

Progressive Group Juggling

Focus: Working together,

Materials: Soft, throwable items (stuffed animals, wadded up pieces of paper work fine)

Have 3 soft throwables for each group of five or more

Sequence: Problem Solving

Suggested Procedure: Basic Juggle

1. Divide the large group up into smaller groups of at least five people. The groups do not all need to be the same size, so if there are natural groups who do similar work or are in the same department, try to keep them together.
2. Have each group stand together in a circle and ask them to count off so that each person has a number. If there are 8 people in the group, they would start with #1 and go to #8.
3. Once everyone has counted off, they then mix up (stay in their small group!), so that they are not standing next to the people they were standing next to before.
4. Person #1 then picks up a soft item and throws it to #2, who throws it to #3, etc. When the last person gets the item, she or he throws it back to #1. In this way, the group has created a pattern and they always throw to the same person.
5. Give the small groups a chance to practice this, and add in the other two items.

Progressive Variation

6. Decide who, in the large group, has the next birthday. The small group that contains this person is designated as group A.
7. Have everyone put down their items except #1 in group A.
8. Group A goes through their sequence. When the item gets to the last person in group A, he or she throws it to the #1 person in the next group (group B).
9. Group B goes through their sequence, and passes it off to the next group (Group C), and so on, until the item returns to #1 in group A.
10. Another level is to have each group pick up their 3 items, and start their juggle at the same time, passing the items off to the next group. When their items are returned, they hold on to them.
11. Try asking people to set a goal to see how long they think it will take them to accomplish this task.

Sample Processing Questions

- What was the difference between doing the juggle in the small group and doing the same juggle in the large group?
- How did you communicate with your group members in the small and large group? Did it change?
- Did you find yourself interfering with others' juggles, or others interfering with yours? What do you think caused that to occur?
- When you are doing your job, how does it fit into the big picture at your workplace? How does your small group relate to each other and to the other small groups that make up your workplace?
- Do you have systems in place to facilitate communication, sharing, conflict, etc.? If so, what are they? If not, what could they be?
- What strategies did you use during the progressive juggle?

Facilitation Notes

This activity is all about what it means to work in a team, and to work in the context of a larger system. Generally the dynamics in the small group are very different from the large group. People get comfortable with their roles of throwing to the same person and it actually is easy because people are standing close together. Many times verbal communication isn't even necessary to get things moving from one person to the other.

When the large group convenes, though, getting the job done takes more effort, more focus, and a different style of communication. Items collide in midair (and can be labeled as conflict, or conflicting goals). There are many more distractions ("The administrator asked me to do a special project..." or

there's a crisis to attend to...) so that people either have to raise their voices to get their co-worker's attention, or their co-workers must be very focused to ignore the distractions ("Where did all those emails go that you sent me? I guess I haven't checked my email all day...").

The metaphors are endless. Allow people to make the connections from their own work experience. Simply raise the questions.