The Great Rope Exercise

Purpose

The purpose of The Great Rope Exercise is to create an atmosphere where cooperation and communication take the center stage. By working together, each member of the team will learn what they can do better, and may also be reminded of what they already do well. It’s an ideal exercise which includes everyone and doesn’t exclude any one individual as the problem. Additionally, it’s a fun thing to do, and although fun is not the key thing a classroom community should strive for – after all, work has to get done! – there is definitely something to be said for creating a scenario where people feel relaxed and motivated enough to always try their best. Additionally, you’ll get to know each other MUCH better.

Equipment

That’s what’s so great about this exercise – all you’ll need is a single piece of rope that’s as much as 50 feet long. The rope shouldn’t be too much smaller than this, as the whole point is to have enough rope that multiple people can work with it simultaneously. (You can add blindfolds to your list for the “extensions” to the activity).

How it works

Begin by instructing the team to pick up the rope. Ensure
everyone does so, as this exercise relies on every person working at the same time.

Now it’s time to set a basic rule which must be adhered to at all times, and it is this: everyone is allowed to move their hands along the rope, in any direction, however they please. But what they must not do at any time is change places. The aim is for the hands to never leave the rope, so keep an eye on the team at all times!

And here’s where things get interesting and the team-building starts. The aim of the game is for the team to form a star on the floor in just 10 minutes. Sound easy? Well, it’s not that easy, as this has to be a five-pointed star. To make things even more challenging, the star should be as neat as possible with no excess rope left over.

**Extensions** can be to add members of the team who cannot see (hence the blindfolds) and members of the team (perhaps the usual class-clown or loudest member) who cannot talk.

**Get the most out of this by**

Allowing the team to formulate their own version of the star. The aim is to create a five-pointed star, but how the team achieves this will differ depending on the group and, possibly, the number of team members involved in the exercise. It doesn’t matter how big the star is or if the rope doubles up in places; likewise, it also doesn’t matter how thick the rope is. The key thing is to step back and allow the team to make their own decisions. And remember, the more mistakes they make, the more they will learn!
Debriefing

Basic in idea, this exercise is a great one for revealing the individual strengths of the team. Not only does it highlight who is listening and who is not, but it also puts everyone in the same boat, which means team members are more likely to see why a certain form of approach does or does not work. Disagreements may well happen, but these are usually handled quickly, and people find themselves focusing most on the task in hand, rather than arguing.

Another thing to remember is that the flexibility of the rope will play a large part in this activity. The more flexible the better, although if you want to increase the difficulty level then you could introduce a more difficult to use rope and see how that affects the group.

The beauty of this exercise, of course, is its many variations. After trying it out once or twice, blindfolds can be used or you may wish to try and form a more complex shape that takes a bit more thinking and time. Additionally, you might ask the team to perform the activity without speaking, which will mean every person needs to adapt to a new way of doing things: a problem-solving attitude that all students need for a lifetime.

Adapted from: http://www.fradleycroft-events.co.uk/blog/team-building-games/the-great-rope-exercise/