

POPSICLE STICKS

& Flying Objects

by Kirk Weisler

This month's activity is a great way to bring closure to a day of training, work with a large new hire group, wrap-up the completion of a project, or to simply just have some creative fun while building your team.

The materials you'll need are simple, not cost prohibitive or intriguing to think about. Popsicle sticks, masking tape, and some markers... preferably felt tip. A fun way to get the Popsicle sticks for your team is to have them eat three Popsicles each. While fun for everyone, this may be a sticky way to get the same Popsicle sticks that you could pick up at most any craft store for around \$2. It is cheaper to buy 200 Popsicle sticks than to buy 24 Popsicles.

Group Size... hmmm... how many... I'd say a few to unlimited. I like to break larger groups into smaller units of six to eight, but any number will work.

Presentable Concepts

Teamwork, cooperation, creativity, synergy, and more. I personally use it as a great closure activity at the end of the day or the end of a training session.

The Challenge

...is for groups of about 8 participants to make a flying object using only two of their three Popsicle sticks and 12 inches of masking tape. Save the third Popsicle stick for the closing activity. The goal is for this object to fly as far as possible, or as I like to say, "You'll have an opportunity to throw that sucker for a gold medal." Give them X amount of minutes to build/create their flying vessel. I find ten minutes is sufficient.

After the groups have completed the building of their flying object, have them line up behind a clearly defined line, and throw their creation individually. Of course, each throw should be accompanied by all of the cheering and hoopla that would be present at the launch of such a grand and glorious new vessel. I usually accomplish this

by asking the group to christen their creation with a name and to let it fly after a team cheer, thus also inspiring a bit of good natured competition.

Your groups will build various creative and elaborate crafts, with some groups taking great pride in their workmanship, others appearing just happy to be there. Let the groups present their design to the entire group before throwing it as far as they can. Distances will vary. I sometimes mandate that the person who throws the craft be the one who was least dominate in the building phase. (If you set up this criteria before the building begins, you open the door for a resource allocation discussion.) These noble crafts will soar 10 to 40 ft. and will, depending on the surface, most likely survive the landing.

TICKS

jects

Typical Presentation, Storyline or Metaphor

It is not enough to simply experience life and all it holds. We need to take what we have learned and let it make us soar. Each of the challenges, learnings or experiences we have shared today have added to what you can do. Let's take these pieces of our experiences, and let them fly!

Important Points

Make sure that participants take pride in the workmanship of their creation. Emphasize that it is a reflection of themselves. Invite the person that had the least contact with the building phase to be the thrower.

To Close the Activity

After seeing how far each of the flying objects has gone, ask each participant to take a writing tool and write a single word or phrase on their remaining Popsicle stick, expressing how they feel about some aspect of the training that day. After each team member has done this, you are ready for the Power Close.

At this point, I usually ask someone to read what is written on their Popsicle stick and





coming closer together and sharing our hopes, dreams and learnings with each other. The closer we become, the greater the trust and the greater the performance.”

Additional questions may be:

- ▶ What was your favorite part of this activity and why?
- ▶ What was the most valuable part of this activity for you personally and why?

Optional Spin on the Activity

To make this a closure or goal-setting activity, give the groups two additional Popsicle sticks and some markers and have them write on their sticks some of the things they've learned from their time in the program, and some personal goals they've set because of the training... etc., etc. (For a lighter session, have them write one or two words describing their experience.) Collect the extra sticks from your groups until you have at least 12. The activity then proceeds as before with the groups building, presenting and throwing their crafts. However, before you close, you read your collection of sticks to the entire group. You will find your reading closely reflects the thoughts of everyone and brings a lot of memories of your time together to the surface, creating a nice feeling for the group. Explain that these thoughts, feelings, goals and memories are what we want to take with us from this time together. Then, wrap the sticks together securely into a tight brick and throw it.

have him/her throw it as far as he/she possibly can. Typically, it doesn't go very far. I then ask the thrower to repeat this pattern with two taped together... again, it doesn't go far. After this, I collect the remaining sticks from all the participants, and after reading what has been written on each of the sticks... tape them together in one big brick. (You'll want to have at least 12 in this bundle.) Then, standing at the line, I throw this tightly wrapped bundle as far as I can. My experience is that this throw always surpasses all other throws. This gives the group a great foundation for discussion relating to how performance is greatly enhanced when a group comes together, much more so than when working alone. (We can relate this to the above mentioned concepts as well as to overcoming problems and how. By sticking closely together we can accelerate our outcomes and performance... and have fun doing it!)

Questions you might ask to help facilitate discussion.

- ▶ What was the difference between throwing one stick, two sticks, and the bundle of twelve?
- ▶ What similarities do you see between that and situations you encounter at work or in life?
- ▶ What symbolism represented in the bundle of sticks, and the words on them, might we do well to remember? The answer you are looking for might be something along the lines of, "Just like the sticks you threw the greatest distance, we might be able to have greater performance by



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Hopefully, it'll sail far beyond theirs and you can further illustrate how coming together as a group with a sharing of feelings, support, ideas, trust, etc. can really help everyone's future...

I originally wrote this activity years ago for my dear friend Dr. Jim Cain. It can found on page 148 of his award winning book *Teamwork & Teamplay*, a wonderful resource for the activity minded manager.



Kirk Weisler is the President and Founder of *Team Dynamics Inc.*, a leadership development laboratory dedicated to helping people help themselves and their organizations through the creation of sensory rich and emotionally laden experiences that accelerate relationships, learning and positive team behaviors. Kirk recently accepted a position as Chief Morale Officer of the Help Desk Institute where he will be helping HDI provide culture and team building expertise and resources to members.

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