

Activity: Islands and Bridges

Overview

In *Islands and Bridges*, participants recognize how shared resources, group mission, trust, and leadership are necessary components of effective teamwork. To be a successful group, members must look beyond the reflex of competition and find that collaboration is the strongest means for achievement. Two teams must work to cross a haunted swamp from different points in the swamp. Each has resources the other needs to be successful, and no one can be left behind. This activity is perfect for addressing issues of trust, collaboration, and perceived competition.

Set Up

Props

- 4 7-foot aluminum beams
- 16 Nubs (4 for each beam)
- 8 18"x18" rubber mats
- 2 12"x12" rubber mats
- 3 12-foot ropes
- 1 75-foot rope
- 1 MTC 1/4" hex screwdriver
- Blindfolds (optional)

1. Attach the nubs on both ends and both sides of each beam at different distances from the end of each beam (thus creating the "shortest" to "longest" beams for this activity). To do this, attach 2 nubs at a distance of 3 inches (the lengthwise measurement of one nub) from each end of the first beam (this will create the "longest" beam). The second beam has two nubs at 6 inches from each end, the third at 9 inches, and the fourth at 12 inches from each end of the beam (creating the "shortest" beam).
2. The general design is an island in the middle of a swamp; bridge pylons are laid so that three of the beams must be used to reach the island from each side and one beam must be used to reach the far shore. Create a rough circle with the 75-foot rope. On

each side, lay out mats (pylons) so that three beams are needed to travel from land (delineated by a 12-foot rope) to the island. In order for the "bridge pieces" (beams) to fit into the pylons (mats), the ends of beams must touch and the nubs must be fully on the mat.

3. On one side, set up the mats using the two shorter beams using the longest beam as the last stretch before reaching the island. Leave the two shorter beams on the edge of the swamp on this side. On the other side of the island, set up mats using the two longest beams so the group can use just these two beams to reach the island. Leave the longer beams on this side of the swamp.
4. Finally, set up two mats which lead from the island to the mainland. These mats require the shortest beam to reach the mainland.

For a detailed view of the setup, refer to the pictures on this page.

Instructions

The team is divided into two groups. They come to this activity at the same time, each one beginning on opposite sides of the swamp. They are each given instructions separately, but they have the same goal. The team needs to get to the mainland area. They can not step into the swamp; they must create a bridge in order to cross. They have two beams as resources. They must first get to the island and from there get to the mainland.

The following rules apply:

- Beams must be on edge (1 1/2-inch side up).
- Mats (pylons) may not be moved.
- Beam ends **must touch** on the mats to extend the bridge.
- Nubs must also be completely resting on the mats to extend the bridge.
- The only things that will support the weighted beams are the pylons (the land is too soft at the edge of the

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- swamp).
- Team members must be in physical contact with one another while crossing, and they must all cross together.
 - If a member of the team falls/steps off or disconnects from the team, consequences happen. At the discretion of the facilitator, the team must start over, someone gets blindfolded, loses the ability to speak, or any other creative challenge set by the facilitator.
 - Stepping on the pylons is optional (facilitator's choice).

The pylons lie just below the surface of the water, which makes them risky platforms. As an added challenge, tell your group that they may not step on the pylons.

Sample Story Line

You have been on a long journey and are heading back toward the mainland. You arrive at the edge of a murky swamp filled with very territorial, nasty beasties who find human flesh extremely tasty. In addition, nasty bugs inhabit the swamp area. Although they spend most of their time on the water's surface, when disturbed they fly up and bite causing temporary but horrendous hardships. Fortunately, someone has been here and left bridge pylons securely built in the swamp which will enable the team to construct a bridge that can be used to get to the island and then to the mainland. The land around the water's edge is very soft, so the bridge pieces must rest on the pylons in order to support your weight. In order for the bridge to be secure, the nubs on the bridge pieces must sit securely on the pylons and the bridge ends must touch on the pylons. For safety, of course, the team decides to cross together, always remaining in physical contact.

Facilitator: At this point, follow the instructions as presented.

Safety

Safety is critical in every activity you do. *Islands and Bridges* requires a critical eye toward safety because of

the physical nature of the activity. At any point during the activity, participants can ask for more support to ensure a safe experience. Once you address these concerns, share the following safety guidelines with the group.

1. If you think you are going to fall, step off.
2. Blindfolded participants need to be spotted at all times. Ask the group to "spot" the beams when passing them, being careful to keep them below the shoulders.

Reflection

This activity often raises issues around fairness ("We were set up to fail!" or "We don't have the right resources to succeed and they do!") and competition ("Why should we share with you!" or "Ha! Ha! We're ahead!"). Such conflict arises when individuals and departments maintain a small picture vision of the goals rather than the big picture, the whole organization's vision. In this activity, both teams must work together. One team needs the long beam from the other in order to cross to the island. But the other team needs the short beam in order to get from the island to the mainland. If they work together, they both succeed; if they don't, neither team can succeed. In addition, there are all the issues related to supporting one another on the beam, loyalty to your small team vs. the big team, trust, leadership, communication, problem solving, and personality/perception.

Discover

- What was your initial experience and how did it change over the course of the event?
- What factors were important in resolving the conflicts related to resources and cooperation?
- What was absolutely essential to the success of each team?
- What factors led to "competitive thinking" and what factors supported "cooperative/systems thinking"?
- What leadership skills surfaced that supported overall success and movement through conflict?

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Connect

- How did the others affect your team's results and what does this have to do with conflict resolution?
- How did you enroll the other team? What ways did you build rapport and move beyond conflict?
- How does "loyalty" to your group or group identification play into conflict? What builds loyalty and group identification? How do you transfer that to the larger group/organization?
- Think of a similar situation at work, school, or home where two groups seem to be competing for limited resources (one where competition is not the purpose). What factors play into competition and what factors support cooperation?

Create

- How can you apply what you learned during this exercise? What specifically will you do?