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The Marshmallow Challenge

Connie I. Reimers-Hild

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, creimers2@unl.edu

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The Marshmallow Challenge

Introduction:

I discovered the Marshmallow Challenge when taking an online course through Stanford called, "A Crash Course in Creativity" with Dr. Tina Seelig (<http://venture-lab.org/creativity>).

The exercise has been used with groups of all ages from around the world by Tom Wujec, who Seelig calls an, "award-winning designer and innovator" (p. 144).

How do you use the Marshmallow Challenge? I use it in a number of different ways:

1. As an icebreaker
2. As a teambuilding exercise
3. To stimulate creativity and innovation
4. As an experiential exercise that adds FUN to learning!

Seelig and I have the same thoughts on the importance of fun when leaning and building teamwork. She sums it up wonderfully:

In fact, play is an important variable for successful creative teams. Simply put, when you play, you are having fun. When you have fun, you feel better about yourself and your work. And when you feel better, you are much more creative and deliver more. (pp. 144-145)

My directions:

We created Marshmallow Challenge kits at Kimmel. Each kit has the directions taped on the top (see page 3) and contains all the essential ingredients for each participating team: A Scissors, 20 sticks of Spaghetti, one yard of string, one yard of masking tape, and one marshmallow.

First, I divide groups into teams. Teams of 4-6 work well. Each group appoints one person to get their teams' kit.

Once teams have their kits, I usually give them about 10 minutes to build their towers (the book recommends 18 minutes--I vary this slightly depending on the amount of time I have with the group). After the exercise, I use a couple of open-ended coaching questions to bring out their observations.

Example coaching prompts include:

- 1) What did you notice about your team?
- 2) What did you notice about yourself?
- 3) What happened during this exercise?

This activity is fun, meaningful and flexible. It builds camaraderie and opens up communication but also can be used to discuss anything from personality differences to the benefits of teamwork and important aspects of innovation (such as collaboration and diversity). The Marshmallow Challenge also provides a space for hands-on learning focused on the learners.

The point of the exercise is not to build the tallest tower (get the thinnest spaghetti so it breaks often) but to learn about the power of leading ourselves as individuals and others so we can all improve our well being, sense of purpose and success (however we choose to define it).

Questions? Please contact me, Connie Reimers-Hild, PhD, CPC, via email (connie.reimers-hild@unl.edu) or our blog (KimmelTV.org). Also, let me know how you use it (I am always looking for new ideas) and how well it works for you! We can all learn from one another!!

Reference:

Seelig, T. (2012). *inGenius: A crash course on creativity*. New York: HarperCollins.



The Challenge: Build the tallest freestanding structure possible using 20 Sticks of Spaghetti, one yard of string, one yard of masking tape, and one marshmallow.

The Caveat: The marshmallow must be on top!

Exercise by: Tom Wujec, award-winning designer and innovator.

As presented in the book, *inGenius*, by Dr. Tina Seelig