

Activity: River of Relations

Overview

River of Relations challenges participants to think critically about conflict, and recognize that there are several solutions to any challenge. The group must cross an area using only the props provided, and discuss conflict along the way. The true value of this activity unfolds in the end, when participants share their insight with one another.

Set Up

Props

- 2 12-foot ropes
- 1 12"x12" mat for each participant
- 1 18"x18" mat for every 2–3 participants, with no less than 4 and no more than 7 in play at any given time.

Create the play area by laying the two 12-foot ropes on the ground about 30–40 feet apart. This will mark the banks of the "river."

Next, space the 18"x18" mats out in zigzag formation from one end of the river to the other. Place the remaining 12"x12" mats on the ground outside of the play area.

Instructions

1. Pass out 2–4 index cards and a writing utensil to each participant. Ask each participant to write "Conflict" at the top of two of the cards. Instruct participants to write a conflict they are facing, or one they know about, on each "conflict" card.
2. On their remaining two cards, ask participants to write "Solution" across the top and then write one solution they could apply to each conflict they have identified.
3. Participants select 4–7 "general" challenge/problem categories so each conflict on their cards will fit in a general category (e.g., coming to consensus, personnel issue, control issue, insufficient information, and

insufficient resources/time). The individual conflict cards are each sorted in piles according to the general challenge in which they are likely to arise (if more than one option is available, choose one). The cards are then placed on the 18"x18" mats, each one representing the general challenge/problem.

4. Participants get a 12"x12" mat which represents their solution(s). The team must cross the river using their solutions as stepping-stones, while remaining in physical contact with one another. The conflict on each island must be resolved by the team using the solutions that are appropriate for the conflict. They must all agree that the solution actually is a solution for the general category they are approaching, and that the specific solution used to step onto the island, will actually resolve (or move toward resolution of) the conflict.
5. Before the group begins, be sure to point out the following rules:
 - a. Solutions may be used more than once.
 - b. If you fall into the River of Relations, you will be swept downstream. Your team will have to return to rescue you before they can continue. (There is a prevailing current that always takes you back to the original shoreline!)
 - c. If you let go of a solution (mat), it will be swept downstream (optional).
 - d. You must have physical contact with your team
 - e. You must go to each island (optional).

Sample Story Line

You have come upon the River of Relations and must reach the other side. There are four islands that you can use to cross the river (good news), but each island holds "spirit energy" that creates conflict and discord the moment you set foot on it (bad news). In order to keep bedlam and anarchy from arising on your team, you must subdue the spirit energies immediately upon stepping onto the island. Fortunately, you have conflict solutions with you. If you use them appropriately, they will subdue the spirit energy on the island long enough

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for you to pass. The solutions must be specific for each island's conflict. (If you want to make sure they go to all four islands, have them collect something of value at each island.)

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

Safety

For this activity to be played safely, ask the participants to avoid jumping, leaping, running, or other unsafe movement. Tape may be used to keep the islands and stepping-stones from slipping.

Variations

Conflict cards and solution cards can be read in order, shuffled independently and read for different conflicts, or each conflict read, followed by all the solutions.

Reflection

Solutions for one conflict or challenge can often be applied over and over again. In fact, the more we use a conflict management skill, the more likely it is to become second nature to us. Creative solutions can be used in more than one situation. Sharing solutions can be valuable, but not all solutions will work in every

situation. A key component is to ask others for their solutions and be willing to "step into" them in order to move closer to resolution. Explore some of the following questions in your debrief:

Discover

- What did you discover about the nature of conflict?
- What did you discover about your solutions?
- What did the team do to be successful? Could you have done this alone? How did the team make it easier?

Connect

- What did you discover about yourself in relation to solutions?
- What qualities were needed from you and other team members?
- Were there solutions that needed tweaking in order to make them work?
- What did you have to do in order to resolve each conflict on the islands?

Create

- How will you apply the learning from this exercise in other areas of your life?
- Who are some of the key people in your life that you need to connect with in order to move through some of life's challenges?
- What is one key point you wish to focus on related to working through conflict?