who shared her vision of life's journey. She showed me that a destination is not a place, but just a part of the journey that is to be cherished. Sometimes the destination is out of our control, but the path we take and the perspectives we choose will always be ours.

Introduction

Many years ago I decided to develop a unique high school volleyball team camp experience. I wanted to create something beyond traditional skills training and competitive experiences. Thus, the Team Retreat Camp was born. I started by taking teams to a high ropes course during camp sessions. Since then, the program has continued to evolve. Through the years, I have taken a deep look at what I feel are experiences that truly impact the core of teams.

Based on my experiences as a NCAA collegiate coach, I believe there needs to be more than just skills training and high level competitions to have a complete team package. Passion fuels the fire. Team cohesion makes the magic happen. The concepts in this book are a foundation with my collegiate teams today.

My research has occurred in many traditional and non-traditional ways. Of course, there is attending countless presentations and clinics. I fill my evenings reading many great books and articles written by amazing authors. I have the ultimate dynamic lab, having the opportunity to run countless activities with my teams and camps. I have been fortunate to witness smiles from more than my fair share of wonderful athletes. They have represented greatly different skill levels from vastly diverse backgrounds. Teams from Florida to Alaska, and everywhere in between have been a part of the process. I can tell you this. Most team members want teammates to be people they care for and trust. They want to know their teammates will be there for them. Ultimately, they sincerely want to do their personal best.

As we know, life itself offers some of the best lessons. The ironies of a metaphor come alive. Somewhere on a trail in Idaho, I am probably on my mountain bike contemplating team situations. Then it happens.

> *"I went on a bike ride to climb to the top of a mountain. On the way up, my chain popped off and jammed in between the chain ring and frame. I pulled the chain out of its wedged position, and put it back on the chain ring. As I attempted to continue riding up the mountain, the chain kept popping off the chain ring. I stopped, and put the chain back on. Five feet later, the chain popped off the chain ring again. The situation was frustrating. Not knowing why the chain would not stay on its path, I tried adjusting the derailleur so the chain would go straight. The derailleur is a mechanism that guides the chain onto specific gears. I got back on the bike and began to pedal, and then five feet later, the chain popped off again. I eventually figured out that I must have a different problem. I looked at the chain, one link at a time. I discovered one of the links in the chain was bent. Since all the links were not in alignment, the chain would not track straight, thus it could not keep the bike moving forward on the journey. I had two options: 1. I could attempt to bend the chain link back somewhat straight. I was not sure if that option would work, as it could possibly bend other links or make that link worse. 2. I could remove the bent link with a chain tool and reconnect the chain without the link. I chose the latter of the two options and five minutes later I was pedaling the bike towards my goal. It was later than I expected, but I reached my goal of riding to the top of the mountain."*

Team Links ™

Think of a group as a series of individual links. Each link works together to form a chain, therefore, each person in our group is a team link within the team chain. Much like the chain on a bicycle, the team chain provides the drive for the team. Without a complete and connected chain, neither a bike nor a team can go very far. The team chain is only as strong as its weakest link. If someone breaks away from the group spiritually or physically, the chain is broken and the unity is shattered. Fortunately, broken links can be fixed, removed, or replaced. Broken links must be remedied though, as the chain cannot drive our team on its journey if broken.

As leaders, one of our main responsibilities is to align our team links so the group can continue to make efficient progress towards our goals. Each link in the chain must be connected to be strong. As time goes on, we must adjust and strengthen the connection between our team links. When we keep our team links connected and aligned, we can pedal full power ahead progressing towards our objectives.

Occasionally, the chain works beautifully. Other times it does not. Often times through leadership skills, we can get and keep the team links aligned. Other times, one or more links will keep the team from continuing on its path to success. All team links must be aligned for the team to pursue its journey. Non-aligned links are counter-productive to the advancement of the group. If team links are not aligned, the group must find a way to align the chain of team links. There may be times that the only way a chain can be aligned, is by removing some of the bent links.

Each member of the group has the responsibility of bringing character, cooperation, commitment, and courage to the team journey. Life is full of choices. Every person in the group has the opportunity to choose how they will proceed. The effectiveness of the team will be impacted by all members of the group. I keep the bent bicycle chain link from the bike ride that day displayed in my office. It is a reminder that as a leader, I need to keep each link strong and straight.

In This Book

Bring Teams Together is a Team Retreat Resource Book that is designed to give leaders tools and resources to create an effective team retreat and team building program. It begins with two educational sections, *Team Building Concepts* and *Team Retreat Concepts*. These sections are followed with resource sections to help expand your team building program.

The *Team Building Concepts* section includes useful information to help plan and develop a program for your group. This section takes an in depth look at the foundations of team building, focusing on developing a dream and establishing a positive culture within your team. This section will also discuss the art of story telling as a method to create memorable metaphors. *Team Building Concepts* will outline the process of briefing and debriefing team building activities. There is useful information for constructing and directing metaphors, as well as using reflection resources as a doorway to the learning process. A method to sequencing the journey with team building will be discussed. Finally, facilitator responsibilities will be reviewed, including evaluating the level of readiness and safety issues.

The *Team Retreat Concepts* section discusses how a team retreat can be a great opportunity to accelerate growth for a group. It presents considerations for planning a team retreat. Key elements for conducting a successful team retreat are detailed, including creating an atmosphere, setting specific goals, and sequencing. The section also takes a look at developing themes and metaphors for a team retreat.

The *Team Building Resources* section includes activities and an equipment checklist for mobile initiatives. There is a list of reflection resources to assist a facilitator in creative debriefing methods. A large portion of this section is devoted to team building initiatives, which is organized by categories and phases for proper sequencing. The first initiatives are ice breakers, which are community and culture builders that help the group to get to know and feel comfortable around each other. Next are communication initiatives, which foster communication skills. Following in the sequence are trust initiatives. After trust is developed, the initiatives focus on learning how to face challenges and become effective problem solvers. Finally, transfer and celebration initiatives assist teams with taking a closer look at the growth of the group, evaluating their future direction and celebrating its accomplishments.

The *Team Retreat Resources* section contains descriptions and outlines of sample team retreats and themes. This section gives you creative ideas in developing your own team retreat. A team retreat can be created with various lengths of time ranging from a single session to multiple day retreats. The retreat can also have an ongoing theme that continues over time, creating doorways to discovery throughout the journey.

The *References* and *Other Resources* sections include a bibliography of references and a list of additional resources to further explore many creative ideas within team building and adventure education.

Take the creative liberty to adjust the enclosed team building activities and team retreat resources to better suit your group and its specific needs. This book is better for your group when used as a creative kitchen manual, instead of a specific recipe book. Adjust the recipes to suit your taste!

Team Building Concepts

Dream, Believe, Live. ™

      It all starts with *a dream*. Teams need to have a dream that motivates and energizes them. Groups will work with passion if their dream holds great importance to them. The dream needs to be expressed and agreed upon by the group. All members must buy into the dream as their chosen direction of pursuit.

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It all starts with a dream.
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      Believe the dream will become reality. The dream only has significance if the group truly *believes* they can make it come true. Efforts and focus fizzle when the dream does not seem realistic. The group should make their dream one that they believe can be brought to fruition through their commitment, tenacity, and perseverance.

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Believe the dream will become reality.
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      Live the journey. The dream can only come alive, if group members commit to the journey. We cannot say we want to become champions, then not exhibit the work ethics and traits of champions. Daily commitment to the dream is what makes it become reality.

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Live the journey.
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The Culture of a Team

      People within a community have similar goals and can identify with each other. They are interested in sharing, participating and having fellowship with one another. A team develops into its own social community.

      A team's community has its own culture. A culture is a community's accepted behavior patterns and beliefs that characterize the community. Culture will dictate the atmosphere within the group.

      The culture within the group will define the way team members dream, believe, and live as a group. Their perspectives, interactions, work ethic, beliefs, and outlook are all influenced by the culture of the team.

      The atmosphere within a group can be the greatest asset or the greatest detriment to overall success. What is the atmosphere in the work environment? What is considered the norm? Does the team work together or function as individuals? Is the atmosphere positive, negative, relaxed or stressful? The group facilitator must create an atmosphere where all individuals within the group strive to become their best.

      Culture will grow from a consensus of the group. As a leader, you have great influence over its direction. Cultivate a society that is desired for the group. Refining the culture for a group is a key component in team retreat programs. Many activities in team building assist in creating and defining a team's culture and a team retreat can play a vital role in this development.

      Consider these group standards when evaluating the culture of your team.

- ❑ Protocols
- ❑ Rules
- ❑ Responsibilities
- ❑ Team interactions, communication, and demeanor
- ❑ Work ethic
- ❑ Expectations
- ❑ The level of problem solving and risk-taking initiated by peers
- ❑ Traditions

Communication is the main catalyst for establishing and maintaining a positive community and culture within your group. Consistency in messages presented to the group is critical in developing a positive culture. How do members communicate with each other (peer to peer, peer to leader, leader to peer, and even self-talk)? An atmosphere where team members put others first creates a caring environment. Also, consider non-verbal communication within a group, such as eye contact, body language, high fives, and other ways to acknowledge others.

A leader's communication should convey relevant information, such as rules, roles, and goals. The role of the leader is to define, clarify, direct, monitor and reinforce the development of the community and culture. Leaders inspire with honest and sincere communication.

Peer communication must include care and concern for each person within the group. Communication must demonstrate a commitment to improving the group or team mission. Respect is paramount in peer communication.

Who will be the team's culture keepers? Identify people who are in a position to monitor, and desire the responsibility to continually reinforce all aspects of the team culture. Once identified, the culture keepers have a responsibility to reinforce the culture on a daily basis. They work behind the scenes keeping the group focused and on track. When peers take on this role, they take part ownership in the mission of the team.

Every group should have distinctive attributes that define them. Groups excel when they have strengths that separate their group from others. The team should know these traits, so they can highlight them in their work.

Team Building Basics

Team building is an interactive experience that utilizes planned activities designed for exploration into the many dynamics that govern how a group functions together. Team collaboration creates an environment that allows a group to reflect back, make adjustments, and plan ahead as a group. It is a time when a group can focus on the internal interactions within the team without the distractions of daily routines.

Team building is only one element of a strong successful team. The physical skills and mental composure of a team cannot be ignored. Team building will not overcome a team's fundamental deficiencies. Team building is used to maximize a team's effectiveness.

Throughout a team building program, a series of activities provide opportunities to enhance many interactions which shape a team's effectiveness. These activities allow team members to do the following:

- ❑ Get to know each other, learn to work together, and develop value in each person
- ❑ Set standards, expectations and goals
- ❑ Improve effective communication and leadership
- ❑ Build trust
- ❑ Problem solve and learn to perform under stress to achieve a common goal
- ❑ Prepare for peak performances

A group's confidence grows during interactions designed in this type of program. Team building gives the group an opportunity to develop in specifically directed areas.

A team building program does not guarantee growth will occur. Individuals within the group play an active role in the group's growth. Team building initiatives help in motivating team members to be a part of this growth experience. Ultimately, success of a program depends on the desire of participants to buy into the direction of a team. Team building can play an active role in creating a single-minded effort.

Team building experiences allow a group to improve skills, develop new capabilities, and eliminate negative influences.

Create a Storyline

Story telling has been a ritual for passing lessons from generation to generation. These lessons further define the culture of a group. Stories have a great power in teaching, as people will emotionally relate, remember and recall the stories specifically or metaphorically. Stories create a sense of reality and truth, as well as tap into reason and emotion.

The Team Link story in the *Introduction* demonstrates the power of story telling with metaphors. The story presents a concept to which most leaders can relate. Most leaders have been in the position of being frustrated because their team links were not in alignment at one time or another. Leaders can reflect back to a time when they searched for bent links, and remember the challenges they faced when deciding what to do with bent links.

Stories also allow a leader to relate specifically to their past and present situations. In the future, it will be easy for the leader to reflect back to the story and evaluate. A story is an amazing metaphor. Stories may not give you a concrete answer, but they may help in evaluating and viewing situations within a team. Stories develop philosophical foundations for future decisions. In this case, the team chain serves as a reminder of what will always be critical to the team's success.

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Stories develop philosophical foundations for future decisions.
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A team retreat and team building program can create a powerful storyline. Activities become stories where the participants become a part of the action. A powerful and memorable team retreat can be created when stories and activities are woven together to form a journey of growth.

Team Building Activities

Team building activities are challenges and games that put a group into situations to learn valuable team concepts. Initiatives can offer a group an experience metaphorically that will prepare them to work together as an effective team. The use of initiatives provides an avenue for groups to explore team interactions, and a way to externalize thoughts that may not normally be shared within the group.

Successful team building programs should be fun and challenging, thus keeping the participants and facilitator engaged. *Fun, cooperation, communication* and *trust* are four characteristics of a successful team building program. The role of the facilitator is to encourage these elements to occur.

Participants are motivated, engaged and have high energy when activities are *fun*. Team building activities should be taken seriously in their content and what they are intended to achieve. However, fun is a critical component to team building, as people are more involved when they are having fun.

Initiatives spotlight the *cooperation* of people working and playing together. A goal is to increase each participant's ability to work as part of a group, while developing a better appreciation of what each person can contribute. Learning to acknowledge the value of others allows a group to grow together.

Team members work closely together and communicate to prevent problems from arising and to problem solve. *Communication* allows teammates to share their viewpoints, learn from the experiences of others, and foster an environment where people can share their thoughts.

Communication starts with the leader. Listening is a key component to communication.   Strive for simplistic, yet valuable messaging. Open communication is a cornerstone to building trust.

Trust opens opportunities for teammates to meet new challenges by having the confidence that others will support them. Trust allows teammates to share without fearing they will be discredited or ignored. Teams with great trust in one another are more willing to taking risks. Team members are willing to expose their inner thoughts and beliefs with people they trust. A relationship based on trust allows for its members to be comfortable with being vulnerable with each other. Honest sharing of thoughts and beliefs creates a sense of understanding and growth. Therefore, trust is the key that opens the experiential door.

It is important to carefully read through an initiative before presenting it to your group. Make sure you have all the materials you need in advance. Confirm that you have everything properly set up before the initiative begins. Finally, feel comfortable with how the initiative will proceed, and what you need to be prepared for in regards to safety issues, briefing, facilitating and the debriefing session.

Each initiative should include a *briefing* or introduction that sets up the learning opportunity, the *activity* itself, and then a *debriefing*, or summary.

Briefing

Briefing is the introduction for a team building activity. It sets up, or frames, the initiative. Have participants circle up when briefing the group. When briefing the group, have participants form a circle. This allows all members to see each other, be equal, and represents the community. The circle puts each person in a position to communicate with the group. It also allows for participants to see the body language of their teammates. During the briefing session, give very specific instructions and rules for the initiative before it begins. Safety guidelines, if necessary, must be emphasized during this phase.

Frame the initiative by giving a story or introduction to the purpose of the activity. This directs their focus towards thoughts of the underlying meaning of the activity. You can give direction by creating a story with an implied metaphor for the activity. Here are some useful metaphors to build into the briefing of an activity:

- ❑ Give titles to the equipment and props utilized in the activity. They can represent real life resources the group has available to them in their workplace. What are these resources?
- ❑ The challenges and limitations presented to the group, such as touching the ground when instructed not to do so, can represent some pitfalls, set backs and challenges the team faces in real life. Have the group identify these challenges before the activity begins.
- ❑ The end result, such as getting to a specified location, represents a goal of the group. Have the group express this goal.

Take the creative liberty to adjust an initiative to better suit your group and its needs. Create a theme or storyline for the activity that may directly relate to a specific group. Set up a metaphor within the activity that has value to the team. Alter or combine initiatives to create an activity based on the context, level, athleticism, advancement of your group, or other factors that will make the activities a better fit for your team. By creatively making the initiatives a better fit, it will give the team building program and team retreat a personal feel that is tailored to the specifics of your special group dynamics.

Activities can be framed to be cooperative, focus on improvement, and/or competitive. Cooperative activities have team members work jointly to complete the required challenge. Improvement activities direct the focus of the activity on progress and perfection. A group can be timed while completing a task. After completion, the group can be given an opportunity to create an updated plan, and then attempt to improve their time. These types of activities have the group develop interpersonal skills based on developing personal best performances. Finally, competitive activities can pit one group against another, or have a team compete against a clock. Competition adds an element of stress to activities. This can be positive or negative, based on the level of readiness of the group.

<u>**Activities**</u>

A team building activities are set up to have a group attempt to achieve outcome goals. An activity can be a challenge, puzzle, riddle, team training session, group project, or game. The process in which the activity is played out is the key to team building. The development of a group can be dictated by the course of action they choose. *Failing to plan is planning to fail.* Decisions need to be made and action needs to be taken. There are steps that should be employed to succeed in the activities.

1. Have an outcome goal. This may be inherent from the briefing for the activity.
2. Develop a plan to accomplish the goal.
3. Focus on the process while working to achieve the goal.
4. Have little successes throughout the journey, like taking baby steps.
5. Take setbacks in stride. Learn from the setbacks, adjust, and then move on.
6. Complete the goal.

Create a climate for the group based on the process. Focus on improvement, effort levels, learning, and achieving steps. A very challenging outcome goal may seem impossible to reach. Reduce the outcome orientation by spotlighting the journey. Leaders who direct attention towards the process reduce stress. The group can then have many little successes along the journey towards the big outcome goal. This emphasis builds confidence, reduces anxiety, and develops work ethic. Success builds confidence. Building confidence allows the group to reach new levels and feel less threatened when increasing risks.

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Leaders who direct attention towards the process reduce stress.

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People learn from their mistakes. This is a part of natural growth development. Failure can be a positive experience if handled properly. It is this disappointment that presents a window of opportunity to learn and grow. Teams will maintain a higher level of motivation and stick to it longer if the group is allowed to make mistakes and grow. Allow the group to take successful "baby steps" towards their goal. Often times, progress is made by taking two steps forward and one step back. How a group responds to these set backs may dictate the progress that is ultimately made.

Though you want to keep the continual focus on the process, outcome goals can play a valuable role to help keep the group focused on a specific direction or pace. Ultimately, the team wants to complete the journey to achieve the outcome goal.

During activities, many methods will be utilized. Some will be very surprising. They will range from haphazard to amazingly creative. Close observation is crucial of what is transpiring throughout activities. Note the planning process, communication, leadership methods, trust issues, how the group interacts, course of action, and the many other nuances that will occur. These observations become great discussion points while debriefing.

What kind of quality control and efficiency does the group have during the activity? As a facilitator, do you allow the group to proceed with a trial and error mentality, or do you want them to decide on a plan based on efficiency. Is there a need for a change or adjustment to the game plan along the way? Is the group willing to change? View the opportunities to learn, grow and improve.

While facilitating activities, be patient and limit assistance or hints. Patience by the facilitator presents opportunities to let growth to occur. Allow the group to fumble a bit. This becomes challenging for the facilitator when a group gets frustrated or stuck. The struggles they face become a hardship the team gets the opportunity to overcome. Instead of giving assistance or hints to the team, address the possible dynamics that are surfacing within the group. Responding to adversity can become defining moments for the group.

As a facilitator of an activity, when you know the participants well enough to project roles they may take in an activity, you may choose to position them to take different roles. A person who usually dominates problem solving could be told they will take the role of the *Professional Listener* and must be silent. They can be told they get the opportunity to learn and grow from others, and really hear

their teammates. Another role is the *Affirmation Specialist*. This person can only say, "I agree" or "I disagree". These roles will allow others to initiate thoughts, problem solve, and lead.

At times, there may be a need to add limitations or filters for some participants or the whole group. Using bandanas are great for creating these new limitations. Add blindfolds to a person or group to impair their vision, and to rely on others for their sight. Put a bandana over the mouth or around the neck of a participant to signify that they can no longer speak. Tie a bandana on a limb, such as an arm or leg, to limit the use of that limb.

Ultimately, the activities should be fun. Keep the energy high. Focus on the task at hand. Have a great experience.

Debriefing

A debriefing session gives the group time to reflect and share. Reflection is necessary to look back and explore past experiences. It is an opportunity to gain value from the lessons learned during the team building activity. Debriefing sessions are a great time to peer through the window of the past and reflect on what the group would like to take forward from the experience.

A collaboration of varied ideas expands the dimensions of a group. Debriefing discussions help to identify how a team can work together when everyone participates and focuses on a common goal. This process increases the team's ability to problem solve. Groups learn to become increasingly more responsible for their own advancement.

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A collaboration of varied ideas expands the dimensions of a group.

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Debriefing is one of the most important elements of an initiative. Sessions should follow all activities completed throughout a program. Debriefing is best when kept simple, focused, and short. When debriefing, it is an opportunity to explore leadership and following. Evaluate the group's communication and feedback effectiveness. Have participants recognize and acknowledge individual and group successes. Take a look at the teamwork and interactions.

Reflection should occur at both an individual and group level. Moments of silence and directed reflection will allow participants to discover their own thoughts. Having individuals share their thoughts will put participants in a position to discover and contemplate their own thoughts as well as the thoughts of their teammates.

Reflection resources and props are used to help people reflect, externalize, share feelings and connect the activity to real life situations for the group. There is a comprehensive list of props that can be used to assist groups in sharing their thoughts and feelings in the *Team Building Resources* section.

A climate that invites sharing is paramount. It is critical that participants are actively engaged and they provide a major portion of the conversation. The group should circle up so everyone can see each other.

The facilitator serves as a guide to the discussion. Discussions should be led with open-ended questions that do not put any one person in an uncomfortable spot. The key questions are based on the word "what". There are three various forms of "what" questions to use during the debriefing. Three "what's" for effective debriefing:

1. What?
2. So what?
3. Now what?

What? The first question reflects on *what* just occurred. Have the group summarize the learning and growth that occurred from participating in the activity. What was the atmosphere? Focus on the feelings that occurred during the activity. What verbal and non-verbal messages did people observe? Consider individual fears and risk-taking. What is the atmosphere we want to create? What kind of leadership occurred? What did we do to overcome this challenge?

So what? The second form is the *so what*. This is the evaluation process of the activity. What interpretations should be made from the actions within the activity? So what was the plan and how did the group stick with it? So what did the group do to lose trust and abort the plan? So what can we learn from our mistakes?

Now what? The third form is the *now what*. This is the transfer to real situations for the group. Now what are the metaphors that directly relate to real life situations within the team? This stage also is a great opportunity to create a flow into the next initiative. Now what do we want to take forward from this activity? Incorporate the briefing session into the debriefing session. This connection completes the story.

Metaphors

Metaphors are the doorway to the learning process. Turning an initiative into a metaphor transforms the activity into a window of discovery for the group. Metaphors help make a connection between an action and the implied meaning within the activity. How does this relate to our specific situation?

Metaphors can be used before, during or after activities as an opportunity to initiate change. Constructing metaphors in the briefing of an initiative creates an implied meaning within the structure of the activity. During the briefing, a facilitator may want to create a story with a metaphor to connect the activity to a specific situation for the group.

Two renowned team building organizations take different paths in developing metaphors for learning. *Project Adventure* works with props in team building activities. The props and activities represent metaphors for the group. In a Project Adventure type setting, a rope can be laid out as a prop representing a cliff. The facilitator may say, "This rope represents a cliff. The other side of this rope represents an obstacle we must face as a group. What is this obstacle?"

In this approach, the prop then becomes a metaphoric challenge for the group to overcome. The group can then speak in metaphors about facing and conquering this challenge.

Outward Bound works with actual outdoor challenges that may represent metaphors for real life situations. Out in a natural setting, participants will find themselves standing at the edge of a cliff.

The facilitator may say, "This is a cliff. It may represent to you an obstacle you face in your life. We can define ourselves by how we face this challenge."

The actual physical obstacle, the cliff, now becomes a metaphor for how to overcome a challenge. Real life emotions are played out in a dramatic setting. Outward Bound programs are developed to enhance both self discovery and team building skills.

Here are some examples of possible metaphors:
- Balancing: Importance and understanding of others, yin and yang
- Unbalanced: Confusion, opportunity for change
- Building: Developing for our future
- Catching: Teammates there to save you, safety net
- Circling: Community, unity, equality, level playing field, connectedness, and strength
- Climbing: Reaching new heights, intelligent risk taking
- Competing: Process between a group (or an individual) and another, and the power it holds over our lives
- Constructing: Problem solving, goal setting
- Crossing: Leaving where you were and arriving at a new place
- Depriving: Trust and relying on others
- Falling: Trust to let go, having a high belief in others
- Journey: History of crossings and growth over time
- Orienteering: Defining direction
- Scattering: Organizing confusion
- Solving: Creativity and resourcefulness

Create a Journey with Team Building

A great comedian will create a line of stories and jokes that connect one to another. The effect is a build-up that progresses through the set. As a comedian proceeds, the audience gets more involved in the developments along the way. In the end, the grand finale comes back around full circle. Much like a comedian, the facilitator for team building wants to weave a storyline concept into a progression of activities and learning experiences.

Instead of having a beginning and end to team building initiatives and programs, they should flow more like a continuous journey. There is great value in connecting a previous activity debriefing with the next initiative briefing. Link a debriefing's *now what* into the next activity's briefing. When briefing and debriefing throughout the journey, continue to draw and build from previous experiences. The progression of the story becomes a part of the journey.

A carefully designed sequence of initiatives is important to allow for growth while developing physical skills and an optimal emotional zone. More risk and vulnerability in advanced initiatives should only be done when these foundations are developed at an appropriate level.

- Develop physical skills to allow the group to succeed in an activity
- Participants need to be in the proper emotional zone

There are three emotional zones that participants may face when completing initiatives, activities and challenges. The emotional zones are:
- *Comfort zone.* Participants are too comfortable and not challenged, so little development occurs
- *Stretch zone.* The middle zone is the level of challenge in which the best learning and growth occur. Participants are challenged but not with the burden of high anxiety.
- *Stress zone.* Participants are too uncomfortable to perform their best.

Sequencing in the team building journey is not always a linear process. Development may take a direction that is not always consistent with the team building progression. Different teams will progress in various areas at different rates. It is not always possible to have the progression be as cut and dry as listed, but the team building progression outline serves as a good guide to model a program. There are five phases a group should progress through within an effective team building program.

Phases in the Journey with Team Building

1. **Ice Breakers, Community and Culture**. This phase is based on creating opportunities to allow a team to get to know and become comfortable working with each other; establishing a community and culture; and setting standards, expectations and goals.
2. **Communication Skills**. This phase is based on developing a strong foundation of communication.
3. **Trust**. This phase is based on infusing trust within the group. All team members need to believe in their teammates. This phase is a keystone to team success.
4. **Challenges and Problem Solving**. This phase is based on improving team performance by developing effective team interactions; leadership skills; and learning to overcome stress as they face challenges and solve problems.
5. **Transfer and Celebration**. This final phase is based on connecting the dots in the team building program. It is about reflecting on the team's growth and changes. This is a time to celebrate the team's achievements as it completes a phase of development and moves into a new realm as a team. It is a time to reflect, evaluate where the group is now, and plan on where the group plans to go from here.

The initiatives and activities located in the *Team Building Resources* section of this book are sorted and labeled by these phases of team building.

Facilitator Responsibilities

A facilitator must ensure that all participants understand and agree that safety, fairness, and having a positive environment are paramount to the team building experience. After all, the participants will play a major role in how the team building experience proceeds. They will provide the interactions that become the basis upon which the group will build.

Groundwork must be completed first to assist in adjusting the physical skills and emotional zones of participants before progressing to more risk and vulnerability. This concept is the emphasis of the *Phases in the Journey with Team Building*. The facilitator must evaluate and consider the team and individual level of readiness. Have the physical skills and emotional zone successfully been developed to a point where a specific activity should proceed?

The rate at which an activity proceeds changes the experience. The pace will affect which emotional zone the participants will feel. The time component can be changed to allow more or less time for participants to strategize and complete a challenge.

A facilitator has a responsibility to express what is appropriate when touching others. Define guidelines regarding what is acceptable, and what is not. Some activities may put participants in positions where touching can completely change the comfort level for the participants. Make sure the groundwork has been laid, and that the participants are comfortable before proceeding.

There may be times when a facilitator will be leading multiple groups through a team building program. Here are a few ideas when training multiple groups that have varying levels of readiness.

Do "personal best" time challenges, so all groups are successful, and can progress at their "pace". Time an initiative, and give the group multiple attempts to improve their time. The team can work on improving efficiency by increasing successes and/or decreasing errors. This method is a great way to develop a continuous improvement mindset, and avoid having groups frustrated from failing.

Another method for handling groups of various levels of readiness is to have a range of options. Let a group choose their challenge at different team building stations. Have a few options of varying degrees of difficulty ranging from easy, medium to difficult. The facilitator can also have a multitude of variables to adjust the difficulty within an activity. Start easy and progress to tougher elements.

Safety First

This book does not serve as a resource that teaches safety for a team retreat and team building. It is the responsibility of facilitators to be prepared for the safety of the participants. Avoid negligent activities and conditions that may cause physical or mental harm to participants.

Some general safety concepts should be understood prior to team building. A facilitator must be confident that all participants know their roles when it comes to safety during briefing sessions, and that they are willing and capable to fulfill those requirements. Groups and individuals may take risks when trying to complete tasks. Facilitators should be engaged at all times to be aware of any potential physical and emotional hazards before they occur.

Physical threats may exist when conducting activities. The group must be prepared for the vigor of an activity. A carefully planned progression is important to create a comfort level for the participants. Proceed at a pace that is comfortable for all participants within the group. Proper skills must also be taught and practiced before proceeding in some physically demanding activities.

During the briefing session, specific instructions for guides and blindfolded participants, bracing, lifting, and catching that may occur during an initiative should be given. When bracing, lifting and catching, participants should be balanced, centered, knees flexed to absorb impact, hands up and ready. Eyes should be constantly focused on the participant. Beware of flying elbows and have falling participants interlock and twist arms up against their chest.

Facilitators and participants must work together to protect each person within the group. Attention and anticipation must be exercised when conducting physical activities. This may include spotting participants when they are jumping, falling, or moving blindfolded. It may mean becoming a barrier when participants are near unsafe objects. Be aware of slippery, uneven or other dangerous surfaces. Listen to group discussions, as you may need to stop decisions that could result in an injury.

Insert new rules as necessary, as safety issues arise during an initiative. An easy way to break trust with your team is to put them in harms way!

Facilitators, teammates, and others can assist the activity by ensuring the safety of those participating. Spotters can become barriers, directors, protectors and catchers as necessary. The spotters should be proactive by constantly keeping an eye on the participants, anticipating what may occur next.

Whenever participants are blindfolded, sighted teammates and facilitators must make safety their number one priority. Obstacles can be located in both high and low locations. Blindfolded participants have a responsibility, as well, not to put themselves in harms way. Teach them how to use their bumpers, which is having hands up and facing out to protect the person from a collision, and proceed with caution. Blindfolded participants should never feel a sense of urgency and rush. This must be emphasized in the briefing session.

Team members must understand that it is their responsibility to ensure their own safety. When blindfolded, having limitations, or overcoming a situation with risk, it is important to make sure the participants proceed with caution. This includes monitoring their speed of movements, proceeding with regard to possible dangers, and making decisions that consider well being as a top priority. Sometimes the enthusiasm of participants will overshadow good judgment when attempting to complete tasks. Prompt the group to make sound decisions, or the facilitator may need to step in when necessary.

Emotional harm can be a risk in activities when not controlled properly. Listen to all group discussions, and be prepared to cut off a topic when it is not appropriate, or may hurt people in the group. Conversations should be directed towards advancing the culture of the group, not at individuals. Make sure the discussions proceed in a way that is consistent with the desired culture. As we proceed to work on team activities, developing trust and empathy between group members is paramount. It is critical that the facilitator is in a position to step in when an activity or statement can be damaging to trust and empathy within the group. The facilitator must also be prepared to protect members of the group from any other potentially emotionally challenging actions, including personal concerns such as height, being touched, and being blindfolded.

Consider the participants comfort zone levels when developing and proceeding through activities. If participants become uncomfortable with a situation, the activity may become a detriment to some individuals and the group as a whole.

There needs to be open and honest communication between the participants and those in charge of the participants' safety. Much like the verbal dialogue that occurs before a trust fall (see *Team Building Resources* section), messages in communication need to be connected between the sender and receivers in a two-way process. Participants receiving messages should acknowledge the sender.

Do not let enthusiasm by either the facilitator or participants diminish attention to the task. Considerations for safety include weather, facilities, and the condition of the participants. Weather considerations may include lightning, wind, rain, or temperature. Do not put the participants in harms

way, and make sure they are dressed properly for the elements. Facilitators have a responsibility to ensure the facilities and equipment is to standards that will allow for a safe experience. Finally, evaluate the condition of the participants. Constantly confirm that participants are not tired, dehydrated, overheated, cold, or in a state that the program cannot continue to be a positive experience. Also, if a person is not engaged, ask them to choose to opt out until they want to participate, ensuring the safety of their teammates, and keeping the experience positive for the group.

Team building activities create an opportunity for collaboration within a group. Exploration within the framework of activities allows members of a team to be exposed and learn to appreciate different perspectives. Sharing of feelings and experiences during the debriefing allows for paradigm shifts to occur within a group. Team building activities tie critical thinking with emotional feelings together. Motivation of a group improves as they take ownership of the developments within the team. Teams will develop an appreciation for the culture of the group, as well as a passion towards what they want to accomplish. A successful team building experience will help develop team links that make a chain strong enough to drive the team to reach their goals.

Team Retreat Concepts

What is a Team Retreat?

       A team retreat is an opportunity to produce a dynamic event for *bringing teams together* for team building purposes. Objectives for the program should focus on developing and enhancing:
- A *culture* for the group's *community*,
- The distinctiveness of *character*,
- The *commitment* and *courage* of team members, and
- The *commonality* in understanding and believing in the team's unified mission.

       It is a productive time to clearly define goals, standards and establish expectations within the group. A retreat should be a rewarding experience that creates passion and motivation towards the team's goals, while developing compassion within the individuals in the group. To accomplish the objectives of a team retreat, an environment should be created to include:
- *C*ooperation,
- *C*ommunication,
- *C*ollaboration,
- *C*ohesion, and
- *C*amaraderie.

       The intention of a team retreat should be set up to accomplish specific team objectives. The group should walk away with these tangibles:
- *Trust* in fellow team members, as it is a foundation that allows for teams to effectively work together.
- *Teamwork* is the collective efforts of the group. Progress can be offset by counter productive activities. The key is to have all team members working together in a directed path.
- Ultimately, strong motivation and belief that the group will be *triumphant* in team objectives.

As group leaders, a majority of our time is spent preparing team members to have the skill sets that pertain specifically to the tasks of the group. However, a big component of success is how individuals work within a group.

- Will they value each member of the team as having an important role within the group?
- Will the group communicate and problem solve effectively?
- How will the group react to the challenges and stresses throughout its journey?
- Will a team continue to work together towards achieving its goals during times of adversity?
- Will challenges uproot the core foundations of the team?
- Will they continue to have trust and stick together when times get tough, or will they become a "different" team?

Teams will face adversity. How a team responds will define them. Preparing a team for these moments of challenge will prepare them to persevere.

Failing to plan is planning to fail. This axiom serves as a reminder to train the intangible skills of the team, so they will serve as a foundation and a springboard for the group's success.

Accelerate Growth for the Group

A team retreat greatly accelerates the growth of team dynamics within a group. This is accomplished by putting the team in an atmosphere where the focus is internal growth, instead of the usual external production. It is a time where participants have access to each other while having a break from busy schedules and responsibilities. Barriers between group members can be broken down and an environment created for teammates to open up, become vulnerable with each other, and build trust. This permits a team to explore group interactions in a non-threatening environment.

Conducting a team retreat when a group first gets together or begins a new season/project serves as an ice breaker and community maker. Team members need to learn about their community, culture, standards and expectations. Returning team members may now have new roles, including evolving roles of responsibility and leadership. It creates an opportunity to plan and develop.

A team retreat scheduled during the middle of the year fosters a rejuvenation that propels the group to a level beyond the status quo. Also, a team retreat before a capstone event can be a great preparation for a peak performance. A championship atmosphere can develop a sense of encouragement, confidence, trust and accomplishment.

Opportunities to socialize, take part in recreation and other fun activities together will introduce participants in new interactive roles. Group members will learn more about each other, their personal lives, and what makes them tick. This insight catapults a bond between team members. It increases the personal investment into each other and the group. A team retreat is an occasion that allows for various levels of leadership and peers to come to common ground and see each other as valued people.

During a team retreat, participants have opportunities to serve and assist others in the group. Team members will acknowledge the contributions of others. Diverse ideas are respected and accepted when empathy and caring exists between members of a group. The sharing of diverse ideas offers new insights creating an opportunity for perspectives to change.

A team retreat becomes accepted time away from busy schedules. Team members will look forward to the event. Since the stress of productivity is removed the group grows together and progress at a comfortable pace.

The development of group dynamics should be directed based on the agenda set for a team retreat. Accelerated growth needs to be focused on specific goals. It is important to choose activities for a team retreat that will focus the team development in directed areas.

An Environment for Team Growth

The adventure of a team retreat creates an environment for participants to explore the unknown. Curiosity leads to a natural desire for further exploration and learning. A team retreat allows participants to discover their skill sets, responsibilities, core values and passions. Collaboration by group members creates opportunities for members of the group to view these concepts from different perspectives. This type of access can become a launching pad for paradigm shifts.

Curiosity leads to a natural desire for further exploration and learning.

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Developing a team retreat is a great way to package your team building program while creating a motivational, fun, and memorable experience. A team retreat will allow a group to get past the typical work place protocols and busy schedules so the team can advance to a new level of effective interactions and proficiency.

When a group cares about each other, the motivation for the group's success towards a mission may take precedence over personal agendas. The participants begin to take ownership for their actions and become more passionate about the objectives the group has set. The event can assist in developing camaraderie, friendship and empathy. The more time participants can spend together allows for barriers to be broken down.

A team in pursuit of long-term goals may need to be re-focused to continue the building process during its journey. A team retreat can serve as an opportunity to assist the group in its quest. Most long-term goals need intermediate objectives along the way to keep the team focused towards the big picture. Taking incremental steps can assist in creating a positive cumulative effect. The positive cumulative effect is based on the concept that if every day a group works on positive growth, then over a period of time, great progress can occur. The progress may not seem like much if evaluated on a daily basis, but long-term evaluations show great improvement. A forest is planted one acorn at a time. If we planted three acorns a day, in a year we would have a forest with over one thousand trees! The three acorns each day did not seem like much, but over a course of time, there was a great positive cumulative effect.

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If we planted three acorns a day, in a year we would have a forest with over thousand trees!

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Throughout the year, use these concepts as a source of rejuvenation. Designing a team retreat mid-year gives the team an opportunity to get away from standard routines and distractions, while focusing on the group internally. As a group gets deeply involved in day-to-day operations, it may become apparent that some challenges need to be worked out to keep the team moving forward efficiently.

Traveling together as a team presents great opportunities for growth and understanding. Spending additional time together allows for socialization and the chance for effective communication to take place. Turning group travel into a team retreat can be an organized development for the group.

As a coach of a collegiate sports team, our staff looked at the adversities facing the group when we traveled to compete. It is a known fact that home teams have a great advantage due to being more in their comfort zone. We wanted to turn our road trip adversity into an advantage, so we carefully designed each road trip into a team retreat. By the end of the year, our team actually preferred playing on the road as opposed to home games. The perception was fostered by a positive team building experience, thus our team felt much closer as a group while on the road. The team recorded the 6th best turn around in the nation that year!

Preparing for a big event is an exciting time of the year. It can also be very stressful. Whatever the event, there is a culmination of dedicated work the group has put in to prepare for the big day. This can cause anxiety. This zenith should be a celebration of the efforts and commitments made by each member of the team. A team retreat serves as an opportunity for final preparations and can relieve anxiety within the group. It is a time to reflect back on the great efforts made by the group to put the team in position to succeed during the big event.

Just like the *phases in the journey with team building*, a team retreat at specific times of the year should have goals for specific development. Plan a team retreat to enhance the environment for team growth.

Keys for a Successful Team Retreat

A team retreat should be a memorable and rewarding experience. It is important to have specific goals when developing a team retreat. The objectives become a beginning outline for what should be planned into the event. The sequencing of activities within the agenda creates a comfortable learning environment as a team progresses through a program. While creating the agenda for a team retreat, careful consideration to infuse team building metaphors is paramount to directing the learning experience.

Here is a checklist for keys to develop a successful team retreat.
- ❑ Create a positive atmosphere
- ❑ Participants have fun
- ❑ Opportunities for camaraderie
- ❑ Create a journey with team building

The number one priority is to create a *positive atmosphere*. The atmosphere should have positive energy and be engaging for the participants. The environment needs to be conducive for sharing between teammates.

Make *fun* a key foundation when developing a team retreat. When teammates are having fun, there is a contagious environment for support and loyalty between the participants. The group will develop a stick-to-itiveness when faced with challenge or frustration.

Creating *opportunities for camaraderie* with fellow teammates becomes is important in developing the team's community. The outcome will be a desire to be loyal and dedicated to each other. Growing team compassion will assist to increase sharing and tolerance needed to put team goals before personal agendas.

Putting participants in social settings allows them to have a unique access to each other away from busy schedules. This allows teammates to learn about each other, while developing relationships and understanding beyond the work place environment. It will promote cooperation, understanding and support for each other. Often times within casual interaction, participants will initiate discussions that will include brainstorming and problem solving of group issues and challenges. Many problems arise when teammates are not comfortable talking with each other. Many challenges can be solved before becoming problems if they are comfortable talking with each other.

Craft an expedition within a team retreat by organizing the goals into the various categories found in *Create a Journey with Team Building*. Leading activities in a structured order will have your participants exposed to all the objectives in a comfortable and effective progression.

Beginning with *Ice Breakers, Community and Culture*, it is important to dedicate enough time to have participants break through social barriers with teammates. Establishing planned social

settings will allow participants more time together to get past the acquaintance stage. This phase allows the group to develop the critical components of the team.

- Get to know and understand each other
- Establish clearly defined goals for the group
- Develop a known set of expectations that set or further define the community, culture, and atmosphere

A prerequisite for developing trust and becoming an effective team is for the group to have a strong foundation of communication skills. The *Communication Skills* phase works on improving these listed components.

- Open lines for communication, cooperation, fun, camaraderie, friendship, sincere caring, trust, and problem solving
- Speaking and presentation skills to include specific details
- Effective listening skills
- Two-way or multi-way communication

Trust is a core foundation for all successful teams. Teammates must believe in each other, have faith that they will be there to support them, and confidence that teammates will not waver in their conviction. Each person in the group must feel valued by the team, and believe the team has great meaning to them. The *Trust* phase focuses on developing these vital characteristics within a team.

- A support system for the teammates
- A sense of unwavering commitment to each other
- Have participants learn that they will protect each other, in various levels including mental and physical
- A willingness of team members to allow them to be vulnerable with teammates at times

The ability to be vulnerable with teammates refers to developing a sense of being comfortable and safe while taking risks with teammates. This includes knowing the team will create a safety net when attempting physical and demanding challenges. Trust with associates them to communicate difficult topics. Knowing that teammates have their best interest at heart creates an atmosphere where they can take risks.

The next phase works on developing team efficiency and effectiveness when facing challenges and stress. Leadership can be developed, as well as the opportunity to work on leadership skills. The *Challenges and Problem Solving* phase will develop these team skills.

- Leadership, leadership skills, and proper peer interactions
- Belief and support for leaders and peers
- Improve team performance
- Problem solving skills, team planning, and the ability to be flexible adjust
- Learn methods to overcome stress

Finally, a team retreat should conclude with feelings of accomplishment and encouragement for the future. It is a time to evaluate and celebrate the growth of the group. The *Transfer and Celebration* phase is an opportunity to conclude a team retreat with these key functions.

- Evaluate where we were, what we have become, and where we are going
- Summarize the learning and growth that has occurred during the team retreat
- Develop a sense of confidence and encouraged feelings
- Create a celebration for team accomplishments

Celebrations bring people together further establishing a sense of community, team member spirit and pride. Our society has many celebrations for achievements and milestones. These celebrations include graduations, award ceremonies, and other celebrations such as victories, championships, birthdays, weddings, and anniversaries. They are a time for reflection, and an opportunity to look forward to the great times to come. Create a celebration to conclude your team retreat!

Effective sequencing of activities during a team retreat creates a comfortable transition as a group progresses through a program. Each sequential activity helps develop a foundation and set the stage for each new activity. Set up a continuum, progressing from the last experience to the next. Participants' readiness to proceed allows for the comfort level to be stretched, and growth to occur at new levels. Much like a teacher's lesson plan, develop a schedule of events that allow participants this transition and progression through a program.

Considerations for Planning

Careful planning is important for producing a team retreat that makes an impact with its participants. Here is a checklist of considerations that are critical components while planning a team retreat.

- ❑ Goals and objectives
- ❑ Scheduling
- ❑ Time to allocate
- ❑ Potential resources
- ❑ Rules and legalities
- ❑ Planning logistics

Goals and Objectives

Organization leaders and the team retreat planner need to set clearly defined goals for the event. Be very specific by further defining the objectives that are desired. The goals become the philosophical basis to the decisions made in the preparations. The design of a team retreat is to create transforming experiences. The purpose of the plan is for growth and development within a team. The event should establish effective collaboration and facilitate new skills. A team retreat should not be an unstructured social event.

Scheduling

Get the team retreat on the calendar. Decide when would be a great time to conduct a team. The goals may dictate the timing of when to conduct the event. Is it an ice breaker for a new group? If so, the team retreat needs to be conducted early on. Is the event being utilized to get a group to be more efficient? Then, the event should occur partially through a season or project after participants are familiar with each other and roles have already been set. Is the event to have participants prepare for a big event? Fine tune the timing to allow for growth at the retreat, yet give time for the group to go back to their normal setting and put their new skills into action.

Where are the opportunities to fit in a team retreat? What dates are available? When planning your group's functions, remember not to consider a team retreat as an afterthought, otherwise it will be hard to find an opportune time to "squeeze" it in. If a team retreat is a priority, then schedule it in just like any other responsibility.

Integrate team building activities during travel and road trips. This practice will completely changed the way a team will view going on the road. The adversity associated with travel will become an environment of an ultimate team atmosphere.

Create a continuous journey with team building throughout the season. Do not consider team building to be a one shot wonder, but as an additional component of continual training and preparation for the group. Design events with specific activities to have the team learn key lessons at various stages within a season.

Time to Allocate

A team building experience does not have to be a multi-day event. A team retreat can range from one session, a half day, a full day, or multiple-day events. Team building with short sessions that continue to occur over a period of time serves as a continuous journey for team development. A short

team retreat offers a group reprieve from their schedule, as well as an opportunity to grow as a team. It can be integrated within another function as part of already scheduled sessions or events.

Plan in a team building activity at the beginning of a day's session every once in a while. This *escape* will make your actual work session shorter, giving them a little break from the mental and physical demands of the day, while gaining valuable team skills. Extend the escape and substitute it instead of a work session. This will give your team members valuable recovery time as well. Another opportunity is to pick a short initiative to do before a big event. Replace a pre-session speech with an interactive function that really brings the team together. You will find that your group will be invigorated by these escapes, and will be fresh and prepared to push hard in your next session.

Change up long mentally and physically demanding times with a team retreat. It is a way to get maximum productivity when your team members are a little worn down. Time away from the classroom, workplace or training is therapeutic and will improve productivity in the long run.

A team retreat with a longer duration will allow the participants more opportunities to break down social barriers, develop relationships, and explore team concepts on their way to improved interaction and growth. Members will grow more comfortable sharing honest communication when given quality time to adapt to the atmosphere of a team retreat. Over time, individual agendas are devalued for the betterment of the group.

Additionally, longer events allow for more time to be allocated to socialization and recreation opportunities. These occasions add to a positive and fun environment.

Potential Resources

Take a look at the potential resources available. Resources include funding, location, facilities, equipment, gear, and time. Based on the pool of resources, selection of activities, level of activities, and potential recreation opportunities need to be considered.

A team retreat does not need to be expensive, but it does need to be fun! A budget is not a limiting factor for creating an amazing experience. Tap into your team's resourcefulness and connections to expand the pool of resources to make the event something special and different. Be creative to open up new possibilities.

There are two ways to make the event a reality. The first method is to brainstorm various resources available, and then plan within those parameters. The second way to proceed is to decide what you would like to create, then search out those resources necessary to complete to plan.

Pick a location which is separate from the work place. After all, a retreat is an escape from the insanity and chaos left behind. Who do you know who owns a vacation home, condo or ranch? What connections do you have with lodging for discounted or complimentary rooms? Are there meeting rooms you can access? Is there a ropes course at a YMCA, college or city recreation department? Are there local and regional parks, campgrounds, picnic areas, hiking trails, beaches, white water rafting, rock climbing, recreation areas or other outdoor elements that can serve as a unique site? Is there a residential camp available? How about access to a sports camp, guide service, or other opportunity to be in a different setting?

Consider your access to equipment and gear. What will be used for transportation? Who has tents, sleeping bags and other camping gear? How about recreational equipment? Can you get equipment for desired activities? What about the props needed for desired team building activities?

Utilizing the contacts of participants will greatly increase the access to resources. This will exemplify the power of a group over the ability of an individual to accomplish tasks. Discovering available resources becomes the beginning stages of planning a team retreat.

Rules and Legalities

Considerations in planning a team retreat include understanding and abiding by possible sanctioning rules, outdoor permits, legal ramifications and other ethical issues. Remember to follow the rules of your governing and sanctioning bodies. This may include research to find out any limitations you may have placed upon your group. When proceeding in the outdoors, often permits or reservations are necessary. If permits are not necessary, notifying authorities in advance may be helpful incase unplanned challenges occur. Never head off into a wilderness area without someone outside your group knowing your specific itinerary.

Legal ramifications include being responsible for minors and having appropriate signed medical release forms. Consider the ratio of appropriate male and female leaders, especially when overnight accommodations are a part of the agenda.

Are there any liabilities or other limiting factors that should be known before developing a team retreat? Ethical and safety issues should also be thought out before planning an event or activities within the team retreat.

Planning Logistics

A team retreat plan should include specific activities, potential recreation and social opportunities that will lead the group to accomplish the defined goals. An inventory list of equipment, gear, props, food, drinks, first aid kit, and other necessities for the team retreat should then be prepared.

Participants may be utilized to play a role in the organization and preparations. Putting participants responsible for handling some planning and preparations for a team retreat will be a team building experience. The brainstorming, decision making, planning, prep work, problem solving, and completion of preparations for a team retreat is a great opportunity for team members to take part ownership in the event. The experience also puts the group in a position to begin the process of learning how to accomplish goals together.

Participant preparations may include physical training, depending on the activities that will occur at a team retreat. Physical elements of an outdoor team retreat, such as hiking, climbing, running, paddling, snowshoeing, or other skills challenge the participants to master new skills, and prepare for the endurance needed to complete a course.

A team retreat that incorporates demanding physical components may require training by the participants well in advance. A training plan can also be put in place, as part of the team building experience. When teams train together, the team members are in a position to support and inspire to each other. This type of retreat also promotes healthy lifetime habits, benefits of fitness, and increased energy/endurance. Be careful not to create a team retreat that is too physically demanding for the ability level of the group.

Themes

A theme for a team retreat generates a motivational rally for the group. A theme creates anticipation for an event, a continual reference during an event, and an access point for reflection back on a team retreat. The theme of a team retreat should house the storyline created by the metaphors within the team building experience. This concept will build a more powerful learning experience. A theme can be a precursor to the atmosphere desired at the event. Much like metaphors within team building, a carefully constructed theme can assist in directing the learning experience while making a connection between the activity and the implied learning that takes place.

The theme Trek to the Top ™ is a great example of how a theme creates a productive environment for team building.   It has the core components by creating anticipation, an easy to appreciate reference, and powerful opportunities for reflection. Trek to the Top ™ is a theme based on climbing a mountain. It carries with it the metaphor of working hard and making progress towards a lofty goal.   The team has to get physically prepared and obtain necessary gear and food for the adventure. Team building initiatives and challenges are presented along the trek. Once they earn their way to the top, the team has a celebration. It is pure exhilaration to accomplish this challenging goal.

Themes create anticipation for the participants before an event. Anticipation of an exciting or challenging team retreat feeds into the atmosphere of the event once it comes. Many emotions are

fostered by knowing the theme of the team retreat. Part of the anticipation can be instilled with the responsibilities of planning and preparation. In the Trek to the Top ™ theme, participant emotions range from being excited to nervous. These are some of the same emotions that occur before a big competition, presentation, or project. Preparation for the trek, with physical training and planning, turns anxiety into an eagerness for the event.

During a team retreat, a theme becomes a continual reference within the activities. The theme serves as motivation towards goals. It helps turn initiatives into metaphors for the overall objectives. In Trek to the Top ™, the actual climbing is a constant reference to taking one step at a time while making steady progress towards the goal. Determination and perseverance becomes a virtue as the group proceeds on its challenging journey of activities, initiatives, and trekking. Parts of the journey go smoothly, while other times the group faces adversity. This journey is much like the pursuit of many goals in a wide variety of settings.

When reflecting back on a team retreat, the theme of the event becomes a window for exploring what was successful in the past, and what we want to bring into the present and future. The thematic experience is easy to remember because it is conceptual based. Over time the details get lost, but the concept remains strong. A theme also taps into the powerful emotions created from experiential learning.

The following is a possible reflection based on a group that completes the Trek to the Top ™.

'Remember during our Trek to the Top ™, we faced that obstacle before we could get to the top. We did 'this' to overcome the challenge, and it helped us reach our goal of getting to the top. It was amazing to stand on top! I really believe 'that' could help us right now. We can overcome our challenge and get to the top again!'

Use the information in the *Team Retreat Resources* section for ideas in creating a theme. Adapt a concept to make the event consistent with what is to be accomplished, as well as unique for a team's specific interests and objectives. A sample agenda for *Trek to the Top* ™ is also located in the *Team Retreat Resources* section.

Pick team building activities and initiatives for the agenda that will support the objectives and goals of a team retreat. The section titled *Team Building Resources* is full of initiatives to use when developing a team retreat. The details and framing of activities should be customized to specific objectives for the group.

A well-planned and executed team retreat accelerates the growth and level of effective collaboration within a team. The experiences gained during a team retreat will offer insight, as well as an opportunity for reflection. The camaraderie, confidence, and trust developed within a group during a program will be a source of strength well into the future.

It is time to get started with your planning. Be creative and have fun. Get your team chain aligned so you can trek to the top!

Team Retreat Resources

Team Retreat Themes

Here are some ideas for team retreat themes. The themes are categorized by the headings of Team Challenge, Journey, Games and Building.

Team Challenge Themes

Team challenge themes are programs that include team building initiatives as a basis of the event. A group is put into circle settings often to discuss challenges. It presents the opportunity to develop community, unity, equality and connection between group members. The initiatives focus on challenging the group to solve tests of cooperation, collaboration, trust and more. Solving challenges invites teammates to share their creativity and resourcefulness. These are the most popular team challenge themes.

- Low Ropes Course
- High Ropes Course

Low Ropes Course

A low ropes course is a program that focuses on team cooperation and collaboration. Initiatives are selected based on the type of experience desired for the course. The course may include permanent structures and props that are low to the ground. They do not include much climbing or extended heights within the initiatives, contrary to a high ropes course. Portable and non-permanent props allow a facilitator to conduct a low ropes course in different locations, such as a park, school, church, business local, hotel meeting room, or another area that offers open space. A low ropes course is an easy way to develop a team retreat without while limiting demands on securing and traveling to a distant location.

Low Ropes Course details and ideas:
- Have 5-6 initiative stations, approximately 30 minutes per station (for a 3 hour session)
- Introduction of goals
- Ice Breakers, Community and Culture initiatives
- Communication Skills initiatives
- Trust initiatives
- Challenges and Problem Solving initiatives
- Transfer and Celebration initiatives
- Closure

High Ropes Course

A high ropes course is a team retreat program that may include climbing, which challenge groups to break through barriers and understand the concept of intelligent risk taking. A sense of accomplishment is a great reward from this type of program. The event will focus on support to overcome personal challenges and group challenges. A high ropes course usually has permanent structures and props that are high above the ground. These include towers with climbing apparatuses, cables and pulley systems, as well as climbing walls. These programs can be found at YMCA's, college campuses, ROTC programs, retreat centers, resorts, and at climbing gyms. There are even companies that offer portable climbing walls that can be trucked in on a trailer.

Participants become dependant on others within the group. The activities create a sense of responsibility upon each member of the group to be there for their teammates. There is also a thrill factor that makes for a memorable experience and something the group will talk about well into the future.

High Ropes Course details and ideas:
- A fair amount of time will be spent progressing through Ice Breakers, Community and Culture initiatives. It is important to progress at a rate so participants do not get beyond the stretch zone of comfort during the activities. The responsibilities and protocols placed on participants will help develop community and culture.
- Communication plays a vital role in safety. Communication systems that advocate two-way messaging are paramount to the success of the activities.
- Trust and blind faith will be tested in the activities presented.
- Challenges and Problem Solving are inserted into the progression of activities. A high ropes course needs to have a fair amount of time allotted to be able to spend time in this phase.
- Celebration of the achievements will be a rewarding conclusion to the challenges that were overcome by the group.

A team retreat can be created to include both low and high ropes course activities. Low and high ropes courses can range in duration from one session of 2 hours to a full day, though high ropes courses are more successful in creating a comfortable progression if a full day is utilized.

Journey Themes

Journey themes have participants triumph over a route during a team retreat. These journeys include team building activities which occur between the start and conclusion of a pre-determined path. Themes that include a journey help groups find and commit to a direction. When progressing through a journey, a team leaves where they were and arrives at a new place. Journeys allow a group to reflect on the past, pick a path they would like to take, and strive to reach a new destination. Teams break through barriers and climb to new levels. Here are three categories for journey themes.
- Adventure Initiatives Course ™
- Hunts
- Adventure Race

Adventure Initiatives Course

During an *Adventure Initiatives Course* ™, a group cooperatively completes a route while facing activities, puzzles, and other challenges along the way. It can follow an obvious course, such as a trail, or be designated by maps or directions given to the participants. The course can have great dynamics in either a wilderness or urban setting.   There are many variations possible within an adventure initiatives course concept.

Obstacle Course details:
- A course created with challenges for the group along the way
- A group completes the course by traveling its path and conquering challenges.

Trek to the Top ™ details:
- Team overcomes challenges to reach the goal of getting to the top
- Climb a mountain, stadium, or even up a tall building
- A successful trek has a group persevere to reach its objective, even when setbacks and obstacles exist

GPS Journey details:
- GPS way points (locations) set the specific designed route
- Have the group solve challenges to earn the next way point
- Each person can be allotted time requirements to play various roles, as the GPS unit is handed to the next person every 5 minutes

Flash Forward details:
- Create a journey that looks into a group's future
- Have the journey's destination be a metaphor for the group's goal

Complete a *Puzzle* details:
- Earn jigsaw or other puzzle pieces by successfully completing challenges
- Have the team put together the puzzle at the conclusion of the journey
- The puzzle picture can be a vision or metaphor for the team
- See the team building resource *Bike Journey* for an example of a jigsaw puzzle that contributes to the theme with on-going messages as each piece is earned

Additional journey ideas:
- Focus on the positive cumulative effect and making steady progress towards the destination
- The destination is a metaphor for a mission, goal, or objective for the group
- Journey by walk, hike, bike, kayak, car, bus, train and/or other methods

Hunts

A *Hunt* is a journey that has one or more groups seeking objects, resources, locations, or searching out answers to clues. Items being found may metaphorically represent resources towards the group's goal. Name the resources the team needs to be successful. What can be retrieved during the hunt to represent these resources?

Treasure hunt details:
- Solve challenges to continue towards the final treasure
- Earn clues to proceed during a journey

Scavenger hunt details:
- Search to collect objects or information
- Find items that represents the strengths of the group
- Search out an objects that represents the mission of the group
- The group can come back to a meeting spot, share their findings, and present what they represent

Geocaching hunt details:
- A cache is a hidden treasure at a designated location
- Have groups use GPS devices to find the multi-stage caches. At the cache locations, teams can either collect the treasures, or note what is in the cache in a created passport. Each cache can have the designated location of the next cache.

Picture hunt details:
- Give the group a digital or disposable camera
- Search to take pictures of specified locations, objects, or other items
- Picture hunts can be created to take fun team pictures of various specific themes, scenarios, or metaphors
- Give team picture themes, and have the group take pictures in settings that are representative of the topics
- Have the team present their project by Powerpoint or in a scrapbook.

Adventure Race

An adventure race has groups vie against each other to finish a course. Multiple teams race to complete a route with team building challenges along the way. Competition adds a whole new dimension, motivation, and stressor to the teams. A race course can be created in a wilderness or urban setting.

Game Themes

Game themes add a fun and competitive element to team building. The fun nature of games will enhance the motivation and make the occasion memorable. Competition adds a real world stressor to the activity. Many organizations face these same challenges within their normal mode of operation. Game themes often have the challenge of teams competing against one another, but games can be also have cooperative elements.

During games, teams work to find ways to be number one, and are motivated by their successes as they proceed towards victory. They also learn from their shortcomings. Teams get creative when it comes to survival. Groups discover that success can be defined by increments of improvement, instead of just wins and loses. Here are some sample game themes.

- Team Olympics
- Murder mystery games
- TV game shows
- Reality TV games

Team Olympics details:
- Create teams from groups, divisions, departments or classes
- Use traditional or non-traditional Olympic games
- Focus on improving personal bests (PB's), competing to be your best
- Time element competitions are great for focusing on team improvements. Teams can race against the clock to improve their best time.

Murder mystery details:
- A team works together to solve a mystery.
- Many pre-made murder mystery games can be purchased where games are sold and online
- A fun way to get groups to interact, communicate, and use problem solving skills

TV game show details:
- Create a mock TV game show such as Jeopardy, Wheel of Fortune, Family Feud or The Price is Right
- Questions can consist of facts based on information the group may know and understand
- Make surveys to rank topics popularity within the team
- Can use brain teasers and riddles

Reality TV details:
- Create a game based on a reality TV game
- Survivor, team challenges to earn immunity from some other unknown challenge
- The Apprentice, including competitive group projects
- Fear Factor, with fun challenges that include an element of stress
- The Amazing Race, a journey with a reality twist
- Who Wants to be a Millionaire, including lifelines, audience help, and call a friend
- When doing a team retreat based on a TV reality show, change the elimination or firing session to a debriefing session. During the debriefing session, direct the discussion towards evaluation and growth without blame. TV shows are looking to cut someone out of the picture. In team building, we are looking to grow as a group from the experience.

Building Themes

Building themes work on developing for the future. They create an environment for creativity, interaction, and group progress towards a successful conclusion. Just as children like to build while using their imagination, a team is inspired by the vision and resourcefulness utilized when completing a building project.

Construction will have a group create a vision, set goals, develop a plan, problem solve, and see their ideas come to fruition. These types of projects can be completed cooperatively, or multiple groups race to complete their project first. What will the team build? Here are some sample building themes.
- Team pyramid
- Build a structure, tower, or shelter
- Build a vehicle, bridge, or ladder
- Build a business, convention or website

Team pyramid details:
- Based on the legendary John Wooden's Pyramid of Success
- A team builds its own Team Pyramid of success
- See the *Team Pyramid* initiative in the *Ice Breakers, Community and Culture* section in *Team Building Resources* for details on the construction
- Discuss and design a team pyramid based on the characteristics a group feels are important to their success

Build a structure, tower, or shelter details:
- Building a specific structure can be representative of the desired goals for the group
- All structures need to have a stable foundation to support the structure, which represents the strong foundation paramount to a team's success
- Construct a tall tower symbolizing the team's quest to be at the top
- Build a shelter to signify the group's ability to withstand challenges that are presented
- Building supplies can either be supplied, or groups can be given some ground rules on how to obtain the resources they will need to build their project
  - Potential building supplies include real building supplies, hardware, tools, popsicle sticks and glue, Lego blocks, index cards and tape, paper, duct tape, food items (such as hard spaghetti noodles and marshmallows, fruit, or candy), toothpicks, clay for sculpting, balloons (as used in *Tower of Champions*) or other resources.
  - Have an auction for groups to bid for building supplies. Give each group play money or credit. Have a viewing of building supplies that will be auctioned. Let each team have some time to create a game plan. Conduct a live auction for the building supplies that will be used.
  - To ensure that each individual will participate in the team building project, use a rule that states that the supplies must be evenly distributed to all team members, and only that player can touch their allocated supplies at any time.

Build a vehicle, bridge, or ladder details:
- This type of project metaphorically represents a group advancing from where they currently are to where they want to be
- Build a vehicle, such as a car, cart, boat (propelled or sail), sled, or paper airplanes to achieve a specific travel goal. Have the constructed vehicles race down a wood ramp, across a pool, down a small snow hill, or other course.
- Build a bridge, which will help the team cross from where they are to where they would like to be
- Build a ladder, to climb and reach new levels and goals

Build a business, convention or website details:
- Have a group produce a team business as a method to discuss structure, format, organizational flow chart, and how separate parts will integrate together
- Host a team convention where each person, group or department has a vendor booth, make presentations, run meetings, host round table discussions, brainstorming sessions, take surveys, and more
- Have a group plan a website that represents their group. The website can be presented on poster boards, Power Point or a real website. The design should have a home page, site map, and links connecting various aspects of the group.

Sample Team Retreat Plan

This plan presents a sample detailed outline for planning and conducting a team retreat. Examples of team building activities and initiatives have been placed into the team retreat agenda, following the order presented in the *Phases in the Journey with Team Building.*

Pre-trip information for participants:

Objective:

The Trek to the Top ™ team retreat includes a trek to the top of an imposing peak. The team will need to overcome challenges to reach the top. At times the group will move swiftly towards its goal, while other times the team may proceed slowly and face challenges. A successful trek will make progress to reach its goal, even when setbacks and obstacles exist. Your mission is to trek to the top.

Instructions for the trek to the top:

- A map will be given to locate check points and path to travel through the course
- A check point, known as a CP, is a place in which the group can confirm their location. The group must get to each and every CP along the specified course.
- Travel the wilderness course as plotted on the map, while successfully completing team activities and challenges at CP's along the way
- The goal is to trek to the top and get back safely, while completing the course

Itinerary:

Day 1
  1:00 p.m.   Meet at pre-determined location
  3:00 p.m.   Check in at campground, cabin, condo or other
  4:30 p.m.   Recreation…go to local hot springs
  7:00 p.m.   Theme Dinner
  8:30 p.m.   Goal Setting at fire circle and s'mores

Day 2
  6:00 a.m.   Breakfast
  7:00 a.m.   Trek to the Top ™ begins
               Maps and instructions are given at the introduction meeting
  5:00 p.m.   Estimated completion of course
  7:00 p.m.   Arrive back home

Participant checklist:
  Preparations
    ☐ Physical training to be capable of hiking 11 miles covering approximately 3000 vertical feet in one day. Expected duration to complete the trek is 8 hours.
    ☐ Knowledge on how to read a map, use a compass and other orienteering skills
  Mandatory items to be brought by each participant
    ☐ Hydration system, minimum 100 oz., a hydration pack is preferable
    ☐ Day backpack
    ☐ Sturdy and yet comfortable shoes appropriate for hiking
    ☐ Weather appropriate clothing, including team shirt
    ☐ Warm clothes for evening
    ☐ Sleeping bag and pillow
    ☐ Toiletries
    ☐ Bathing suit
    ☐ Towel
    ☐ Hat
    ☐ Sun block
    ☐ Notebook for journal
    ☐ Optional ski or trekking poles (helps the knees)
  Mandatory items to be brought by the team
    ☐ Stove, Dutch ovens, and/or other cookware items (as needed) for all meals
    ☐ Food, water and drinks
    ☐ Coolers and ice
    ☐ Paper plates, utensils, cups, dish soap, sponges and cleaning items
    ☐ Bug spray
    ☐ Camera
    ☐ Spray bottles and squirt guns
    ☐ Tents, folding chairs and other camp items

Information for Facilitators and Planners:

The previous information is given to the participants for preparation. Depending on physical training and abilities of the participants, a supplemental work out may be given 4 weeks in advance to prepare for the trek. It is highly recommended to have participants get together to complete the work out leading up to the team retreat. These informal meetings will have a great team building benefit within themselves.

Facilitator checklist
    Overall event planning
- [ ] Funding and budget
- [ ] Purchasing process to acquire necessary items
- [ ] Reservations for group camping
- [ ] Coordinate transportation
- [ ] Team building and other gear
- [ ] Team Retreat itinerary
- [ ] Trek to the Top program plans

    Items to bring
- [ ] First aid kit
- [ ] Survival gear, including knife, light and matches
- [ ] Digital camera

    Team building props and supplies
- [ ] Big bag of M&M's
- [ ] Bike puzzle from the Bike Journey initiative, found in Ice Breakers, Community and Culture
- [ ] 3 batons
- [ ] 3 gift boxes and paper
- [ ] 3 permanent markers
- [ ] 3 pens
- [ ] 12 blindfolds
- [ ] 12 balloons
- [ ] 8 poly dots,
- [ ] 2-30' rope
- [ ] Shock cord Portal
- [ ] Emotion Feeling Cards TM
- [ ] 15 Team Links TM

Trek to the Top course map

Trek to the Top ™ Agenda

Ice breakers

Trailhead:
Introduction
- A flash forward of our journey this season…
- "A climb to the top of the conference"…The trek represents facing and successfully getting through adversity and challenges of climbing to the top of a championship, team challenges based on the stages of a season.

CP1 at first bridge
M&M's for information about you.
- To get M&M's, you must share something about yourself that others may not know. The facilitator will give M&M rewards to participants when they share with the group something about themselves that others in the group did not know.
- As the group hikes on the trek, participants may share their reveals to the group, while hiking on the trek. Start the momentum by having the facilitator go first.

Community and Culture

CP2 at 4-way crossing
Bike Journey initiative, instructions found in *Team Building Resources Ice Breakers, Community and Culture* section
- Only one team will end on top…hope, courage and perseverance will be the keys to success. These characteristics will be paramount in our trek to the top.
- Tell Lance Armstrong story of hope, courage and perseverance
- The *bike* is the ultimate team machine. The bike takes us on our journey.
- The bike doesn't work without all its parts…Parts of the bike can be earned over the journey to the top of the mountain.
- Give the team the *frame* from the Bike Journey puzzle for getting to this point as a group. Discuss what the frame represents (supports the whole bike and its riders, as well as holds all the parts together, the frame is the foundation to the bike).

CP3 at picnic area:
Pass the Baton to New Members and Gifts from New Members from the *Team Building Resources Ice Breakers, Community and Culture* section
- Give team the *wheels* from the Bike Journey puzzle. Discuss the wheels (they help us move efficiently).

CP4 at horseshoe bend on road:
Team Climb from the *Team Building Resources Trust* section
- Give team the *brakes* from the Bike Journey puzzle. Discuss the brakes (they take care of us, keep us from getting out of control).

Communication Skills

CP5 after some climbing:
Telephone from the *Communication Skills* section
- Give team the *inner tube*…nobody sees them, but we don't go anywhere without them. Discuss.

Give team the *seat*…carries the load. Discuss.

Trust

At CP6 further up the trail:
Guided Journey from the *Trust* section
- Give team the *handle bars*…they steer the bike on its journey…like the coaches. Then, give bonus part… the team the *fork*…connects the handlebars to the frame…responds to the handlebars, and guides the bike down its path. Discuss.
  - Why two separate pieces?
  - Why must they be together?
- Further up the trail, after a steep section, give team the *Derailleur*…change our gears…adjusts our outlook…easy or hard. Discuss.

Challenges and Problem Solving

After a short downhill section, give team the *brakes*…take care of us, keep us from getting out of control. Discuss.

CP7, near the top
River of Distractions from the *Team Building Resources Challenges and Problem Solving* section
- *As we get closer to the top…*The challenge continues
  - Look how close the top is. We think we are almost there!
  - Things are sometimes harder than you think they will be…how will you persevere?
- Give team the *gears*…make our ride more efficient and effective. Discuss.
- Give team the *cranks and pedals*…work ethic. Discuss.

Transfer and Celebrations

Near the top, give team the *cables*…communicate with gears and brakes. Discuss.

CP8 on top of the peak
Team Links to Success and *Pass Positives* from the *Team Building Resources Transfer and Celebrations* section
- Give team the *chain*. Discuss.
  - What does this peak represent to us?
- Build our bike. Have team assign the roles to players and write initials on the back of each part puzzle piece, then build bike puzzle
  - Coaches…handle bars…steer
  - Frame…holds all the parts of the bike together…it supports the whole bike
  - Wheels…help us move (efficiently)
  - Inner tube…nobody sees them, but we don't go anywhere without them
  - Seat…carries the load
  - Fork…connects the handlebars to the frame…responds to the handlebars, and guides the bike down its path
  - Derailleur…change our gears…adjusts our outlook…easy or hard
  - Gears…make our ride more efficient and effective
  - Brakes…take care of us, keep us from getting out of control
  - Cables…communicate with gears and brakes
  - Cranks and pedals…work ethic
  - Chain...cannot get anywhere without links

After the team arrives back down at the bottom of the mountain and completes the trek to the top, the final activity is *Portal to the Future* from the *Team Building Resources Transfer and Celebration* section.

Trek to the Top is finished.

Team Building Resources

Equipment

Some simple props will allow for the operation of many various team building activities. Here is a list of some recommended items to include in a portable team building program.

- ❑ Emotion Debriefing Cards ™
- ❑ Team Links ™
- ❑ Index cards
- ❑ Pens
- ❑ Paper
- ❑ Masking tape
- ❑ Permanent markers
- ❑ White board and dry erase markers
- ❑ Ropes (30' and 15' lengths)
- ❑ Blindfolds
- ❑ Balloons
- ❑ Beach balls
- ❑ Squishy balls
- ❑ Small stuffed animals (Beanies)
- ❑ Shock cord (Bungee) loops (1 ½' diameter)
- ❑ Batons
- ❑ Green dot stickers
- ❑ 10 small boxes
- ❑ 30 poly dots with numbers
- ❑ Selected reflection resources
- ❑ Backpack or bag

Make a Team Building Kit

Reflection Resources and Props

Reflection resources and props are a repertoire of tools that assist participants with communication and sharing. They help initiate conversations that may be challenging to begin.

Reflection resources and props also help lead group discussions in a specific direction. They can be used to assist groups in sharing their thoughts and feelings during a briefing, activity, and debriefing.

Briefing

Briefing reflection resources and props help set the metaphor for the activity. Here is a list of reflection resources that can create the proper mindset for the activity.

- **Resources**. Gear and props utilized for the success of an activity, such as ropes, steps, and poly dots, are considered resources. Have a team name them to represent resources or characteristics they need to be successful. Attach a piece of masking tape to each prop, and write the resource it represents on the tape with a marker.
- **Special Friend**. Each participant picks a miniature stuffed animal and chooses a personal goal or characteristic it will represent. The special friends should be referred to during the initiative and/or the debriefing session to make the connection between some of the keys the team needs to be successful. Attach a piece of masking tape to each prop, and write the resource it represents on the tape with a marker. Have the participants use, carry, or save their special friend during the activity.
- **Challenges**. The team discusses some of the challenges or distractions that interfere with being successful. The group then gives titles to gear, props or other limitations within an activity, such as blindfolds, barriers, boundaries, rope lines, landmines, stuffed animals to carry, other items or restrictions. The challenges should be referred to during the initiative to make the connection between facing challenges effectively to be successful. If possible, attach a piece of masking tape to the challenges, and write what it represents on the tape with a marker.

During an Activity

Sometimes a group needs to reflect on their chosen plan or process during an activity. Here is a list of reflection resources that can direct attention to some areas of deficiency.

- **Blindfold**. A blindfold represents an individual or group not having a vision. Have a person wear a blindfold when a team has not organized an effective plan to complete an activity. The blindfold will immediately make an initiative more challenging. After the activity, a discussion on how the blindfold changed the progress of the initiative. What can be done to ensure the whole group has one set vision to complete challenges?
- **Backpack**. Wearing a backpack during an initiative can represent the baggage a person or group can carry. Add weight to the backpack to "*weigh you down*". Use this metaphor during activities where a backpack may impose an additional challenge to succeed. How much more difficult was the challenge with the excess baggage? How does it interfere with our success? What kind of baggage could get in our way? How do we get rid of the baggage?
- **Highly inflated balloons**. Have the group transport highly inflated balloons during an initiative or journey. They serve as a metaphor for how fragile interactions, decisions, and trust are within a group. What are some setbacks that can deflate our team? How fragile is trust within team members? What do we have to do to protect our trust?
- **Tangled string**. The tangled string represents confusion. If a person rushes to untangle a string, it sometimes becomes more knotted. When a group is proceeding with confusion and without a planned purpose, hand the team a tangled string in the middle of a challenge. Have the group stop their previous activity to untangle the string. Afterwards, have a short debriefing. What happens when we go through an activity without a well thought out plan? When we rush, what happens to our effectiveness? Do we make more mistakes and create our own setbacks? How can the team untangle the confusion?

Debriefing

Debriefing reflection resources and props help initiate and lead group discussions in a specific direction. Here is a list of reflection resources to use during debriefing.

- **Index cards**. Ask participants write down a word, phrase, or statement on an index card based on their thoughts to an open-ended question. For example, "How did you feel during the activity?" After giving the participants a moment to think and write their answer, go around the circle having each participant share what they wrote, and add any additional thoughts.
- **Debriefing cards**. Debriefing cards are decks of cards that call up thoughts and feelings when they are viewed. After your activity, have the group sit in a circle. Spread the cards out face up so all cards can be seen. As the participants look at the cards, a multitude of thoughts will go through their minds. Have each participant pick a card that represents a way they felt during the activity, or a thought they would like to share with the group. Each individual then shares the card they picked, and the reasons why they felt their card represented the thoughts they had during the initiative. Debriefing cards are a great resource to get the group engaged in discussions. Here is a list of debriefing cards available. They can be found for sale on the internet (see the *References and Resources* section for specific web sites).
  - o Emotion Debriefing Cards TM (each card has a word that represents an emotion, sample words include *support, engaged, energized, cooperation, fear, ignored,* and *frustrated*)
  - o Chiji cards (random picture cards)
  - o Pocket Processor (cards that include two opposite statements, representing yin and yang, or competitive/non-competitive statements)

- **Fist to 5**. A description is in the *Team Building Resources Ice Breakers, Community and Culture* section.
- **Knot Race**. Take a rope tied into a loop, or shock cord loop, and have each person in the group hold onto the loop. Have the group guide the loop around so that the knot in the loop rotates around the circle. After 10 seconds, have the group stop. The person the knot is stopped in front of is the person who will answer a debriefing question. Repeat process as many times as you have questions. "You never know when it's your time to be counted on."

During a debriefing session, a prop can be passed around a group. When an item comes to an individual, it is their turn to speak and share their insights based on the object being passed to them. Here are some reflection props to pass around a circle of participants.

- **Mirror**. What do you see in yourself? What do you see in your team? What would you like to see in yourself? What would you like to see in your team?
- **Ruler**. How do we measure success? How far have we come?
- **Compass**. What direction is the team headed? What direction do we want the team to go?
- **Key**. What will be a key to our success? What was a key to our success?

- **Flashlight** or **light bulb**. What would you like to highlight from this experience? What great ideas do you have?
- **Motivational rocks**. Rocks that have a motivational word engraved on it, such as *Dream*. What are your dreams?
- **Picture cut outs** (from magazines, post cards…), such as a picture of clouds. What are your dreams? Or a picture of mountains. What vision of greatness do you have for the group? How will we get to the top? Be creative and come up with a concept you would like to use for inquiry or reflection.
- **File**. Are there some aspects within our group that are a little rough? How do we smooth things out?
- **Eraser**. What changes can we make to improve?
- **Credit card**. Who would you like to give some credit to? Who would you trust?
- **Battery**. Who gives you energy, and why?

Initiatives

Initiatives have been placed in sections based on the *Phases in the Journey with Team Building*. Some initiatives can be used in a variety of phases, or can be altered to accomplish diverse experiences. The activities have been categorized in the following order.
- Ice Breakers, Community and Culture
- Communication Skills
- Trust
- Challenges and Problem Solving
- Transfer and Celebration

Fist to 5

Goal: Setting standards in creating our community. A visual method for a team to set standards.

Equipment:
- None necessary

Instructions and Rules:
- Group participants stand in a circle
- Ask the team members to evaluate and rate a question or statement with a hand signal fist to 5 (a continuum from 0-5). Fist (zero) represents that they did not like or did not agree with the statement…through 5 which represents that they really liked or very much agreed with the statement.
- Various topics can include: Rate Fist to 5, how hard we worked. Was the team being supportive during the activity? How effective was the group? How was our team communication?
- Participants tell why they rated the situation the way they did

Debriefing:
- Why did you rate the statement so highly?
- What can we do to improve the situation and make it a 5?
- What kind of adjustments would we like to make?

Discover in Order

Goal: Players learn various topics about each other. These initiatives can be used as a way to make random groups for other activities. Variations add an element of touch to stretch the comfort zones of participants.

Equipment:
- None necessary
- Optional 30' rope and/or shock cord loop

Instructions and Rules:
- The group organizes themselves and lines up in order based on a topic given
- The participants line up by various topics including:
  - Birthday
  - Smallest to largest shoe size
  - The number of brothers and sisters
  - Where you were born, closest to farthest from this location
  - The number of year's an athlete has played their sport
  - GPA
  - Alphabetical by middle name
  - Any other category that will allow participants to learn about each other
- Other options include asking questions that would have players line up based on their perceptions within a continuum. For example, the group lines up by how they view their abilities to do a specific skill ranging from a perceived strength to weakness.

Variations: **Lifeline, Life Wire and Life Loop**

- **Lifeline** variation: Another method for lining up is to use a rope as a lifeline. All participants hold onto the lifeline. Participants must always be in contact with the team's lifeline (rope). Ask participants a *Discover in Order* question to have the participants change order while remaining in constant contact with the lifeline. This method will get participants in close contact and touching. Change line up themes and have them change order while remaining in contact with the lifeline.
- **Life Wire** variation: Another method for lining up by *Discover in Order* is to use a rope (or some type of line) on the ground as a life wire. All participants stand on the life wire. Participants must always have at least one foot in contact with the team's life wire (rope).
- **Life Loop** variation: An additional method uses a shock cord loop. Use the shock cord loop the same way as in Lifeline. The shock cord loop adds a dimension that it is smaller, but is elastic.
- For a more advanced variation, see *Blindfolded Challenges* initiative, found in the *Challenges and Problem Solving* section
- These initiatives can be used as a way to make random groups. After the participants have lined up in order, they count off (1-2-1-2…) to make random groups.

Debriefing:
- Once participants are in order, ask additional questions to individuals or the group for them to clarify and expand on their newly shared information
- What did we learn about each other?

Commonalities

Goal: Participants learn about commonalities they share with each other

Equipment:
- None necessary

Instructions and Rules:
- This activity can be done while walking from place to place, on road trips, or at the beginning of a session.
- Participants partner up with someone they do not know that well
- Teammates find as many obscure commonalities between the two people
- At the destination or conclusion of allotted time, have teammates share the commonalities with the rest of the group

Variation: **Commonalities Scavenger Hunt**

Instructions and Rules:
- The group complete a scavenger hunt with only the resources of their teammates
- Create a list of questions that you feel would interest the participants. Examples include:
  - Find the two people who have the most similar spelling of their first names. Last names?
  - Find a group of people whose combined age equals 30, 50, 75 or 100
  - Find the three people whose birthdays are the closest
  - Find the two people born the furthest distance apart
  - Name all the participants in the group who have…
- The questions should be pre-written out on a scavenger list
- The group can cooperatively work together through the questions, or 2 or more teams can be made to compete against each other
- Teams write the names of the group members who fulfill the scavenger requirement
- The questions can also be presented to the group one at a time by the facilitator. The team members immediately search for the answer to a specific question, before being presented another question.

Debriefing:
- What did we learn about each other that we previously did not know?

<u>**My Domain**</u>

Goal: Players communicate and learn about each other by making mock web home pages. Variation has a team discover the dreams and organization of the group.

Equipment:
- Large sheets of blank paper for each person
- Lots of colored markers

Set Up:
- Team circles up in a big open space with paper and markers in the middle

Instructions and Rules:
- Players make a mock web page on paper with markers based on the theme given for the web home page
- Various themes:
     - A web page about you
     - A web page about your team
     - A web page about your dreams and goals
     - A web page about your dreams and goals for the team

Variation: <u>**Team Domain**</u>

- Team makes a mock web page on paper with markers based on the theme given for the web home page
- Various themes:
     - A web page about our team
     - A web page about our team's dreams and goals

Briefing:
- The web is the information super highway. What information would you like to put out there to share with others?

Debriefing:
- Discuss what the project represents
- What did you share with others?
- What did you expect to find on other web pages?

Word Search

Goal: The team creates a system where all team members are vital to the overall success of the group. A team will find and remember words posted throughout a course and present them at the end. The words memorized are key characteristics of great teams.

Equipment:
- Index cards and a marker to make **word cards**, which are cards with one word on it. Have at least one word card per person in the group with a minimum of 10. Word cards can be created by using index cards and a marker. Sample words include commitment, communication, confidence, cooperation, dedication, fun, integrity, support, teamwork, tolerance, trust, and work ethic.
- Tape or staples

Set Up:
- Post word cards in key locations along a course, as chosen by facilitator. Have space in between the posted word cards, so that it takes at least a few minutes to get from one card to the next.
- This initiative is best when completed over the duration of a team building program. Have word cards posted between team building stations, so the participants come across them when moving to a new team building activity.

Instructions and Rules:
- Give instructions at the beginning of a team building program before starting other team building activities.
- The team must find the *X* amount of word cards that will be posted throughout a course and remember the words.
- The words can never be written down.
- Teams need to create a system to remember the words before starting the course.
- The group must present the words in alphabetical order at the conclusion of the course.

Debriefing:
- How did your group remember all of the words? How did you come up with this method?
- Did you trust that your group would remember their words?
- Comments on how each individual of the team has a key purpose to our overall group mission?
- What do these key words represent?
- Will any of these words have an impact on the success of our team?

Five Finger Contract

Goal: The group agrees to terms of the Five Finger Contract. Start building a team community through common agreements.

Equipment:
- Five finger contract
- Ink pad
- Wet wipes or wet towels

Instructions and Rules:
- Read the Five Finger Contract. Each finger represents a characteristic of strong teams.
- Participants discuss the 5 terms of the contract. Be specific in what is expected and how it will be reinforced.
- Participants go to the contract one at a time, ink each finger and put their corresponding finger print in the appropriate space
- Participants agree to use their fingers as a way to communicate and reinforce the agreements during the year

Debriefing:
- Discuss how the Five Finger Contract can be used if a teammate makes a mistake and does not honor all five fingers of the agreement

Five Finger Contract

Pinky Finger
Trust – Much like trust, the pinky is a vulnerable finger

Ring Finger
Commitment – Willingness to let things go, not hold grudges, and stick together through challenging times

Middle Finger
Awareness of put-downs and negative statements

Pointer Finger
Taking responsibility – Not pointing blame

Thumb
Teamwork – Agreement to work together towards team mission

Pass the Baton to New Members

Goal: Participants returning to the group pass specific team characteristics and traditions to new members

Equipment:
- Batons (track team), one per new participant on the team, can order or purchase through sports store or track supply catalogs
- Permanent marker pens

Complete first…Instructions for returning participants meeting (no new participants allowed):
- Returning team members think of characteristics and traditions the group possesses that they would like their new teammates to continue
- Returning participants write their characteristics on plastic batons. One characteristic per baton. Each baton will be presented to a new person in the group. A specific baton/characteristic will be presented to specific players for maximum effect.

Instructions for Team Meeting:
- Team leader talks about what great attributes the returning team members have done for their group, then talks to the team about the importance of passing valuable team characteristics from returning players to the new players
- Discuss the trust and confidence goes into passing a baton
- Returning team members present their batons to each new person, and talk about the characteristics presented with each baton

Debriefing:
- What do these batons mean to the team?
- What commitment level do we have to take the baton and run with it?

Gifts from New Members

Can be ran concurrently with *Pass the Baton to New Members*

Goal: New participants present returnees the special attributes they bring into the team

Equipment:
- Little gift boxes (jewelry size) with a slip of paper inside, one per new participant on the team
- Pens

Complete first…Instructions for new participants meeting (no returning participants allowed):
- New team members think of characteristics they possess that they bring into the team. These characteristics add new dimensions to the group.
- Each new participant write their characteristic on the slip of paper, then put inside the gift box. Each gift box will be presented to the team captain(s).

Instructions for <u>Team Meeting</u>:
- Team leader talks about what great things the new team members bring to the group, then talks to team about the importance of bringing in new valuable team characteristics from new players to add new dimensions to the team.
- Discuss the trust and confidence that goes into accepting the new players and characteristics into the team
- New participants present their gifts to the returning players, and talk about the characteristics presented on the gift boxes

Debriefing:
- What do these gifts mean to the team?

Tower of Champions

Goal: Prepare the team for a goal setting session. A great brainstorming session for creating a list of characteristics the team would like to possess.

Equipment:
- 20 balloons
- Roll of tape
- 4 permanent markers

Instructions and Rules:
- The team has 15 minutes to inflate their balloons and write a unique characteristic of a championship team on each balloon. Each characteristic can only be used once.
- With the materials listed above, the group has 4 minutes to make the tallest free-standing balloon tower possible
- **As an option**, two or more teams compete against each other in this challenge. Which team can build the tallest balloon tower?
- **Another option**, conduct the *Balloon Trolley* initiative, found in the *Challenges and Problem Solving* section, to move the balloons from one area to another before building the balloon tower.

Debriefing:
- Describe the foundation on which the tower was built?
- Discuss the characteristics that make the Tower of Champions?
- How would we like to build these characteristics into our team goals?
- What does this tower represent to us?

Metaphor:
- A strong foundation allows you to build a tall tower, just as a strong foundation of characteristics allows the team to build toward lofty goals.

<u>**Name Our Mission**</u>

Goal: To have the team discuss and cooperatively determine a theme or mission for the season.

Equipment:
- Index cards
- Pens

Instructions and Rules:
- Team sits in a circle where they can see each other's faces and body language
- Players listen to all teammates before making any decisions
- Players should speak their opinions if they are not in agreement with other teammates
- Each player write the letters of their first name on index cards
- Using letters from the "letter cards" created by the team's first names, participants on the team are to spell out a statement or phrase that represents the theme or mission of the group
- Not all letters need to be used, but at least one letter should be used from each person's name

Debriefing:
- Why is this activity important to the success of our team?
- What did each person give to the group to be successful? What does this represent?

Metaphors:
- Each person gives something valuable (letters of their names) to building our team

<p align="center">**<u>Dream. Believe. Live.</u>** _{TM}</p>

Goal: The objective is to discuss and cooperatively determine the team dream and the steps it will take to achieve it.

Equipment:
- White board and dry-erase markers
- *Dream. Believe. Live.* form
- Pen

Instructions and Rules:
- Group sits in a circle where they can see each other's faces and body language
- Players listen to all teammates before making any decisions, and speak their opinions if they are not in agreement with other group members
- A team leader will conduct a discussion for each section on the *Dream. Believe. Live.* form. Brainstorming ideas can be written on the white board
- The team comes to a consensus for each topic listed on the *Dream. Believe. Live.* form. The team should only pick a dream that the whole group believes can become reality, and will commit to living out.

Dream. Believe. Live. TM

Dream
What is the dream of our team this year?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Believe
Why do we believe we can make our dream a reality?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Live
What steps are we going to take to make it happen*?*

Steps (goals) to be written so that they can be evaluated. Make them specific and accountable, not vague.
Step One (Date_____/_____/_____):
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Step Two (Date_____/_____/_____):
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Step Three (Date_____/_____/_____):
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Flash forward
Describe what would feel like to accomplish the team's dream. What would occur? Why is it important to the group?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

<u>**Team Pyramid**</u>

Goal: Team discusses and cooperatively determines the foundation and key characteristics of the team.

Equipment:
- 10 boxes
- Packing tape
- Permanent markers
- White board and dry-erase markers

Instructions and Rules:
- The team uses the white board and dry erase markers for brainstorming
- The team discusses the characteristics they would like their group to possess. Create a list of 15 to 20 characteristics.
- The group comes to a consensus and picks four of the characteristics that will be the foundation for their group. Write each idea on a different box (write on the same side of the box).
- The team picks the two cornerstones of their foundation. The team should then tape the four boxes together, side-by-side, with the cornerstones at each end. This creates the foundation of the team pyramid.
- The team then discusses the characteristics that will be built on the foundation. The team should come to a consensus and pick three concepts. Write each idea on a different box (write on the same side of the box). The team then tapes the three boxes together, side-by-side, then tapes the row on top of the foundation of the team pyramid.
- Following, the team discusses the characteristics that will be built upon the second row. The team must come to a consensus and pick two ideas. Write each idea on a different box (write on the same side of the box). The team then tapes the two boxes together, side-by-side, and then tapes the row on top of the second row of boxes.
- Finally, the team discusses what they want to accomplish with the characteristics. The team must come to a consensus and pick one idea. Write the idea on the final box (write on the same side of the box). The team then tapes the final box on top of the third row of boxes. This completes the Team Pyramid.

Debriefing:
- Why is this activity important to the success of our team?
- What does our Team Pyramid represent?

Metaphors:
- *John Wooden's Pyramid of Success* (has 15 building blocks). The foundation *John Wooden's Pyramid of Success* is friendship, loyalty, and cooperation with the cornerstones of industriousness and enthusiasm. Building on the solid foundation is self-control, alertness, initiative, and intentness. Above are more strong blocks of condition (prepared to be your best), skill, and team spirit. Nearing the peak are poise and confidence. The top block of the pyramid is competitive greatness. Above this block is the pinnacle, success. The mortar that holds the pyramid together is patience and faith.

Additional Project:
- Pick one characteristic per session.
- Have each person write what the selected characteristic means to them and why it is important to the team to possess. Start with a cornerstone of the foundation, and work up to the peak of the pyramid.

"I will…" Statements

Goal: The objective is to have teammates make commitments to each other in the form of "I will … (do this for the team)" statements.

Equipment:
- "I will…" Statements Form
- Pen

Instructions and Rules:
- People on the team will declare their three "I will …" statements.
- Teammates only make "I will…" statements that they can commit to doing.
- The "I will…" statements are recorded on the form.

Debriefing:
- Will all teammates commit to their "I will…" statements?
- Why is this activity important to the success of our team?

"I Will…" Statements

I will statements are commitments teammates make to each other. Say "I will..." instead of "I will _try to_..."

I will _be a positive influence to my teammates._
I will _be shake off mistakes and be focused the very next play._
I will _be work my hardest to help our team reach our goals._

Name _____   **Name** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____

Name _____   **Name** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____

Name _____   **Name** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____

Name _____   **Name** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____

Name _____   **Name** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____

Name _____   **Name** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____

Name _____   **Name** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____

Name _____   **Name** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____

Name _____   **Name** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____

Name _____   **Name** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____

Name _____   **Name** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____
I will _____   **I will** _____

<h1 style="text-align:center"><u>Help</u></h1>

Goal: To get people willing to ask for help from other members within the group.

Equipment:
- Soft throw-able object like a small stuffed animal or squishy ball
- Name the object "Help"

Instructions and Rules:
- The game is a version of freeze tag
- Establish playing area boundaries. All players must stay within the boundary area.
- One person has the "Help" item. The person with "Help" cannot be tagged. If you ask for "Help", it must be given to you. "Help" can be thrown.
- One person is it, and tags people. Once someone is tagged, they must freeze in place.
- Frozen people can call for "Help". Once they have "Help", they are no longer frozen.
- Change the person who is the tagger.

Debriefing:
- What type of help may you need from your teammates?

<u>**Team Collection**</u>

Goal: To get participants to realize that they need to share and have consideration for each other to have the group to reach its goals.

Equipment:
- Exactly 4 small squishy balls, marbles, or 1 inch diameter rocks per person
- 1 Frisbee or pie tin
- 1 yardstick per person, with a plastic spoon taped to the end (so the "scoop" extends off the end of the yardstick)
- 1 cup per person

Instructions and Rules:
- Have the group sit on the ground in a circle. The diameter of the circle should be about 10 feet
- Give each person a cup to place to the side of their right hip
- Place a Frisbee or pie tin holding all the squishy balls, marbles, or rocks in the middle of the circle
- Hand each person the yardstick, telling them that they can only touch it with their left hand, and only the last three inches of the stick (the opposite end from the spoon)
- Tell the group that whomever has the most squishy balls, marbles or rocks in their cup becomes the champion…"Ready, Go"
- Note: If they did not completely share the first time. Give the group a few minutes to come up with a revised game plan, and then repeat the game.

Debriefing:
- *Hopefully they realized that it is quite challenging to get the items in their own cup. Also, if they each assist others to get exactly 4 items in each cup, the whole team gets to become champions!*
- What were some of the challenges each individual faced?
- Why did you help each other?
- Who ended up winning?
- When you played a second time, how was the outcome different?
- What role did sharing play in this game?
- What was the outcome if everyone on the team shared equally?
- How does this relate to how the group can become champions?

<u>**Carry Your Load**</u>

Goal: To demonstrate to the group the strength of the team when everyone carries their share of the load.

Equipment:
- Location where each player on the team can find a 6 to 8 pound rock (by a stream or river)
- Paint (black plus one color) and paint brushes
- A big bucket (minimum 5 gallon size)

Instructions and Rules:
Session 1
- Each person finds a 6 to 8 pound rock. Team members paint their rocks and the bucket in school or group colors.
- After the rocks dry, each player paints their name (number if a sports team) and a statement of what they do/will do for the team with black paint on their rock
- On the bucket, paint the group name and the mission of the team
Session 2
- Place the bucket across an open area, approximately 20 feet from where the group will meet.
- Have each person tell the group what they have painted on their rock, then put the rock in the bucket
- Have a peer leader or team captain attempt to move the bucket, with the rocks in it, back across the open area back to the group
- After failing to carry the bucket, have each person retrieve their rock to carry back to the meeting area. The leader or team captain will also carry the empty bucket. Then place all the rocks back in the bucket.

Debriefing:
- Discuss what the project represents
- Instruct team members to bring their rock to specific group functions, as they carry their load for the group

Metaphors:
- The efforts of all members contributing vs. one person carrying the load of the team
- Amazing work can be done by the efforts of all members combined
- Moving a mountain one rock at a time to make something great happen
- Individually the rocks can be thrown around, but together the group cannot be pushed around

Bike Journey

Goal: Team members learn various roles within a group, and how they are vital to each other for the group's overall success.
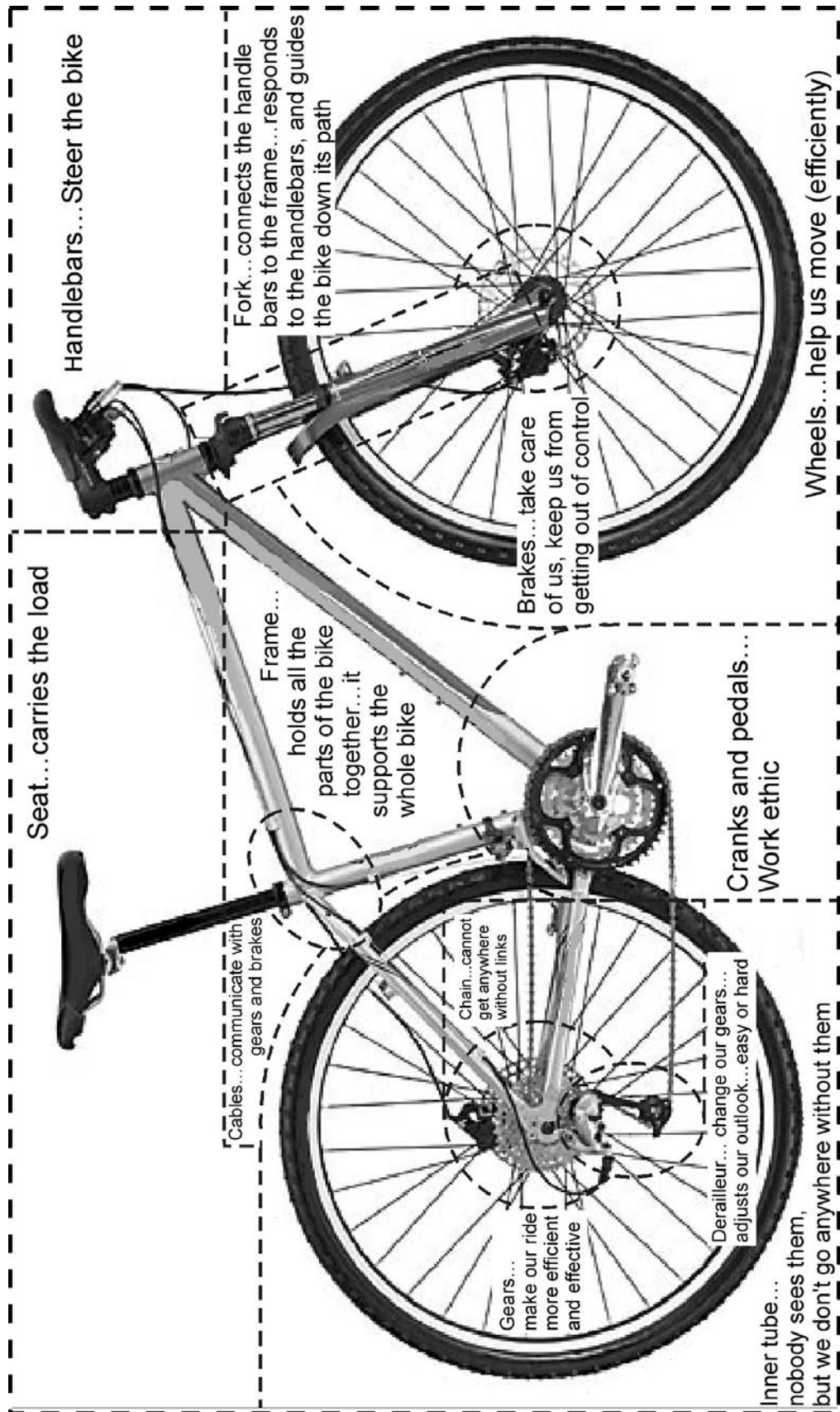
Equipment:
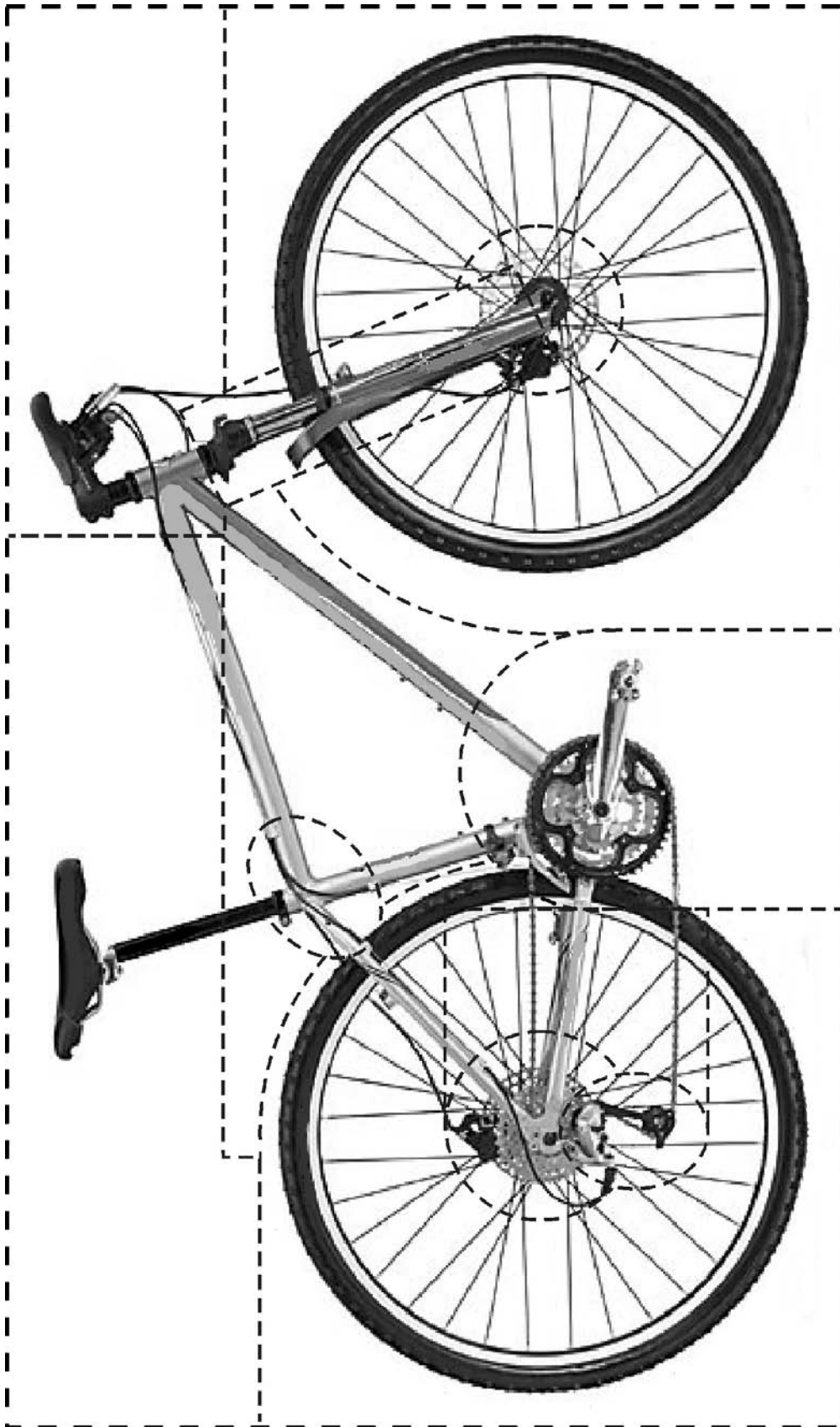- Bike puzzle (cut into pieces, attached)

Instructions and Rules:
- The team earns each piece of the bike puzzle with team challenges. They can be earned throughout the journey of a single team building session or a multi-session team retreat.
- As each piece is earned, discuss the role and responsibility of the bike part. Do any members within the group represent the each specific bike part with what they offer your group?
- The team builds the bike puzzle:
  - Handlebars…steer the bike in a direction (leaders of the group such as coaches, managers, teachers…)
  - Fork…connects the handlebars to the frame…responds to the handlebars, and guides the wheels toward its intended direction (participants in the group must respond to the leadership, and go in the desired direction)
  - Frame…holds all the parts of the bike together…it supports the whole bike
  - Wheels…help us move (efficiently)
  - Inner tube…nobody sees them, but we don't go anywhere without them
  - Seat…carries the load
  - Derailleur…changes our gears…adjusts our outlook…easy or hard, slow or fast
  - Gears…makes our ride more efficient and effective
  - Brakes…take care of us, keep us from getting out of control, they keep us safe, smart choices are made with the brakes
  - Cables…communicate with gears and brakes
  - Cranks and pedals…work ethic, this is where the work is put in
  - Chain...cannot get anywhere without aligned links

Debriefing:
- How is each part vital to make the bike go?
- How vital are the various participants in our group to make our team continue towards our desired direction?
- What is the destination of our journey?

Handlebars...Steer the bike

Fork...connects the handle bars to the frame...responds to the handlebars, and guides the bike down its path

Wheels...help us move (efficiently)

Brakes...take care of us, keep us from getting out of control

Seat...carries the load

Frame... holds all the parts of the bike together...it supports the whole bike

Cranks and pedals... Work ethic

Cables...communicate with gears and brakes

Chain...cannot get anywhere without links

Derailleur... change our gears... adjusts our outlook...easy or hard

Gears... make our ride more efficient and effective

Inner tube... nobody sees them, but we don't go anywhere without them

Different Perspectives

Goal: A visual way for the team to learn how people view things differently and accept various perspectives.

Equipment:
- None necessary

Instructions and Rules:
- Team circles up
- Tell the group to point their index finger of right hand straight up overhead…
- Then, rotate hand in a 2 foot diameter circle clockwise…
- Continue rotating hand clockwise while pointing up to the sky.
- Slowly lower finger while continuing rotating same direction and pointing to the sky
- Once the finger is about waist height, ask the group to look at the direction their finger is rotating (it will be rotating counterclockwise)
- Ask if the rotation has changed directions
- Repeat process, if many in the group are surprised or puzzled
- Ask why the finger has changed directions

Debriefing:
- Discuss metaphor regarding perspective and the direction we view things
- Two different views, both of which are correct. How does this relate to conflicts within our team?

Metaphor:
- Two different perspectives can both be correct

<u>**Telephone**</u>

Goal: Group members learn how messages get altered and misinterpreted when passed from person to person throughout the team.

Equipment:
- Before this initiative, write down messages to send through the group. Based on the type of specific goals you have for the initiative, the messages can be a long sentence with detailed information for the group.

Instructions and rules:
- Have group stand in a line, an arms distance from each other
- Start sending a message by whispering it to a person at one end of the line. Tell that person to repeat the message to the next person in line.
- The person who just heard the message repeats what they heard to the next person in the line.
- When the message has worked its way down to the other end of the line, the last person states the message out loud for all participants to hear. If the statement is different from what the originator said, the originator should correct the statement.

Debriefing:
- How did the message change over the course of its path?
- How does this reflect real life and statements made by team members to others?
- Discuss the impact that is made by sharing negative messages about group members.
- Discuss the impact that is made by sharing positive messages about group members.
- Discuss the forming of cliques, and magnifying conflicts with leaders, teammates, and others. What can be done about this?

Metaphors:
- If you want to know the real story, go to the source!
- When talking about others, messages usually get twisted before getting back to the person.

<u>**Emotion Cards**</u>

Goal: To have the group explore how emotions and body language can affect the team.

Equipment:
- Emotion Debriefing Cards (from www.TeamRetreat.com), or make at least 15 emotion cards by writing one word representing an emotion per index card

Instructions and Rules:
- Put emotion cards face down on a table
- Each person will pick a card, and do a charade (no talking by the person doing the charade)
- The rest of the team will guess the emotion card word
- This initiative can be completed as a timed challenge, 1 minute per card, or set up teams like charades and turn into a competition

Debriefing:
- How did body language help us figure out what the person was feeling?
- How does body language affect our group?

<u>**Yin and Yang Skits**</u>

Goal: To have the group explore how emotions and body language can affect the team.

Equipment:
- 3 skit cards (formats found below). Create new and different skit cards…have fun with this!

Instructions and Rules:
- Put skit cards (samples below) face down on a table
- Divide team into 3 groups
- Each team will pick a card, then go to separate areas to create two presentations of the skit with different outcomes, as defined by the skit cards. Groups have 10 minutes to create their skits.
- Groups will then present their two skits to the group
- Have a short debriefing after each skit

Debriefing:
- What feelings did the skit create for the group?
- What difference in feelings did the adjusted skits create?
- What are some ways to keep the team in a positive frame of mind while meeting expectations of the group?

Skit Cards

Title: Frustration vs. Confidence
Theme for skit: Someone in your group makes a mistake (pick a topic
                        specific to realistic group functions)
1st Presentation: One person in the group makes a mistake and gets really
                        frustrated with them self
2nd Presentation: One person in the group makes a mistake and then shows
                        confidence and the ability to recover to her teammates
----
Title: Blame vs. Response
Theme for skit: Someone in your group makes a mistake (pick a topic)
1st Presentation: One person in the group makes a mistake and others in the
                        group get on the participant for making the mistake
2nd Presentation: One person in the group makes a mistake and others in the
                        group help the participant mentally recover
----
Title: Your Fault vs. My Fault
Theme for skit: Two people in your group are part of making a mistake (pick a topic)
1st Presentation: Two people blame each other for the mistake
2nd Presentation: Two people accept personal responsibility for correcting the mistake

Team Speeches

Goal: Players present their thoughts and emotions to the team.

Equipment:
- Index card and pen for each team member

Instructions and Rules:
- Give each player an index card and pen
- All team members have 10 minutes to prepare a 30 to 60 second speech
- The speech topic is to be related to the group, this season, or their dreams. It is OK to make the speech emotional.
- Players must speak their personal opinions in their speech
- Players may find some personal space to write their speech
- Bring players together, and have them present their speech

Debriefing:
- Use Emotion Debriefing Cards to start this debrief…How did you feel presenting your speech? How did you feel listening to other speeches?
- What was the most difficult part of this activity?
- Did you consider this activity as a risk? Did you feel vulnerable? Why?
- Are we vulnerable with our teammates?
- Did your teammates really listen to what you had to say?
- What did we learn about our teammates?
- Why is this activity important to the success of our team?

Theme Song

Goal: Players present their team theme in a creative and memorable way.

Equipment:
- White board and markers
- Pen and note paper
- Optional Karaoke machine or CD player with CD's

Instructions and Rules:
- The group discusses a theme or mission for the group. Use the white board to brainstorm ideas.
- The group has 30 minutes to prepare a song that is based on the theme or mission of the team
- The team presents their song at a group function later in the retreat. This will allow the group to rehearse and even add some fun and creative twists, like costumes or choreographed dance moves.

Debriefing:
- The presentation should be a great finish to this activity. The group will be proud of their accomplishment. Let the applause and laughter serve as the debriefing session!

<u>**Heroes**</u>

Goal: Players tell emotional stories and take emotional risks in front of their teammates.

Equipment:
- None needed

Instructions and Rules:
- Have the team sit in a circle
- Each player tells the group about a person who is a hero in their life. The story should include specifics to why he or she believes the selected person is a hero. Have the presentation last a few minutes.
- Note that this initiative can be emotional for some participants. The group may need to have some free time following the initiative.

Debriefing:
- How did you feel telling the story about your hero? Did you feel vulnerable? Inspired?
- How did the group feel hearing about their teammates' heroes?
- Thinking about your hero, how does that make you want to proceed in your future?

<div align="center">**<u>Details</u>**</div>

Goal: Participants learn the value of being very specific and detailed when communicating.

Equipment:
- Detail images (copy from back side)
- Blank paper, pencil and clipboard for each illustrator

Instructions and Rules:
- Both talking skills and accurate listening is important for success with this initiative
- Pick a presenter and an illustrator for each image
- The presenter describes the image to the illustrator, so that the teammate can duplicate it on their own paper
- Illustrators may not show their designs to the leader to check for accuracy
- Each image will have a different leader
- Each leader will read rules to the group. The rules are located at the bottom of each design.

Image #1 (5 minute maximum for this image)
- The leader can say anything
- NO gestures, and must face away from the illustrator
- Illustrator may not speak or ask questions

Image #2 (5 minute maximum for this image)
- The leader may ONLY make gestures, NO speaking
- Illustrator may ask as many questions as they want

Image #3 (5 minute maximum for this image)
- The leader may speak and gesture
- Illustrator may ask three questions

Debriefing:
- Focus the debriefing in terms of not judging whether a particular leader and illustrator was successful, but rather what can be learned from this experience
- What challenges did the group face when the leader could only talk?
- What challenges did the group face when the leader could only gesture?
- How was the challenge when the leader and illustrator could communicate back and forth, as well as gesture?
- How could we as individuals and as a team better facilitate our own communication?

Image 1
- The leader can say anything
- NO gestures, and must face away from the illustrator
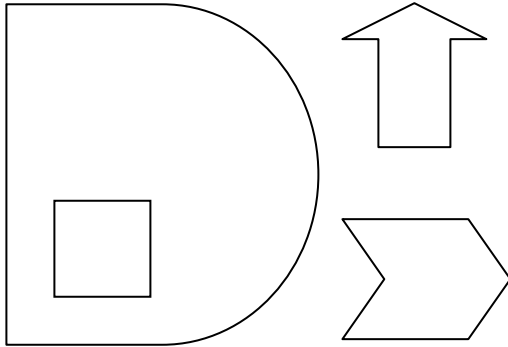- Illustrator may not speak or ask questions

Image 2
- The leader may ONLY make gestures, NO speaking
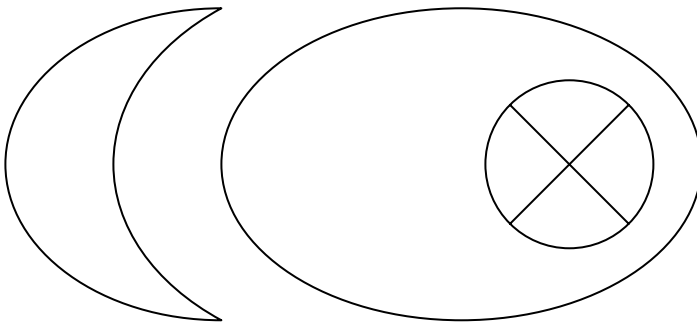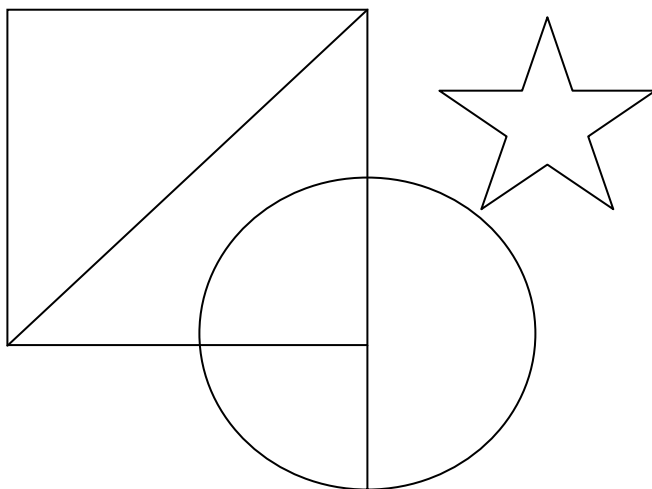- Illustrator may ask as many questions as they want

Image 3
- The leader may speak and gesture
- Illustrator may ask three questions

Challenge Juggle

Goal: The group learns to juggle challenges.

Equipment:
- 1 balloon per person, plus a few extra balloons
- Permanent markers

Instructions and Rules:
- Each person in the group names a challenge or distraction facing the team. They write their challenge on their inflated balloon.
- Then the team comes up with a few more challenges not stated, and writes it on the extra balloons
- The group stands in a tight circle
- The facilitator introduces a balloon while reading the challenge, then taps it up in the air towards the middle of the group
- Participants continue to hit the balloon up in the air to keep it aloft
- Participants are not allowed to have a balloon come to rest or be caught. If a balloon hits the ground, the group starts over. Success is based on the group keeping the challenges (balloons) continuously juggling in the air.
- After the group gets comfortable, the facilitator adds one balloon at a time while reading the named challenge
- Continue the process until all team challenges (balloons) are added (more balloons in the air than people)

Debriefing:
- How did this make people feel?
- When did we try new strategies? (When it was simple, we did not introduce new strategies...do we only add strategies to improve efficiency when we face difficulty or lack of success?

Metaphor:
- Our life is a juggling act
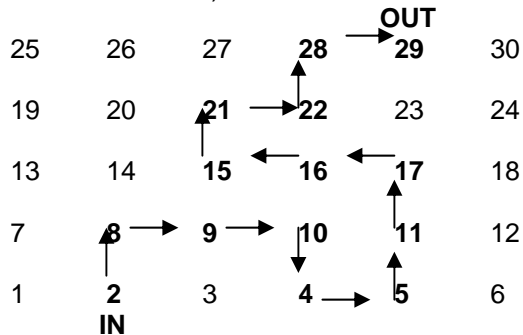- The stresses created by trying to take on too much

Mystery Maze

Goal: The group works together to figure out the solution of a human sized maze.

Equipment:
- 30 sequentially numbered spots (poly dots, paper plates, or index cards)

Set Up:
- Set up spots in numerical order grid of 6 spots by 5 rows (approximately 2 feet apart, first row has numbers 1 through 6, second row 7 through 12, and so on)
- The facilitator writes down a correct path through the grid (sample: IN on 2-8-9-10-4-5-11-17-16-15-21-22-28-29-OUT)

```
                              OUT
     25      26      27     28 →  29      30

     19      20      21 → 22      23      24

     13      14     15  ←  16  ←  17      18

      7       8 →   9  →  10     11      12

      1       2       3     4 →   5       6
              IN
```

Instructions and Rules:
- Team members must stay connected at all times. The chain of team members must all go through the maze correctly.
- Participants only use non-verbal communication
- The first team member in the chain starts to go through the grid, stepping on a numbered spot
- The facilitator says "no" when the lead person steps on an incorrect spot, then all participants must retrace their correct steps back to the beginning
- Each time the group starts at the beginning, another team member goes to the front of the chain. The next lead person then attempts to go further through the maze
- Continue to repeat process until successfully getting the whole team through the maze

Debriefing
- How did we work together to complete this challenge?
- What role did each individual play in the success of the group?
- What role did failure play in the group being successful? Is there a value in failure?

<u>**Radar Hunt**</u>

Goal: Emphasize the importance of clear communication and attentive listening.

Equipment:
- 40' rope (use both the 30' and 15' lengths)
- Blindfolds for every other person
- 12 squishy balls

Set Up:
- Make square rope boundary of at least 10' by 10'
- Randomly spread the 12 squishy balls within the boundary

Instructions and Rules:
- Each sighted partner is linked up with a blindfolded partner
- The blindfolded player must remain inside the boundary
- The sighted player must remain outside the boundary
- Points are awarded when the blindfolded player picks up a squishy ball from the ground, throws it and hits another blindfolded player. The sighted player keeps their team's score out loud.
- The sighted player gives directions for the blindfolded player to find and throw squishy balls to be successful
- Go for 90 seconds, then switch roles

Debriefing:
- What skills were critical for the success of your team?
- How does this relate to our competitive experiences?

See, Talk, or Walk

Goal: A teammate leads another teammate to safely reach their goal and bring it back to the group.

Equipment:
- Blindfolds for 2 of every 3 participants
- A 30' rope circling an area
- One small stuffed animal or squishy ball per person

Instructions and Rules:
- Each player picks a stuffed animal or squishy ball
- The stuffed animal or squishy ball is their "special friend". Each player mentally picks a personal goal. Their special friend now represents their personal goal.
- Have each person share their "special friend" and personal goal with the group
- Put participants into groups of 3. All 3 participants start inside the circle.
- One person is not blindfolded, but cannot walk outside the rope circle and cannot talk. That person is the only person who can *see*.
- The second person is blindfolded, but cannot move outside the rope circle and is the only person who can talk.
- The third person is blindfolded, that person is the only person who can *walk*.
- The facilitator puts the special friend of the *walker* somewhere outside the rope circle (30 or more feet away)
- The *walker* starts in the rope circle blindfolded, and is to be led to find their goal and bring it back to the rope circle
- Give the team a few minutes to come up with their strategy

Debriefing:
- Can use Emotion Debriefing Cards for this debriefing
- How did the blindfolded players feel?
- How did the guides (see and talk) feel?
- What role do teammates have in assisting others in reaching their personal goals?

<u>**Guided Journey**</u>

Goal: The teammates guide the group through a challenging journey.

Equipment:
- Blindfolds for each person
- 30' of rope (lifeline)
- Obstacles to go over, under and/or around, plus stepping stones

Instructions and Rules:
- All players are blindfolded and hold onto the lifeline (rope). If a player is wearing glasses, they must be removed, or worn over the blindfold.
- Once blindfolds are on, nobody on the team can talk or peek
- Tap three newer group members on the shoulder, and tell them to remove their blindfolds, and separate from the team
- Tell the newer group members they will be guides and lead the team on a journey. The guides can talk, but each guide must have specific leadership duties and can only give directions (i.e. left, right, step down, up, bend down…). The guides cannot give clues about the terrain, like rock, creek, rope…). Safety is the top consideration. Remind the guides of their responsibility for the group's safety, including all hazards high and low. Guides and facilitators can step in and be spotters when needed. Give guides a few minutes to determine their specific duties.
- Tell the group that they will be led on a journey by their guides. Tell blindfolded participants they have a responsibility to move safely, and not put the guides in adverse situations.
- DO NOT ANNOUNCE. Along the course, the leaders will guide the group on a journey (pointed out by the facilitator) that includes turns, obstacles, going under rope (cannot touch or the team goes back), going over obstacles, and finally stepping stones (shock cord loops, cannot have foot outside loop or the team goes back).
- Repeat process with group leaders. They can be given more challenges such as leading with no words, or just animal sounds, and/or more challenges along the Guided Journey obstacle course (various barriers…).

Debriefing:
- How did the blindfolded players feel? Safe? Trust? Understood directions?
- How did the guides feel? Pressure to take care of blindfolded players?
- Did the tone of voice change? How? Does this change occur during competitions?
- How does this activity relate to leadership for the volleyball team?

Metaphor:
- Blind faith

Minefield

Goal: Guide teammates through a minefield.

Equipment:
- Blindfolds for every other person
- 2 ropes
- 30+ landmines, small items such as squishy balls, small stuffed animals, participants' shoes or other objects

Set Up:
- Place the two ropes approximately 20 feet apart to create parallel start and finish lines. Spread the *landmines* randomly throughout the area between the ropes.

Instructions and Rules:
- Team members are paired up. One teammate is blindfolded. If a team player is wearing glasses, they must be removed, or worn over the blindfold.
- The sighted team member must stay behind the start line, and will verbally guide the blindfolded person from the start to finish line. Any time a team member steps on a landmine, they must go back to the start line.

Debriefing:
- How did the blindfolded players feel? Safe? Trust? Did they understand the directions given by teammates?
- How did the guides feel? How did people interpret directions differently?
- Did the tone of voice ever change? How and why? Does this change occur within our group?

Metaphor:
- Blind faith

Team Climb

Goal: Team members make a Team Climb, as they focus on each step in climbing to the top.

Equipment:
- 5 thick fallen tree branches in a wilderness area (send participants to find), baseball bats, wood dowels, or two by four pieces of wood at least 3 feet long

Instructions and Rules:
- The group will make a team ladder
- Have the group identify 5 steps they must take to reach their team goal or mission. Name each rung of the team ladder, specifically placing them in a strategic sequential order (which comes first, then next…)
- Make a team ladder using the rungs listed in *Equipment*. Have two people hold each rung.
- Each member of the team must climb by stepping on each of the rungs on the ladder. As they step from rung to rung, they must say what that rung represents.
- On the ladder of success, we cannot skip rungs as we make our climb. We need to take all the steps to climb to the top (we cannot go from the 1st rung to the 5th rung by skipping steps).

Debriefing:
- \What does this activity represent? How were the rungs supported?
- How does this project support our team and the upcoming goal or mission?

<center>**Trust Progression**</center>

Goal: Build trust by allowing group members to support and look out for the safety and success of teammates. This progression can be completed in one session, or over a course of time.

Equipment:
- Soft surface underneath activities (on grass or pads)
- Sturdy platform (approximately 3 to 4 feet high) to do trust falls
- Shock cord loop for *Trust Loop*

<u>**Safety Issues**</u>**:**
- **Focus:** Eyes constantly on the participant
- **Stance:** Catchers should be balanced, centered, knees flexed to absorb impact, hands up and ready
- **Absorbing force:** "Give" with the body, moving or rolling in the direction of the force
- **Beware of flying elbows:** Have fallers interlock fingers and twist arms up against chest
- **Line up fallers:** Make sure catchers are lined up in proper positions for fallers before each activity (do not allow the faller to injure a catcher!)
- Enthusiasm can diminish suitable attention to the task. Re-emphasize the catchers' responsibilities.

Instructions and Rules for <u>Trust Wave</u>:
- Participants must insure the safety of all teammates.
- Divide team into two lines facing each other, so that when the players extend their arms at shoulder height, their hands reach to approximately the wrist of the person opposite. These people are the *spotters*.
- The goal is for one participant, the *runner*, to start ten yards from the group and walk, jog and then run between the two lines of people.
- The spotters raise their arms just before the runner reaches them and lowers them as soon as the runner has passed by.
- Before beginning, have the runner and spotters learn the commands. Runner asks the spotters, "Ready to raise?", then the spotters reply "Ready for your run". The runner then says, "Here I come."

Instructions and Rules for <u>Trust Loop</u>:
- Participants must insure the safety of all teammates
- Participants stand in a circle holding onto a shock cord loop with both hands.
- All participants make their bodies super stiff, so that their feet (ankles together) will act like a hinge point to the ground. Do not bend at the hips. All participants then equally lean back staying stiff. There should be a balance between all the participants. The shock cord loop will stretch.
- As confidence is gained, the participants in the circle can put their feet closer together, creating a longer leverage point, and repeat the process.

Instructions and Rules for <u>Willow in the Wind</u>:
- Participants must insure the safety of all teammates
- Participants stand in a tight circle with their "bumpers" up (hands up in front of the chest facing out, with the elbows half bent). The people in the circle should have their right foot forward, and their left foot back for leverage.
- One participant stands in the middle of the circle, with their body super stiff, so that the feet (ankles together) act like a hinge point to the ground. The participant must interlock fingers and cross arms.
- The participant's upper body is moved around the circle (with the feet staying in the same hinge location) from the "bumpers" of the participants in the circle. The participant in the middle moves like a willow blowing in the wind.

- As confidence is gained, the participants in the circle move back slightly to have the willow blow farther.

Instructions and Rules for <u>Three-Person Trust Fall</u>:
- One faller, two catchers get in a straight line about 2 feet apart. They should be lined up catcher-faller-catcher.
- Faller needs to face one of the catchers with secure arms to chest, by interlocking fingers and twisting arms up against chest
- Faller needs to keep body stiff. Do not bend at knees or hip.
- Before beginning, have the faller and spotters learn the commands. Faller says to the spotters, "Ready to fall.", then the spotters reply "Ready to catch". The faller then says, "Falling", and the spotters reply, "Fall on." After, the faller may fall forward to the catcher.
- Catchers push faller back and forth with their bumpers (from *Willow in the Wind*). The faller falls forward to one catcher, and then is pushed gently backwards to the other catcher. The process is repeated, back and forth. Start with the faller falling only a short distance, and then increase the distance in small increments.

Instructions and Rules for <u>Levitation</u>:
- One participant lays on the ground to be levitated
- Teammates kneel around body to be lifted, then place hands underneath the body of the participant to be levitated
- Person being lifted MUST stay rigid
- On the command of the leader, the group will lift the body slowly over head - 5 feet above ground
- Move the body laterally back and forth for a distance
- Slowly lower the person safely back to the ground

Instructions and Rules for <u>Trust Fall</u>:
- Participants must insure the safety of all teammates
- Divide team into two lines facing each other, so that when the players extend their arms at belly button height, their hands reach to approximately the elbow of the person opposite. These people are the spotters.
- The goal is for one participant, the faller, to fall backwards into the arms and hands between the two lines of spotters from a platform
- The facilitator guides and insures the faller falls directly into the arms of the catchers
- The spotters are responsible for catching the faller
- Before beginning, have the faller and spotters learn the commands. Faller says to the spotters, "Ready to fall.", then the spotters reply "Ready to catch". The faller then says, "Falling", and the spotters reply, "Fall on."
- Safety concerns: 1) The faller must interlock fingers and cross arms. The faller must not let go, or they will elbow the spotters. 2) The faller must remain straight and stiff. If the faller bends at the hips, then they can break through the spotters hands. 3) The spotters must insure the safety of the faller, especially supporting the neck and head. 4) The coach must be on the platform with the faller, and insure the faller is properly aligned with the spotters.
- The group can start at a lower height, so that the faller can feel the arms behind their ankles. After confidence has been raised, the faller can go up to another height.

Debriefing:
- When you were the person with your eyes closed, how did you feel?
- How did you feel when your teammates' safety was in your hands?
- What role did teamwork play in making the activity successful?

Metaphor:
- Releasing yourself to your team. Trust that your teammates will be there to catch you. Your teammates are your safety net.

<u>**Initiatives: Challenges and Problem Solving**</u>

<u>**Balloon Trolley**</u>

Goal: Build a balloon trolley and move the entire group through a designated course without allowing any of the balloons to hit the ground.

Equipment:
- 11" or larger balloons or beach balls, one less than one per person
- Obstacle course items, such as rope, picnic table…

Instructions and Rules:
- No talking, all communication must be non-verbal
- No hands or teeth can touch a balloon. The group must figure out a way to insert and hold balloons between teammates.
- No holding onto other team members
- One balloon is to be held between each team member creating a trolley of people and balloons (person-balloon-person-balloon-person…)
- The group will move as a complete balloon trolley through a course designated by the facilitator
- If a balloon makes contact with the ground, the entire group must start the course from the beginning, and the two people that were in contact with the balloon must go to the front and back of the line
- Change the level of difficulty as the activity progresses. Add more obstacles for the group to conquer. Have participants change the location of balloons from belly-back, to shin-calf.
- As an option, incorporate the *Tower of Champions* initiative, found in the Ice *Breaker, Community and Culture* section

Debriefing:
- <u>The Go Around</u>: Everyone in the group gives a ONE word description of how they felt the GROUP completed the activity. Follow up on statements.
- <u>The Go Around</u>: Everyone in the group gives a THREE word description of how they felt ONE OTHER PERSON completed the activity. Follow up on statements.
- Describe how leaders and peers worked together to be effective during the initiative

Traffic Jam

Goal: Two groups of people exchange places on a line of circles that has one more place than the number of people in both groups.

Equipment:
- Stepping stones (poly dots, paper plates, or shock cord loops), 1 more than the number of people in the group

Instructions and Rules:
- Place the stepping stones in a straight line, approximately a foot away from each other
- Divide the team into two equal groups
- One group stands on the stepping stones to the left of the middle circle, the other group stands to the right. Both groups face the middle unoccupied circle. As participants move, they must remain facing the same direction as they originally started.
- Using the following moves, the left side group must end up in the places on the right side and vice-versa

Legal Moves:
- A person may move into an empty space in front of them
- A person may move around a person who is facing her into an empty space

Illegal Moves:
- Any move backwards
- Any move around someone facing the same direction you are, i.e. you are looking at their back
- Any move which involves two persons moving at once
- Not being in contact with a stepping stone

Debriefing:
- What process did we use to solve the challenge?
- Did the group have one distinct leader or many? Did that help or hinder the solution?
- What leadership styles emerged from this initiative? How did the group select a leader? Discuss the process of being a follower in this initiative?

Order Line Up

Goal: The group works together to figure out ways to become more efficient.

Equipment:
- Numbered index cards (one number per person). Do not use a marker that will bleed through the card. Make sure the numbers cannot be seen from the backside of the cards.

Instructions and Rules:
- Each person picks a number card, but cannot look at it
- The facilitator will time the challenge. When the facilitator tells the group to start, they will line up in numerical order.
- When the time begins, participants hold the card up to their forehead with the number facing away from them so others can see it
- Participants are not allowed to tell anyone what number is on anyone else's forehead, including using any type of signs or signals
- The group is given their time, then the group has a few minutes to come up with a strategy to beat their time
- Each person will pass their card to another person, and then pass their new cards again (two passes with the cards). This will be the new card for each person. Then, repeat the timed challenge applying the same rules.
- Repeat this process a 3 to 5 times, as long as the group continues to improve their times
- **Option**: Two teams play against each other to add an element of competition and stress. Have each team go one at a time.

Debriefing:
- How did we work together to complete this challenge?
- How did we rely on others?
- Did the element of timing the activity or competition add stress to the game? How do deadlines or competition add stress to what our group tries to accomplish in real life? What do we control?

<h1 style="text-align:center"><u>Sequence</u></h1>

Goal: The group works together to figure out ways to become more efficient.

Equipment:
- 30 sequentially numbered spots (poly dots, paper plates, or index cards) set up randomly scattered approximately 3 feet apart from each other
- A rope (start line) placed at least 50 feet away from the numbered spots (far enough away so that participants cannot see the actual numbers from the start line

Instructions and Rules:
- The facilitator times the group to see how fast they complete the task
- The group starts behind a start line and sprints to the numbered spots
- The team then must tap the numbered spots in sequential order, 1 to 30
- The group cannot tap the next number until the hand is lifted off of the previous number. Any number missed or hit out of sequence adds a 10 second penalty.
- After all numbers are touched in sequential order, the group runs back to the finish line
- The group is given their time. Then, the group has a few minutes to come up with a strategy to beat their time.
- Repeat this process a 3 to 5 times, as long as the group continues to improve their times
- **Option**: Two teams play against each other to add an element of competition and stress. Have each team go one at a time.

Debriefing:
- How did we work together to complete this challenge?
- What role did each individual play in the success of the group?
- What role did experience play in the group becoming more efficient?
- Did the element of timing the activity or competition add stress to the game? How do deadlines or competition add stress to what our group tries to accomplish in real life?
- What do we control?

Sharing Resources

Goal: To have the group evaluate the resources they need to be successful, and work with others to allocate, share, and stretch them.

Equipment:
- White board and dry erase markers
- 6 shock cord (Bungee) loops with at least a 1 ½' diameter

Instruction and Rules:
- Have group write on the white board a list of resources they need to be effective in their role within the group
- Have the group talk about what would happen if they lost those resources
- Have the team identify the most important resource
- Put the shock cord loops on the ground in a large circle. Each loop represents one of the resources listed on the board.
- Have each person stand within the loops. Each person must have at least one foot flat on ground standing within a loop to be considered safely operating within the resource.
- Go around and have each person name the resource that their loop represents
- When the facilitator says go, participants must move to a different loop (resource), then name that resource
- After a few rotations, the facilitator removes a loop (resource) as people are rotating (much like musical chairs). Participants must find solutions so that all players are safely operating within their resources.
- For facilitator information only. There are at least 4 options for success: 1. More than one person standing within a loop (sharing resources); 2. Stretch loop (stretching resources). 3. Participants not operating safely within loops (operating beyond our resources); or 4. People are left out (denied resources).
- Continue process removing loops one at a time until only one loop is left (the most important resource), or until the group cannot fit flat-footed safely within the remaining resources

Debriefing:
- What difficulties did the team face?
- How did they solve their challenges, once resources were removed?
- How did this make people feel?
- What thoughts do we have about how this challenge represents the situation our group faces?
- Discuss the options available when resources were being lost

Metaphors:
- Wasting resources
- Losing resources
- Sharing resources
- Stretching resources
- Operating beyond our resources
- Denied resources

Pass the Distractions

Goal: The group gets through all distractions on their way to reach their goal.

Equipment:
- Many (12-25) squishy balls and/or mini-stuffed animals
- 30' rope and a 15' rope
- Masking tape
- Permanent marker

Instructions and Rules:
- Make a square with the 30' of rope. Make a circle next to a corner outside the square with the 15' of rope.
- Place the squishy balls and mini-stuffed animals outside the square next to the corner opposite the rope circle
- Participants list distractions that make it difficult for the group to be successful. Write the distractions on masking tape and put on squishy balls and mini-stuffed animals.
- Participants stand outside the roped square on all sides
- While being timed, the group passes the distractions through all participants without passing them to a neighbor.
- The first person picks up the squishy balls and mini-stuffed animals one at a time, and then reads the distraction before tossing it to someone else. Each person must say the name of the distraction when passing it to someone else.
- The last person places the "distractions" in the rope circle. Any distraction that falls into the square cannot be retrieved. There is a 5 second penalty for each distraction that does not make it to the rope circle.
- Repeat process trying to break time record

Debriefing:
- What was the key in working with distractions?
- How do we work through our real life distractions?

River of Distractions

Goal: The group needs to get all team members across the river of distractions.

Equipment:
- Stepping stones (shock cord loops, poly dots, paper plates, or foam steps). Have 1 stepping stone for every 2 people, plus 1 extra (for 10 participants, 5 +1 = 6).
- 2 ropes
- Masking tape and a permanent marker
- 5 bandanas
- Optional squishy balls and mini-stuffed animals (distractions) from *Pass the Distractions*

Instructions and Rules:
- **Option:** Do *Pass the Distractions* initiative first, found in the *Challenges and Problem Solving* section
- Place ropes in straight lines parallel to each other (3 feet apart per stepping stone, 18 feet apart for 6 stepping stones)
- Place stepping stones randomly throughout the space between the two ropes. Make sure the stones are within 3 feet of each other and the starting point.
- Have the team stand behind one of the ropes "on shore".
- The team must get across the river of distractions without making contact with the river. The open space represents the river of distractions. The optional squishy balls and mini-stuffed animals (distractions) from *Pass the Distractions* can be placed in the open space between the ropes.
- If someone steps into the river of distractions, or any part of a foot is off of a stepping stone or outside the loop, they go back to the beginning and lose a limb. Tie a bandana on an arm or leg of the person who stepped into the River of Distractions, identifying that the limb can no longer be utilized.
- The team writes three skills and concepts the team needs to be successful on masking tape. Tape skills to 3 of the stepping stones (skill stepping stones)
- The skill stepping stones, once activated by stepping on them, must remain in contact with a person or it will be lost.
- The skill stepping stones can be picked up and moved

Debriefing:
- Did you focus on the distractions or the skills? What is the best place to focus?

Metaphor:
- Crossing-leaving where you were and arriving at a new place. Where have we been? What will we do in this new place?

<h1 style="text-align: center;"><u>Blindfolded Challenges</u></h1>

Equipment:
- Blindfolds for each person
- Rope (30')
- Big open area without hazards

Blindfolded Line Up

Goal: Participants creatively communicate with each other without talking.

Instructions and Rules:
- Each participant puts on a blindfold before any other directions are given
- Scatter the participants around the open area so that they are 5-10 feet apart
- Tell the participants that they may not make any verbal sounds during the exercise
- Tell the team their challenge is to arrange themselves in order by a topic (as in *Discovery Order*)
- The facilitator insures the safety of all participants
- If repeating process and topic, add other limitations, to have them create another solution

Debriefing:
- How did they feel being separated in the beginning?
- What methods did they use to communicate with each other?
- How did they deal with the frustration they might have felt?

Blindfolded Shapes

Goal: Improve clear and specific communication and listening skills amongst teammates.

Instructions and Rules:
- Participants line up along a stretched out rope, then put on blindfolds
- Tell participants to form shapes with the rope
  - Triangle, square, circle, star, spell mascot…

Debriefing:
- How valuable was having a leader in this activity? Why?
- What role did tone or loudness play in the communication system?
- What confusion did you have?
- What helped the group to complete the desired result?

<h1 align="center"><u>Compass Walk</u></h1>

Goal: To have participants learn that they are a great resource in keeping their team and teammates on track towards reaching their goals.

Equipment:
- Blindfolds for every other person
- Rope
- Big open area

Instructions and Rules:
- Set up a rope approximately 50 feet from a chosen destination to create a start line
- Team members are paired up
- One person in the pair will be blindfolded. From behind the start line rope, one person in the pair views and decides an orientation to a specified destination. That person puts on their blindfold and walks towards the destination.
- The sighted person will walk along side the blindfolded person to serve as a spotter for protection. The sighted person cannot talk or touch their partner, except to say "stop" one time when they want the blindfolded person to stop. Once the blindfolded person stops, they may take off their blindfold, as they cannot continue to walk any more. The goal of the sighted person is to get the blindfolded person to stop as close to the destination as possible.
- In the second attempt, the previously sighted partner will be blindfolded. After viewing and deciding the orientation to the destination, that person puts on their blindfold and walks towards the destination. This time, the sighted person can give detailed verbal directions, while walking along side the blindfolded person. The sighted person will tell the blindfolded person when to stop. Once the blindfolded person stops, they take off their blindfold as they cannot continue to walk any more. The goal of the sighted person is to get the blindfolded person to stop as close to the destination as possible.

Debriefing:
- During the first trial, how did it feel not being able to see your goal and not getting any help from your teammate?
- During the second trial, how did it feel being guided towards your goal from your teammate?
- How do we keep our focus on our goals?
- What role do team members play in keeping oriented towards our goals?

Barbed Wire

Goal: The group gets all team members over the barbed wire fence to the other side.

Equipment:
- Rope tied up between two trees, poles, or other supports, parallel to the ground at about chest height (the barbed wire)
- 6 or more six-inch pieces of masking tape, attached to the rope (barbs of the barb wire)

Instructions and Rules:
- What are the "barbs" that threaten our group from going where we would like to proceed? The masking tape on the rope represents the threats to the group.
- The facilitator may select leaders who cannot talk at any time during the activity
- Have the remaining participants plan a strategy to get the group over the barbed wire to the other side
- Once the initiative begins, all players must be connected. If any team member becomes unconnected, the whole group must start over
- Every team member must get over the barbed wire without touching it

Debriefing:
- How would you describe the planning process during this activity? How did the planning time help or hinder your efforts?
- Were the silent leaders confident in the plan? How did you feel having to follow the plan without giving input or feedback?
- Were people confident in the plan once it was adopted? If not, how were those doubts addressed?
- How will we overcome the real life barbs that stand in the way of our group?

Metaphors:
- Crossing over to a new place

10 Story Bits

Goal: The group figures out the order of the story.

Equipment:
- Copy a short story, and cut it up into 10 bits (sections). Stories can have a special theme or message for your group.

Instruction and Rules:
- The each person, or small group, receives 1 bit of the story
- Participants are not allowed to show others or read their bit out loud. They can summarize the content of their bit to others though.
- The group has 15 minutes to organize their bits into a complete and properly sequenced story.

Debriefing:
- What difficulties did the team face?
- How did they systematically solve their challenge?
- What did they learn?

Solve Our Challenges

Goal: The group discusses and brainstorms how to overcome some real life challenges that face the group. This is a great way for team members to take ownership and pride in their group.

Equipment:
- White board and markers

Instruction and Rules:
- The group brainstorms to identify some of the challenges the group faces to be successful. When brainstorming, first solicit a quantity of ideas, and have a group leader write them on the white board.
- The group prioritizes the top challenges they faces, from the brainstorming list. Circle these challenges on the white board.
- After the group recognizes its most important challenges to overcome, the team brainstorms possible solutions. Again, write these brainstorming solutions on the white board.
- The group comes to a conclusion on how they will proceed on the selected challenges
- To facilitate the brainstorming and prioritizing discussions, ask open ended questions to have the group further explore their thoughts and ideas

Debriefing:
- What difficulties did the team face?
- How did they systematically solve their challenge?
- What did they learn?
- Where will they go from here?

Peak and Poor Performances

Goal: Participants better understand their mindset when they are performing at their best.

Equipment:
- Copy attached Peak and Poor Performances sheet for each person
- Pen for each person

Instructions and Rules:
- Give each person a pen and Peak and Poor Performances sheet
- Participants write words, phrases, and/or draw pictures that depict their thinking when they are performing poorly
- After, participants write words, phrases, and /or draw pictures that depict their thinking when they are performing their best (peak performance).
- Participants share and explain their sheets with the group
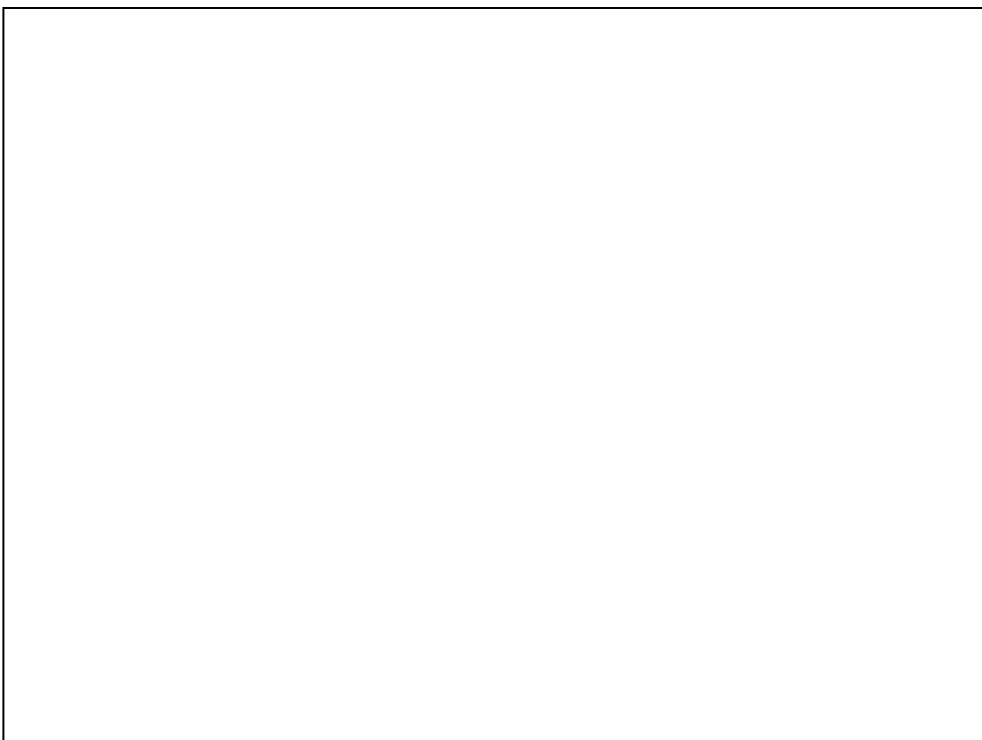
Debriefing:
- Who decides which thoughts dominate your thinking?
- What can teammates and leaders do to help participants think peak performance thoughts?

Peak and Poor Performances Worksheet

Peak Performance

Poor Performance

Go

Goal: Participants proceed without pressure in stressful situations or competitions.

Equipment:
- 3 green dot stickers per person (available at office supply stores)

Instructions and Rules:
- **Option**: Use this initiative following the *Peak or Poor Performance* initiative
- Introduce team to the mental traffic light analogy:
  - Red light means "stop", and is a mindset that a person is angry, frustrated, out of control, feeling helpless, or wanting to give up
  - Yellow light means "proceed with caution", and is a mindset that a person is hesitant, distracted, nervous, or unsure
  - Green light means "GO", and is a mindset that a person is confident, assertive, composed, focused, and in control
- Discuss specific group scenarios and responses using the three traffic light colors:
  - Scenario
  - What is the:
    1. Red light response
    2. Yellow light response
    3. Green light response
- Give each person on the team 3 green dots, and tell them to put them in places they will see before or during stressful situations or competitions

Debriefing:
- Discuss how the dot stickers will be a reminder to have a green light mental outlook
- What strategies can we use to create this same feeling without the green dots?

Portal to the Future

Goal: The group passes through to a new place. Good graduation exercise.

Equipment:
- 1 shock cord (Bungee) loop (the portal, 1 ½ ' in diameter)

Instructions and Rules:
- Group members stand in circle around the shock cord loop
- All players must stay in contact with the group
- As part of the group's graduation, all participants will pass through the "portal". Passing through the portal represents passing through to the next phase for the group.
- As each person passes through the portal, that person cannot touch the portal

Debriefing:
- Ask participants to talk about the development of the group.
- What do we want to leave behind?
- Have group describe and recap the journey?
- What are we bringing to our new place? Where are we now?
- So what do we do now?

Metaphors:
- Passing through to a new place for the group.

Additional Version

Re-Born

Goal: This activity is an opportunity to start over in a new place.

Equipment:
- 1 shock cord (Bungee) loop (the portal, 1 ½ ' in diameter)

Instructions and Rules:
- Group members stand in circle around the shock cord loop
- All players must stay in contact with the group
- All participants will pass through the "portal". Passing through the portal represents "being re-born into a new world".
- As each person passes through the portal, that person cannot touch the portal

Debriefing:
- Talk about the opportunity to start over and re-define our group.
- Where do we want to go?

Metaphors:
- The opportunity to start fresh and define who and what we want to become.

Other Graduation Options

Other graduation options include other crossing-type activities. The metaphors can be based on crossing to a new place. *Barbed Wire, Mystery Maze*, and *River of Distractions* are all possibilities to utilize the crossing element.

<div align="center">**Pass Positives**
Additional variation in **Secret Fan**</div>

Goal: Participants pass positive thoughts they feel about their fellow teammates possess.

Equipment:
- None
- Optional memento or Team Links™ to use in *Links to Success* initiative
- For *Secret Fan* option, one envelope per person, with slips of paper to equal the number of participants in the group in each envelope

Instructions and rules:
- The facilitator talks to the team about how each person on the team offers contributions to the success of the group
- Have one person in the group tell another designated person what they appreciate about them (skills and characteristics that contribute to the group). The facilitator designates which team members will present the "positives" to whom. The team can sit in circle, with each person presenting the positive statements to the person on the right…*or* seniors can present to juniors, and so on.
- **Option**: The person then presents them with a memento (Team Link™ if following this initiative with *Links to Success*)
- The receiving player then repeats the process to their designated teammate
- Continue the process until all participants have talked and received their positive statements
- **Secret Fan** variation: Another method for sharing positive statements about each group member. Pass envelopes with each person's name on it (slips of paper inside) and a pen around to all participants. Team members write a positive statement about the person who is named on the envelope on a slip of paper, fold in half, and put it in the envelope. Pass the envelopes around to all team members so they can write their thoughts about each member of the group.
- *These are great activities for a last session before peak performance time*

Debriefing:
- What do these comments mean to the each person on the team?

<u>Team Links to Success</u>

Goal: Demonstrate to participants that each of them is an important and valued part of the team and its success.

Equipment:
- One Team Link ™, karabiner, paper clip, or safety pin (links) for each person on the team

Instructions and Rules:
- Give each person a link
- Have each person attach their link with the other links from the group. Make a chain from the links. Complete a loop with the links.
- Show the team the linked chain and talk about the strength and unity the circle symbolizes. Remind the participants that they are only as strong as the weakest link. If someone breaks away from the group, the chain is broken and the unity is shattered.
- As a reminder of this metaphor, take the chain apart and give each player on the team one of the links. They can attach it to a shoe, bag, or key chain. It serves as a reminder that they are a member of this team, and the responsibilities that go along with it.
- Each time the team comes together for future team functions, have them re-link their chain. Have team members take back their link at the end of each team session. This will serve as a continual reminder of the "link" they bring to the team each day.

Debriefing:
- What do we need to bring to the group?
- What responsibilities do we have when we are not with the group?

<div align="center">**Pass the Baton**</div>

Goal: Group members who are leaving the team (graduating seniors on a team) pass "the baton" with special characteristics they would like to have the returning participants to carry on.

Equipment:
- Plastic batons (track), one per person leaving the team, can order or purchase through sports store or track supply catalogs
- Permanent markers

COMPLETE FIRST…Instructions for team members leaving the group (graduating seniors) meeting:
- Have this group of people think of characteristics they possess that they would like to pass on to returning teammates
- Have one baton per person
- Have participants write their characteristics on the plastic batons. Each baton will be presented to the returning participants.
- *Note: Have the seniors write on the batons in a small space. In the following year, you can use the same batons, and have those seniors add characteristics to pass on. The batons could then be passed on from generation to generation, creating a great tradition for your program.*

Instructions for Team Meeting:
- Have team sit in a circle where they can see each other's faces and body language
- The facilitator talks to team about the importance of passing team characteristics from senior members of the group to the returning participants, and about the trust and confidence that goes into passing a baton.
- Have the senior members present their batons to each returning participant. Have them talk about the characteristics presented on the batons.

Debriefing:
- What do these batons mean to the team?
- What commitment level do we have to take the baton and run with it.

References

Other Resources

Peak Volleyball
Peak Volleyball offers the book Bringing Teams Together, Emotion Debriefing Cards ™, and other team resources. Peak Volleyball conducts Team Retreat Camps for high school and middle school teams. www.PeakVolleyball.com or toll free (866) TEAM-FUN

Project Adventure
Project Adventure has many resources, including equipment, props, publications, seminars, Chiji cards, Pocket Processor cards, and more for team building programs and ropes courses. www.pa.org

Outward Bound
Outward Bound is an organization that produces team building and self discovery programs in the great outdoors. They also develop school-based curriculums. www.outwardbound.com

Jeff Janssen
Jeff Janssen offers books based on the premise of developing a championship team. Many resources are geared for sports teams. Jeff Janssen conducts team presentations and clinics for sports teams and businesses. www.JeffJanssen.com

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Mike Welch Bio

Mike Welch is the founder and director of Peak Volleyball and the Team Retreat Camps™. He has directed team building camps for high school teams across the nation from Florida to California, Alaska and many places in between.

As a college head volleyball coach, Mike Welch led NCAA Division I and II teams to 6 nationally ranked seasons, 5 conference championships, 4 NCAA Tournament appearances, and an NIVC appearance. He has coached collegiate players to 2 All-American, 17 All-Region, 43 All-Conference, and 84 Academic All-Conference honors. Mike has led teams to receiving AVCA Team Academic Awards, including the highest team GPA in the nation out of all NCAA Division I volleyball teams (1993), and two Top 3 finishes in NCAA Division II (1998 and 1999). Mike has also been Head Volleyball Coach of the USA Youth National Team twice, as well as a head coach at the US Olympic Festival, leading USA teams to 1 gold and 2 silver medals. Athletes Mike Welch has trained have gone on to become an Olympic Gold medalist, Olympic Best Scorer honoree, Olympic Silver Medalist, USA Olympic Team Captain, NCAA National Player-of-the-Year honorees, High School National Player-of-the-Year honorees, college All-Americans, and high school All-Americans.

As a successful author, Mike has written many articles for Volleyball Magazine, Coaching Volleyball, and Volleyball Monthly. He has written chapters in previously published books, and was on the Editorial Board for the AVCA's Coaching Volleyball journal.

Mike has presented at the AVCA National Convention three times, including on the topics of team building and team retreats.

Mike enjoys keeping active with coaching youth volleyball, mountain biking, and skiing. He and his wife Diane have two children Michaela and Riley.