

ACID RIVER EXERCISE

Objective:

To emphasize the responsibility in teamwork and the connections everyone plays in accomplishing the group's goals.

To allow for observation of team interaction while exploring problem solving, communication skills, cooperation, planning, roles and expectations.

Group Size:

Groups of 12-24

Materials:

Carpet Squares (1 tile for every 2 people)
4 lengths of rope

Instructions:

1. Divide space into 3 sections of river (you can do two sections, and reuse one). Make the river wide enough to be a challenge for the group to get from one side to the other (look at about 15 – 25 ft.) Mark the river with rope.
2. Distribute the carpet squares – 1 tile for every 2 people.
3. Explain to the group that the river is acid and will eat up everything that touches it, except for the magic tiles. However, **the magic tiles must be touched at all times they are in the river.** If the tile is not touched, no matter for how brief of a moment, it is lost, swept away in the current.
4. Everyone must get over to the other side of the river. If using two sections of river, no one can cross the next branch of the river until everyone is over the previous branch. If any one touches the river, or falls (a foot half on the tile and touching river, hands in, whatever), everyone must go back and start again.
5. No scooting or sliding on the squares. This can be a safety issue and it emphasizes individual work versus teamwork.
6. Once the group has started the process, your role is to take carpet squares that are “swept away by the current” and to watch for safety issues.
7. The facilitator can take away (or give) carpet squares arbitrarily.

Processing Questions: Instruct participants to speak from their own experience.

1. What happened during the process? What worked? What didn't or what hindered the process?
2. Was leadership demonstrated during the process? How so? What did you observe?
3. What were the individual roles people played? Were members comfortable with their roles?
4. Who knew what the process for crossing was? Who didn't? How did you communicate the plans to group members?
5. What might the different aspects of the exercise represent in your organization: the carpet squares, the river, the loss of tiles, the facilitator, etc?

Variations:

1. The tiles can only go forward. They cannot move backwards.
2. No one can finish until everyone has left the "bank" of the river.
3. You can choose to add challenges like muting individuals, using only 1 arm, eyes closed/blindfolded, no one can talk.
4. You can give them an object that they need to carry with them to safety and discuss what that might represent.
5. You can create situations for them to draw from that are connected directly to their organization; e.g. their budget has been cut - lose ½ of their tiles, your last three meetings have been unproductive and full of inside jokes - lose 1 person, you've just come back from a retreat where you set goals for the year and did teambuilding with the group members - add a tile.