

LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP - Module 3

Keeping Your Team Motivated and Focused



Marty M. Fahncke: Welcome everybody to Keeping Your Team Members Motivated and Focused, a presentation brought to you by The Business Source. My name is Marty M. Fahncke. I'll be your host today and today we are featuring Brian Cole Miller.

If you want to help make your team more productive Brian Cole Miller belongs at the top of your list. Brian was at the top of the list for Visa when they were looking for a premier team building person for their business strategy program. Companies such as the KESS Store and Nationwide Insurance depend on Brian's unique insights and strategies for building their teams.

Brian is in high demand because his approach is fast, simple, practical, and delivers great results. This approach is one of the main reasons why his book [Quick Team Building Activities for Busy Managers](#) is a huge best seller and is consistently one of the top books on teams on www.Amazon.com.

Personally I think people resonate Brian's message because he provides realistic solutions to leaders that need to get the job done and done quickly. Today he is going to share some of those solutions with our Business Source listeners. Brian, welcome. Thank you for joining us.

Brian Cole Miller: Thank you.

Marty: We are really excited to have you with us today. In the interest of time and making sure that listeners get the maximum amount of information in the shortest amount of time, I'm going to get right to the questions if you don't mind.

Brian: Sure.

Marty: Fantastic. First of all, one of the biggest problems leaders face today is in motivating their team. We've surveyed our listeners and they have told us that's their biggest issue. What are the most important things we need to do to really get our teams motivated and engaged?

Brian: I hear that a lot, Marty, when I work with clients and when I hear that, I generally divide that question into two. I look at both what I call motivation and what I also call incentive.

Oftentimes when people say, "Give me some tips on how to motivate people," what they're really looking for is, "How can I incent them? What kind of prizes can I dangle in front of them? What kind of benefits or

financial rewards should I be hanging in front of them to get them moving?" I'm not saying those are bad or wrong. Actually they are quite good but it's just that that's not the whole picture when you look at motivating people.

How I generally answer that question is there are two ways to go about it. One is to truly motivate them. To motivate them what I think needs to happen is people need to be on board with where you're going. They need to have bought into the mission for the organization, the purpose of the organization.

They need to buy into that. More specifically they need to buy into the goals that are being presented for them whether they be team goals or individual goals. It doesn't matter. They need to be really committed to those and feel they are part of that.

In order for that to happen they need basic pieces of information. One, they need to know exactly what those goals are. They need to know what's expected of them.

The difficulty I see here, Marty, is that oftentimes managers think that it is understood. It's kind of a no-brainer. It's obvious. It should be obvious to anybody that these are the goals or they look at someone and they go, "You know he's a customer service rep. How can he not get what customer service looks like? It should be obvious."

[Laughter]

You know what? It's not always obvious to everybody. The managers usually err in this part by not being quite clear enough. So that's part number one. The employee needs to really understand what is expected of him or her to be successful.

Second piece of that is they need to understand how what is expected of them hooks back to the organizational goals. "It's fine that I work here in the HR department and I'm helping people with benefits but how is that helping my organization provide the best tires on the road for their vehicle?" or, "How is what I'm doing here in HR helping my organization provide people with the healthcare insurance they need to feel comfortable and confident that they're going to be taken care of in times of crisis?" That's the link that oftentimes managers also miss, so those pieces need to be there.

The third part is the incentive and that is the employee needs to



know what's in it for him or her to accomplish those goals. Again, here is where managers sometimes err in terms of either assuming that they get it, or assuming that money is the end-all, be-all.

They get to keep their job, ha, ha, ha. They get a paycheck at the end of the week and they think that should be enough. Usually that's not enough. Unless people are really, really struggling for money I find that money is not the end-all, be-all motivator for most people.

When I'm in a room of people and they're talking about this stuff, oftentimes what I'll say is, "Raise your hand if right now, given your skills and your experience you could leave the organization you're at right now and go to another job and get paid more money." Invariably 95% of the room raises their hand.

Marty: Wow.

Brian: To me that says, "It ain't about money." It's about other things and other things drive people. When you think about what you're doing and why you're not doing something that could get you more money. It's because you realize money is not the end-all, be-all. I'll give you an example if you want me to give you one.

Marty: Please.

Brian: Okay, let me give you an example. Let's say you have a call center. You have people who are doing nothing but taking calls from people.

From a business standpoint you're looking at this and thinking, "Okay, right now our people are taking calls at the average rate of 8.1 calls per hour. In order to be competitive, in order to keep our costs low, in order to compete with the company down the street that's also doing call center work, we need to get our people up to 8.4." Here is the legitimate business dilemma you have.

You come to your people and you tell them, "Here is what we need you to do." You can be really specific about that goal so they understand it. You've accomplished part one of what I'm saying needs to be happening.

You also can tie that back to the business goals and show what the competition is doing, how the costs are affected, how this affects your bottom line, sales, all of that kind of stuff. People understand,



“Okay, I understand the goal is 8.4. I also understand how this helps us, as a business, to improve, to grow, to stay, to survive, or whatever.”

Then we get down to the employees “What’s in it for me?” question. Here is where the manager really has to shine as a manager. The more you know your people, the more effective you can be.

I’m going to give you an oversimplified example just so that it’s real clear what I’m going for and you don’t have to be in the call center business to understand it. Let’s say you have three people you’re sitting down with and you want them to understand this. You go through the first part, “Here is the goal 8.4. Here is the second part – it links back to our business this way....”

Then you turn to person one, who you know in your heart is the most competitive person on the planet. She does nothing but compete with everyone. She competes with her coworkers. She competes with her husband. She competes with everybody on the planet. She is really competitive and likes to win.

For her you might say, “You know what Alice, you get that 8.4 and you help us get the 8.4 and you know we’re going to beat the company down the street that your best friend works for and won’t that feel good?” You’ve hooked into her sense of competition and wanting to win, in a way that gets her more motivated.

Turn to the next person who really doesn’t care about competition. He is all about himself. You say to him, “Mario, if you get that 8.4 your name is going to go on this board here in front of the whole department showing that you got it. You know what? The second week you get it we put your name in bigger letters. The third week you get it we’ll put an eight by ten glossy of you and the fourth week we put signs and the lights around it,” and whatever. You just go on and on with that.

The third person sitting there listening to this is folding her hands and rolling her eyes and you know she’s not about that stuff at all. She is about helping people. She is in the call center because she loves to help people.

You turn to her and you say, “You know, Janice, I understand you’re all about helping people and you know what? If you move your average calls from 8.1 up to 8.4 that means you’ll actually be



able to help an extra 5 to 7 people per week. Won't that feel good to be able to help that many more people each week?"

Each person needs a little bit different motivator in order to hook into the goals.

Marty: That's a great example, Brian, but how do you know? Do people always know what motivates them? Is it that easy to just ask them and understand it that quickly?

Brian: You have a couple of questions there, Marty. No, people don't always know what motivates them. To the other part, yes it is easy just to ask them. Too often what managers assume is, "What motivates me motivates everybody else."

I love to travel. If you were going to put some kind of a sales contest together or some kind of a motivation program to get me to improve my performance or to ratchet up or something, promise me a trip to Puerto Rico and I am so on board. In fact, the trip to Puerto Rico would be more incentive to me personally than the \$3,000 that you spend on that trip to Puerto Rico. I would rather have the trip than the money.

As a manager I would err by saying, "Oh, God. We'll have a trip to Hawaii. The winner gets a trip to Hawaii. We're going to have a trip to New York City and they get to go see shows." That gets me excited and so I'm assuming everyone else is going to get that excited.

Then some people are like, "No. I have kids. I can't leave them. I don't want to leave them. I don't want to travel. I would rather have the money. I would rather have a promotion. I would rather a parking spot closer to the door so I don't have to walk so darned far when it's cold and snowy out."

Yet most people can get that if you just ask them. Not everybody is going to give you the answer and so part of that is around having a good relationship with your people so that "A:" they'll be forthright and forthcoming with you and do that.

The other part is, the more you know people the more you realize, "You know, I don't really need to ask her. I know what she's all about. She seems always to be getting tickled when we talk about something where there is a winning or a losing. She is really competitive."



Marty: The three steps you talked about were: one, to get buy in on the goals, two, is to make sure that you're clearly communicating the goals and three, is to identify what's in it for them so that you can make sure that you motivate each individual person with what they want to be motivated by.

Is that a good summary?

Brian: It's a great summary, Marty.

Marty: Let's move on to question number two. One of the most powerful ways you deliver team building results is through your famous exercises. I spent some time reviewing those and I'm really excited to talk more about them.

What I like about them is that they take less than 15 minutes to do and the leader doesn't need any special skills or training so they're kind of idiot proof. What are the steps for running an activity successfully and what are the biggest problems we can face while doing the team building activities?

Brian: Great question, Marty, and the reason I said it is because quite often people pick up books like mine and flip right to the exercises. They go, "Oh, that looks fun. Let's do that one." They try to do it and when it falls flat they blame the book or they blame, even worse, the concept of team building activities.

Let me step back first and just give you a couple of seconds about how I feel about team building activities. A lot of people look at them and see them as "just games" or "just fun" and there is a place for fun at work.

I firmly believe that but I'll be the first to say I don't want to do the team building activity if all it is fun. If that's the only objective is to have fun, hell, bring out Monopoly and play a board game or something. You're going to get that much from it.

Team building activities are important learning tools because what they do is they help people experience things. People usually learn deeper when they experience something rather than when they just read it or hear it. I can explain to you the importance of being clear in directions and how you need to be succinct when you're giving directions to a worker on how to perform a task.



I can explain till I'm blue in the face but when you sit down and you experience what it's like to get real clear directions, or when you experience what it's like to get really poor directions, the learning is usually much, much deeper and you take it more to heart. That's the value of the team building activities.

They're not just for fun although most of the time they are a blast. That's like an added benefit but the real purpose is to have some kind of a learning experience. I say that because that's the first step in the team building exercise process, at least the way I've laid it out. Step one is to be very clear and definitive about what the goal is for the activity.

Most times unfortunately people will look at this and say, "You know I have a staff meeting coming up. I want to loosen people up and make them have fun. We're going to be talking about communication so we should probably have an activity that relates to communication." Then they just pick one that looks fun.

Again, fun is great. Even greater is an activity that is very focused on what the focus of the experience activity they're going to learn or get out of the activity. That's the first step.

The second step once you have the goal in mind is to prepare for the activity. You really need to understand the activity, especially if you're getting it from a book or if you're getting it from someone who said, "Oh, I did this really good activity at one of my staff meetings and this is how it went."

You need to review the activity several times and get the materials together. Make sure that they all work. If you're going to use balloons make sure that they actually blow up and have a couple of extras, that kind of stuff.

Oftentimes you'll need to practice or at least think through how you're going to explain the activity so that it comes out in a way that makes sense to the people that are going to be performing the activity so they know what the rules are and so they know how it works.

One of the most frustrating things for people is to start an activity and then to have a facilitator halfway through say, "Oh, wait! Oh, wait! I forgot. There is one more rule."

[Laughter]



“You have to put your hand behind your back.” It frustrates people and makes them really resentful of the process. If they’re resentful of the process they’re not going to learn a whole lot from the activity. So make sure that you’re prepared.

The next step then is to explain the activity to the people when you’re actually in the room. Set the mood. Describe the activity. If you can, it would be great if you could explain why you’re doing the activity. A lot of people resist doing activities for the very reason that they don’t see a whole lot of value in them.

Traditionally people who have been through these team building exercises or workshops that have team building activities, to them it often feels like fun and games. If you can, be really specific in the introduction. Say, “We’re going to do this activity and the reason we’re doing this one is because it’s really going to drive home the point of blah, blah, blah,”

People are then much more likely to sit up and go, “Oh, Okay. There is a purpose here. I’ll play along for a little bit. I’ll trust you in that maybe there is a payoff here at the end.”

Marty: When you’re explaining activities you explain the why and not just the how.

Brian: Correct. I would start off by explaining, “This is the activity. This is why we’re doing the activity. Now let me tell you how we’re going to do it.”

Once you’ve explained why, they’re more likely to buy into, “Okay, maybe I’ll play along here,” rather than, “I’m just going to sit back passively so other people can play.”

Marty: Alright.

Brian: At this step you’re also explaining the rules, the steps. Ideally you’re having them follow along through the exercise putting them into pairs or trios or teams if you need to, getting things set up so that the activity can be successful.

The next step then is to check for understanding. Just make sure that they understand what they’re going to be asked to do. It’s amazing how obvious it seems in your own head and when it comes out in words people look at you with strange looks. You’re



thinking, “What did they not get?” At this point you want to check to make sure they understand.

I usually check to make sure they understand the rules, especially if this is a competition where there is a winner and a loser. Oh my gosh, if you’re not really clear on this you’re going to sabotage the whole effort because people get so caught up in the winning and the losing that they miss the point of what the exercise was about.

You need to clarify those rules. I’ll usually say, “Okay, who wins?” and they’ll answer me. Then I’ll say, “Now what if there’s a tie?” and they need to answer it. It just needs to be clear.

It doesn’t necessarily mean it has to be fair. You don’t have to spend a whole lot of time and energy making sure that, “Okay, if there’s a tie we’ll have a run off. Then we’ll put the stuff in the computer and have it analyzed to see who is really better.”

You don’t need that. It can be as simple as, “If there is a tie I’m going to declare a winner and what I say goes.” As long as people know that up front they’re usually fine with it.

It’s when we get on the other end of it and there’s a tie and you say, “Okay, it really doesn’t matter. Let’s just say you’re the winner. Now what did we learn from this exercise?”

You know what? They’re not ready to go there yet because they’re still angry that you declared a winner without it being a fair process. You need to be really clear about that.

Before we end this step I always ask, “What last questions do you have?” just to make sure.

Then the next step is to run the actual activity. Make sure they’re following the rules. Encourage them and support them. The danger here for the person running the activity is usually that they will try to step in and help people by, “Oh, no. Did you think about this? Maybe you should try this,” and offering suggestions and help.

That’s really not helpful because the object of the activity is for people to experience something themselves. Maybe what they need is to experience the frustration of not having the answer right away and not being given the answer in the first 30 seconds of being challenged.



Your job running this activity is to sit back and observe. Make sure it doesn't go really, really disastrous, but otherwise just sit back and watch.

You know what? I have lots of activities that don't go exactly as I want them to and we've learned from them as well. Even a disaster isn't necessarily a disaster. The next step then is to debrief the activity.

The first step of this whole process that I'm explaining to you, Marty, decide on what activity you're going to do and be very purposeful about why you're doing it. That is by far the most important step. This one here is the second most important step. These two steps go together hand in hand. I'll tell you more about how that happens when I talk more about some of these activities in a couple of minutes. But the debrief is critical because this is when you drive home what the learning was supposed to be.

Oftentimes the problem I see with people running activities not as successfully is what they do afterwards. They say, "So, how was the activity?" and the people say, "Oh, it was fun. It was frustrating. It was cool. It was not cool." "How did you guys feel about it?" "Oh, we felt fine." "Good. Okay, well let's go onto the meeting."

Nothing really came out of that. Here is the opportunity we have to really drive home the points that you wanted to make. The worst thing you can do is drive them home yourself.

The other error I see managers make, other than just blowing past it, is to lecture everyone on what they were supposed to have learned by this experience. That kind of defeats the purpose of a team building activity where you're learning by experience. Basically what you did is had an experience and had someone interpret it for you and tell you what you should have learned from it. That's not as powerful as letting them learn together.

When I do the debrief usually I go at them in a very focused way. I know I want them to have learned from it and I go after it with a bunch of questions. What I want them to do is through my questions, come to realizations and have their own "aha" moment where they learn something themselves.

I start with the simple easier questions and move deeper. The first couple of questions I ask are usually just around what happened. I say things like, "What happened here? What strategies did you



use? What did you find happened? What did you find when the balloon popped?” or something like that. “How did you get the cards in order that quickly?”

It’s more just around reliving the experience together because most people want to and need to. Usually when you stop an activity you don’t stop and hear silence. You usually stop and hear people immediately start reliving the experience together so I talk about it in a group setting. “Let’s talk about what happened.”

The next area I go to then is their reaction to what happened. I’ll say things like, “When you dropped the ball what did you guys do?” or, “When you found out that this strategy wasn’t working for you how did you adjust on the spot?” You’re still reliving the experience but you’re also looking at what their reaction was externally.

Then I go internally. “How did you feel about it? What were you thinking as this happened? How did you feel inside when she did this and when this happened?” I start getting at feelings and internal reactions as well.

Then next there are questions asking them to interpret. I’ll say things like, “What do you take from this? What does that mean to you? What was your learning?” is what I’m after.

Then they start asking those questions. They start pulling from the game which was silly, playing with Play-Doh or Legos or balloons or something and moving more towards, “Huh, I learned this about myself. I learned this about my coworkers.”

The last set of questions is a round up of the application. “You learned that. So what? What does that mean? What do we do differently back on the job? How do you change your behavior? How do you change your approach? How do you change your attitude toward a certain stimulus in the workplace?” That’s the debrief questions and the debrief area.

The key here is to be prepared for it. As I said, in step two you want to prepare. You *really* want to prepare the debrief questions if you’re not good on the spot. I’ve done this a hundred times so often times I have notes still.

As many times as I’ve done it I still have notes in this particular part of the process, to make sure that I’m asking the questions that get from, “What happened?” all the way to, “How do we apply this?”



How do we apply our learning?”

I really encourage people to make sure they've thought through, “What do I want these people to learn?” and, “How can I get them to that point by asking questions rather than delivering answers and pointing it out to them?”

There is actually one more tip I'll throw in here and that is especially for groups that are just starting team building activities. The first time you ask questions they're going to be quiet because they're not sure. “Should I be answering this? I'm not sure. Should I be answering this honestly? Should I be saying what I really think and feel or should I be saying what I think he wants me to say?” and that kind of thing.

The key there is to ask the question and then literally shut up. Stop talking. Don't offer options. When you ask the questions, “So, what was your reaction when you dropped the ball?”

[pause]

You see the silence? The longer the silence, the more uncomfortable it is. The more likely someone is going to respond.

The novice manager or the novice person who doesn't really know what they're doing and haven't thought through this really well will more likely say something more like this in error, “So what were you feeling when you dropped the ball? Were you frustrated or were you angry or were you unhappy or what?”

Now I've given them a multiple choice question and they'll give me one of the answers and expect to move on. There is not a whole lot of dialogue here and there is not a whole lot of internal searching for, “Hmm. How did I feel?”

Then the last step once you've debriefed is to look at how you can reinforce the learning back on the job. This can happen in a number of ways. It depends on the activity.

For example during the activity they may have created some kind of sculpture or something. Maybe they played with Play-Doh and they created a sculpture during an activity. Maybe you could display the sculpture back in the workplace. If they drew pictures display those back in the workplace.



If some kind of a word or phrase became a catch all kind of a trigger for the learning in the discussion, maybe later in staff meetings you'll want to use that phrase or that word often to remind them of the learning. In any case, try to refer back to the activity and more importantly the learning from the activity.

When you see someone doing something that they learned as the result of that activity it's a great thing to call up. "I just noticed that! Did you guys all see that? Maria just did what we learned in that activity before. Do you remember that when we talked about being really clear on the expectations? Maria, repeat that what you just said. That was so clear. It was great learning from that activity."

Therefore you are reinforcing that thing long after the activity happened. Ideally what happens goes beyond the 15 minutes you spend in the activity.

Those are the seven steps. You also asked what are the pitfalls. I kind of hit them as I was talking. The two biggest pitfalls are not being clear on why you're doing the activity and what you want to accomplish with it. The other pitfall is not getting at it through the debrief questions and trying to lecture your way into the hearts of people which does not usually work.

Marty: That's fantastic. That's a very clear and easy to follow step by step. Number one; be clear and definitive about the goal. Number two, prepare thoroughly for the activity. Three is explain why you're doing the activity as well as how it should be done.

Four, check for understanding. Five, run the activity itself. Six, and you stressed that this was a very critical piece, debrief about the activity. Seven, reinforce the learning of the activity so they can take it with them ongoing.

Those are some great steps. I've used some team building exercises in my own business and I just learned a lot right there and I just want to thank you very much for those steps.

Brian: Yeah, if you don't mind, I have another example I would love to share with you about the earlier step where we said that you wanted to explain why the activity as well as what to do for the activity.

Marty: Sure.

Brian: There are a few activities and this one is in my book, where you don't want to explain "why" up front because explaining why would actually ruin the activity. Let me tell you about that one. Okay?

Marty: I always love to hear examples.

Brian: Okay, great. This one I use when I'm working with a team and we're getting ready to do some planning. Let's say the group has gone off sight. They're going to do their annual plan for next year, or we're sitting in a conference room and we're going to do a budget plan for the next three years or something like that. The topic of the discussion, the purpose of the meeting is planning.

Often I don't even tell them we're doing an activity. They have no clue. What I do is I get up in front of the room and I start getting myself ready, looking like I'm ready to start. I look at the group and I get a look on my face like I'm really concerned. I say, "You know what? This room set up is not going to work." I'm not very clear or specific at all. I say, "This room just is not going to work right."

Then I make my face look like I've just had a great idea. I say, "I have an idea! Here is a challenge for you. I have one thing to get ready here. I'm going to give you," and I look at my watch and say, "I'm going to give you 90 seconds to improve your seating arrangement. Ready? Go!" Then I purposefully look away from the group and start digging in my briefcase to discourage questions.

They kind of look at each other and most of the time when I do this, Marty, they get up and start moving their chairs around. Where they're going with their chairs, I personally have no idea because I wasn't clear on what I wanted, but they start moving their chairs around. Oftentimes what they do is move from classroom setting to a circle or if they're in a circle they kind of tighten the circle up or they try to move visual obstructions out of the way, something like that.

At the end of 90 seconds I look back up and I say, "Okay, 90 seconds up." Did you guys improve your seating arrangement? They'll say, "Oh, yeah. Sure. Sure." I say, "How do you know?"

They start looking at each other and someone may say, "Well, we're in a circle now. Isn't that what you wanted?" Usually I say something like, "No. Actually what I wanted was I wanted you to sit boy girl, boy girl, like we did in kindergarten. What's wrong with you people?"



They kind of chuckle and then we talk about it. Through questions I get them to answer we talk about it and eventually make the point that when you're not really clear on your plan, you have no idea when and if you ever meet the goal of the plan. This sets the stage for the rest of the planning session.

Throughout the rest of the hour or day or three days or whatever time you have allotted for planning, you constantly are referring back to, "Weren't we talking about improving your seating arrangement? Is that how clear we are?"

What invariably happens is as we're making plans, as we are talking about goals, somebody will say, "You know we need to improve customer service." "Oh, yeah! Yeah! Put that down."

Then somebody will say, "Is that like improving your seating arrangement? What does it mean to improve customer service?" Everybody looks at each other and we realize we need to have a much, much, more in depth discussion on what that means if we're going to hold ourselves accountable for it.

That's an example of using a team building activity and I didn't tell them up front that I was even doing one, much less why we were doing it. To do so would have ruined the effect of it on the other end.

Marty: Absolutely. Something else I took note of was Step 7 on reinforcing. I was chuckling because I could see even six months down the road the members of this group being in a meeting and somebody proposes an idea. And he goes, "Well, I think you're just trying to rearrange seats there." By referencing that, everybody knows exactly what that means instantly.

Brian: Exactly. You're right. That is a great example of that.

Marty: Yeah. Do you have other exercises? I would love to talk more about some other examples of activities and exercises that can help leaders to improve communication within a team. Can you give us another example step-by-step just like that one?

Brian: Sure. Another one that comes to mind is the one I call Origami named after the Japanese art of paper folding. We'll be folding papers with this. The purpose of this activity is to highlight the need for people to be much clearer in their directions or their instructions

or in their communication.

Oftentimes, especially in top down communication we find people are not terribly clear. Then they make all sorts of assumptions about what is already understood or what is implied or more implicitly implied in the words we use or the phrases we choose based on our own experience, not appreciating that others don't have our same experience and therefore are not really on the same page with us as we talk.

Origami helps highlight that. This is especially a good exercise when you have a room full of supervisors or managers or team leaders or shop stewards or whoever is in a position where they're giving instructions or help, trainers as well.

Marty: From a step-by-step standpoint, the goal of Origami is to help teach the group communication. So that's step one is to know that is the goal.

Brian: Right, and more specifically to help communication when there is information to be shared. Communication is broad. It can include listening skills and writing skills and things like that. This is verbal communication being shared, especially when it's sequential in terms of instructional information.

Marty: Right.

Brian: You get the group together. You pass a piece of paper out to everyone. Official Japanese origami is done with square paper. You don't have to use square paper. A piece of notebook paper will be fine. You explain what the activity is, why we're doing this, and then explain the rules.

The rules in this game are you follow the instructions. Number one, you cannot look at other people and what they're doing with their paper. You should only be looking at your own. The second rule is you can't ask questions.

Marty: You cannot ask questions.

Brian: You cannot ask questions. Then you say, "I'm going to give you a set of instructions. I want you to follow them with your piece of paper." Then the first thing you do is this. I'm making these up now as we go. If you were to do this for real I would recommend you write them down so you can think through how you're going to

have people manipulate the paper.

For example you say, “Everybody fold your paper in half.” You wait a couple of seconds while everybody folds their paper in half. They’ll look a little bit confused because as you can imagine, they are looking at the notebook paper and they’re thinking, “Do I fold it in half side to side or top to bottom?” because I wasn’t really clear there. You make an assumption and move forward and fold the paper in half however you choose to.

Then I may say fold the paper in half again.” Again you have the dilemma of doing something. Then, “Fold the paper in half one more time. Now what I want you to do is rip a corner off on the right hand side.” Depending on how you’re holding your piece of paper at that time there may be two corners on the right hand side so you have to choose one and again make an assumption.

Now I want you to turn the thing over and rip the upper corner off. Once again you may have a choice or not. Those are the kind of instructions you want to give. They are very loose. They are very vague, on purpose. Then at the end you have people compare what they have.

Now we’re into the debrief of the exercise. Going from the example in the model I explained earlier I start by asking questions. “So what happened here? Does everybody’s paper look the same?” Of course the answer is no.

“Oh, that’s interesting. What does yours look like? Whose looks most like each other and whose looks most different?” We’re just talking about what happened and what the experience was like.

Then we get into, “Okay, what was your reaction when I gave you the first instruction to fold in half?” They’ll say, “I folded it this way. I folded it that way.” “Well, what was going through your head?” “I was a little frustrated. I didn’t know what you meant,” or, “I thought this was ridiculous. You’re not being clear enough. What’s wrong with you?”

Then we move into the learning part of it or the interpretation. “What does this mean to you?” “It means that people need to be real clear on directions.” Then I usually say something like, “Well, I thought I was being clear.” “Yeah, well you weren’t, Brian.”

Okay, what does that mean for us? What does this mean back



on the job? What's the learning? What can you apply? That's when they start saying things like, "I think when I do my on the job training for the new employees when they come in I think I need to be more clear. I think I need to be asking them if they understand more often.

"I think I need to be checking with them. I think I need to be watching them a little bit closer. I think I need to be..." Fill in the blank with any of a thousand different answers and that's when they're starting to connect what they did with their experience with on the job experiences they can be more effective with.

Marty: Well, that sounds like a great exercise. You have it laid out very clearly step-by-step how to do it. I can certainly see how that would work well but I see there could be some pitfalls. What kind of pitfalls would you want to be careful of in an exercise like this? Where can this go wrong that our audience should be aware of?

Brian: Some of the pitfalls that you would find in this one are the same as with any of them. People don't want to play. They look in and go, "Brian. Really. Paper? Don't we have enough business to do here that we don't need to be playing paper games?"

With that one what generally helps best is one of two things. One, be upfront and very clear with why you're doing this. Quite often that attitude comes out because people have experienced this kind of stuff in the past. It's not been purposeful and they've not seen the value of it so they think it's a waste of time or it's an indulgence on your part or something like that.

Be as clear as possible up front with why you're doing this. You may want to say, "It's only going to take eight minutes," or, "It's only going to take twelve and a half minutes and we're going to be done in less than fifteen minutes." Something like that may help appease them as well in terms of that kind of thing.

The other thing is building trust with the group beyond or before this meeting in terms of them trusting that you are business focused, that you are about results. You wouldn't be doing something like this unless it had a purpose.

What you may even have to do is say, "Here is the purpose for the activity. Would you just trust me on this one? You're going to get something out of it I guarantee it. Trust me on it. Go with me for 15 minutes. Then afterwards touch base with me and see if you



thought it was worthwhile or not.”

Another pitfall for this particular exercise is people start looking at each others paper. They are so concerned about getting it right as if there is a right or wrong here.

[Laughter]

They are so concerned about getting it right or being the only one who gets it really weird while everybody else’s is very similar. With that you can go one of two ways. You can let it be and that becomes part of the debrief.

“Gosh, I saw a lot of people looking at each other’s paper. What is that about? Even though the rules were don’t look at each other’s paper it seemed like the temptation was too great. What was going on for that to happen?” That could be a great learning thing.

“Well, I just didn’t want to get it wrong. I didn’t want to be the odd man out.” Hmm, isn’t that interesting that we have a whole group of people that don’t want to be odd man out? I wonder what that translates to when we’re doing other work? There is learning there without stopping them from breaking the rule.

The other option of course is to remind them, “Hey guys, remember I said no looking at the other paper. You’ll get a chance to look at the other’s paper in about five minutes. Right now what I want you to do is just focus on your own paper. Trust me there is no right or wrong answer here.”

Marty: Um hmm. I like letting it go and talking about why somebody might be tempted to do that. I think that is really interesting.

Brian: When I have groups like that and they break rules, nine times out of ten that’s what I do. It’s interesting.

One of the other values of team building exercises even if they only last 15 minutes is within seconds people start falling into being themselves. If they are the type who breaks rules at work, they tend to be the type to break rules in the team building activities. If they’re the types that, in a staff meeting or project plan meeting, tend to clam up, withdraw and withhold information. They tend to do that in team building meetings.

They tend to act that way even though they say they don’t. “This is



a fabricated situation, Brian. It's all contrived." Yet still they act very much like themselves.

I'll go into work with teams and I'll do a team building activity and within the first 15 minutes I'll notice something. Later I'll talk to the manager about a person who did something. "Wow, it seems like she really did this," and they'll say, "Oh, yeah. She's like that all the time." It's amazing how often people fall into their normal way of operating, their normal way of working, their normal way of interacting with people when they are presented with a game.

Marty: Brian, I'm learning so much about how these team building exercises are so much more powerful than I ever realized. I appreciate you bringing this information to me and certainly to our listeners at The Business Source. This is fantastic. I would love it if we could do a couple more specific examples. Would you mind?

Brian: Sure.

Marty: Okay. Fantastic. Another area that our listeners have told us many times that is a big area of concern is with getting team members to work better together. You touched on that just a little bit in some of your exercises but do you have a specific exercise that helps teams work better and could you walk us through that?

Brian: Sure. The one that comes to mind on that is one I call Catch. This is actually one of my favorites. I use this quite a bit and the reason it's one of my favorites is because, like several of the activities, it has different directions I can take it when I'm working with a group. If we want a group to work together more effectively in terms of problem solving, decision making, and that kind of stuff, I would often use this activity.

Here is how it works. You start the activity again by setting it up. "We're going to be doing a team building activity. It's called Catch. The reason we're doing it is because blah, blah, blah. Here's how we're going to play it."

Let me tell you now the steps for playing it. Get the group and it can be pretty much any size group. If you get more than ten or fifteen people you may want to split into two groups and have it going simultaneously. Have the group stand in a circle facing each other.

Give them a ball, one of those squishy balls to one of the people



on the team. It doesn't really matter who you give it to. You point out to everyone, "So-and-so has the ball." You turn to her and you say, "Please throw the ball to anyone else in the room."

She throws the ball to someone else and he catches it. You tell the person who just threw it, "I want you to remember who you threw it to" and then turn to the person who has the ball and say, "Now I want you to throw it to someone other than the person who just threw it to you." He will throw it to someone else. "Remember who you threw it to."

Repeat this all the way through until everybody has had the ball once and finally the last person in the group has the ball and throws it back to the person who started it. Are you with me so far?

Marty: Yes, I am.

Brian: Okay. This is much, much easier to describe in person when you can be doing it.

Marty: I'm closing my eyes and visualizing it.

Brian: Okay. Actually this is a good one to point out that when you're in the step explaining to the group how to play the game, it's best to get up and start doing this together rather than having everybody sit in the group and saying, "Okay, what we're going to do is we're going to go over there and we're going to stand in a circle. I'm going to give someone a ball. They're going to throw it to someone else. Remember who they threw it to and then throw it to someone else." It's so much information.

Marty: Right.

Brian: What I recommend is as much as possible when you're doing these kinds of activities, as you're describing steps or explaining rules, demonstrate or walk them through it as you're doing it rather than explaining it all up front and then having them try to remember. Alright so we have the people in the circle. They have thrown the ball to each other.

Then I say, "Okay, you've established what I'm going to call your pattern. What I'm going to do now is I'm going to time you and see how fast you can get the ball from the person who started through everybody else in your pattern back to the first person."



Marty: Okay.

Brian: Then I say, “Go.” I have a stopwatch there and I time them. Typically with teams of ten to twelve people this round takes about ten to twenty seconds. What they do is they throw the ball the way they just did it. If they drop the ball just pick it up and keep it moving.

Then I look at the group and say, “Hmm, that was pretty good. Here is the challenge. See if you can make it better. Make it faster. You have 45 seconds to come up with a strategy to make it faster.”

Well, immediately they crowd in together and they all go, “What do we do? What do we do?” There is a bunch of discussion. Somebody usually takes control of the group and one of two things is typically the response.

Either they bring the group in together because you know when you first say, “Stand in a circle,” nobody is touching each other or close to each other. Everybody needs personal space. Well now there is a goal. There is a challenge. We have to get faster. They will crunch the circle in much tighter so that the time the ball is in the air is much shorter.

The other option they do and these are the ones that think a little bit more out of the box is the people get in order. Instead of having to throw the ball across the room to each other, across the circle to each other they stand next to each other so it just goes around the circle once. I time it. Usually no matter which approach they take it cuts down to four, six, eight seconds, something like that.

They then start looking pretty smug that they got it faster until I say, “Great. Round three. Make it faster.” If they aren’t challenged enough I’ll often say, “The fastest team I ever worked with had 14 people in it and it was done in less than a second.” That usually gets their attention.

Sometimes they look at me and challenge me and say no I’m lying or just making it up or whatever. Usually it energizes them and they go, “Oh, what can we do? What can we do?” Then they do it again.

Typically what ends up happening is that they figure out that they didn’t really need to catch the ball. I said it needs to pass to everyone else and back to the first person. What they’ll usually end up doing is the person who starts it puts their hands up high



holding the ball. Everyone else puts their hand below his hand in order. He drops the ball and as it drops and touches each of their hands until he catches it at the bottom in less than a second.

There's the activity. Most people figure it out. Some people don't and that's fine if they don't. Then we sit down and talk about it. In the debrief at the end we discuss what happened. "Oh, she dropped the ball." "It was really hard throwing it that far. I'm not much of an athlete. I felt really intimidated."

Then we get to, "What was your reaction?" They talk about, "I was really nervous. When you told me we had to do it again I thought, oh, I caught it once already. I didn't want to let the group down."

We talked about that, how we were feeling about it and specifically if the goal is around teamwork we talk about things like, "How did you feel when you dropped the ball and delayed the group," or, "What was going through your head when she dropped the ball?" We get some of those things out.

With teamwork we would also be asking questions around, "Who became the leader of the group? Was there a leader? Who took control of the group? Were the behaviors helpful? Who stepped back and didn't participate at all? Was that helpful or not?" The focus and the purpose for the activity drives the questions.

Just a side step here, if I wanted to use that activity for something other than teamwork I may have used it for competition. That would look like asking questions around, "Why were you guys looking at the other group and so concerned about beating them when the real goal was to beat your own time? What was that about?"

Then we talked about how some people automatically assume that they're competing with other people even when they're not. Is that a good thing? Is it a bad thing? Did it help? Did it hurt?

It could have been an activity that was focused on out-of-the-box thinking. "How did you guys get to this point? What kept you from getting even faster? You're fastest time was three seconds. I've seen it done in less than a second.

"What were some of the assumptions you made that held you back? What were some of the things that you did that kept you from getting better? What were some of the things that you did that did promote the out-of-the-box thinking. How did you get there?"



Then in the reinforce step later we will talk about that in terms of, “Are we working as a team here?” We are sitting in a budget meeting. We could be saying, “Is this like that ball thing? Are we looking past something? Should we be doing something?”

“Is this like that ball thing where Janice over there had the answer and we just shut her up because we were so focused on what we thought was right? Should we be looking at everybody else on the team? Is there something that we’re missing?” Or whatever, it would be the approach for using it later on.

Marty: Has this exercise ever blown up and caused a lack of teamwork because of maybe the blame game, or an argument or fight which is just the opposite of working together? How do you avoid that?

Brian: Yes, it has. As any activity can blow up, this one can when the group is extremely competitive. It’s all about winning and being the best and the fastest, especially if I mention that it’s under a second and they wanted it in a split second.

There are usually one or two people that are just really, really focused on the competition or on winning if there is a prize or whatever. How that blows up is they jump all over someone for dropping the ball or not being fast enough or not getting the concept of move over and they grab the person and yank them over. Then you have people looking at each other discouraged and upset.

It’s kind of like the example I gave earlier in terms of if people aren’t following the rules. Unless somebody is getting hurt or in danger or it’s getting really out of control, I let it go. I let it play out and then in the debrief we get to the questions.

“I noticed at one point, John over there grabbed you, Melissa, and pulled you over here. What was going on there for the rest of you?” I take the focus off them first because that’s a little unnerving. “How did the rest of you respond to that? Did you guys see that?”

“Yeah, we saw it.” “What went through your head?” “I’m glad I wasn’t Melissa. I would have hit the guy if he yanked me.” “I felt sorry for Melissa. I just don’t think he should have yanked her.” “I was glad he did. She was just not getting it.” Those might be the answers.



Then I'll turn to John and Melissa and I'll say, "What was your reaction?" "I felt really resentful. How dare he touch me much less yank me and pull me. So that's why later I dropped the ball I think. I didn't do it on purpose. I felt resentful and I didn't want to play anymore. I pulled out. Emotionally I was gone."

"I wonder how often that happens back in the workplace when we try to force someone to do something that they're not quite ready to engage in yet. I wonder how that plays out. Have you guys ever seen that?" Now we're into the interpretation. We're learning how this application applies back on the job.

Marty: I'm really seeing how important that debrief piece is. I understand now why you stressed it so much when we were going through the step-by-step. Even if things don't go as planned there is still learning to be done through that and understanding all of the goals and motivation, teamwork and communication in that debriefing. There is a way to learn from every exercise regardless of what direction it takes.

Brian: Yes. Always.

Marty: Do you have any specific examples, real world examples where this particular exercise has helped to build teamwork? You can certainly change the name of the company.

Brian: I do have an example. Yes. It's with an insurance company that I've worked with. The group we had was not working together too terribly well so that's why I was brought in to work with them. This was actually the very first exercise we did. I think we even did it before we did introductions.

The purpose was to get at teamwork. I wanted to get a quick sense of the group because I had never worked with them before, get a quick sense of their interactions and things like that. We did the activity and what I noticed was one person kind of controlled the rest of the group and ran the whole thing.

When I said, "Let's get a little faster," she immediately took control and said, "Okay, here's what we're going to do. We're going to tighten up here and blah, blah, blah," and pulled everybody in really tight and did it again.

Going back to the example before, she was actually kind of pulling people by the shoulder. It wasn't rude or anything but people don't



want to be touched. I could tell that there were a couple of people that bristled when she touched them and led them into the group tighter. In the second round she brought them even tighter and told them to pass even faster. She did not have the answer and they ended up four of five seconds was their fastest time.

In the debrief we were able to establish that it was quite obvious that this was how the team normally operates. By the way, she was not the boss. She thought she was the boss but she was not the manager of the group.

In the debrief we were able to establish that this is often how things work. It wasn't so much that it's often how things work in a group but that she's always the one driving things.

The group dynamic that we discovered was that in the group whoever thinks they have the right answer is the one who asserts himself or herself. The rest of the group then backs off, acquiesces and is reluctantly pulled along through the "right answer," whether it's right or wrong. All thinking stops as soon as somebody says, "I've got it."

Nobody challenges it. Nobody questions it and certainly nobody throws out an alternative idea or thought. It was revolutionary for this group in terms of seeing , "God, that's how we operate all the time!"

Marty: What kind of steps did they take to change that?

Brian: We worked together, but shortly after I stopped working with them. They continue to work together and I'm still in touch with them. I've worked with the company since, but not that particular group.

What they did was they started looking at how we make decisions. They decided to start with the decision making process first. If that's the issue with the team there are so many things to go after and so many ways to go after it.

What we decided as a group was, "Let's just pick one. Let's let everything else go for now and let's just pick one thing, only focus on one thing at a time. Let's focus on decision making, particularly when it comes to a project."

They would have projects coming in all the time and they would have to accept or reject a project. What was happening was one



person was making that decision based on his or her infinite all knowing knowledge. When projects came in that were a certain size or larger, which was quite a bit, they would sit down and have a discussion about it. The person who thought they had the right idea would agree to listen.

In this case that person would identify him or herself and then had to sit through the meeting the first half hour and not say a word. It forced everyone else to wrestle with it and grapple with it. I don't think they ever had a situation after that where they went with the original person's idea because that first half hour created such rich discussion that when the one person who thought he or she was the expert was able to jump in, they came in from a different perspective.

They would say, "Oh, I thought this was the answer. Based on what you said and a little bit on what you said, here is what I think we should do." Immediately it was a better answer. Then when they talked even further they got even closer to the ultimate or the best or the most effective or the most cost effective or whatever it was that they were after in terms of their ultimate goal for that particular project.

Marty: That's a great example. Thanks for that.

What I love about these exercises is that they are very quick and simple. 15 minutes or less for pretty much all of them..

Brian: Yes, all of them.

Marty: Yet the team impact is huge. As I was saying, I was visualizing in that first exercise that you described months or years down the road people talking about rearranging chairs. In 15 minutes you can change the entire culture of an organization. That is incredibly powerful.

Brian: Yes, it can be. That's why I like team building activities so much because they are so powerful. They really don't have to take hours and hours and hours. Don't get me wrong. If you want to spend a day doing team building activities, I have some activities that do take hours long and the learning is that much deeper and much more impactful than 15 minutes.

Most times you don't have that time. And you're not often at a retreat and you're not out there where you can climb the ropes or



get in the boats or run the races. You don't have that kind of time or those kinds of resources. That's what this book is for.

It's for the more typical situations where, "I have a staff meeting. We meet every week or every other week. I would like to do something with team building but I can't afford to hire a consultant nor can I afford two and a half hours for this thing in this book here. Therefore I'm just going to use the resources I have."

Marty: Exactly. It's funny you just mentioned the word consultant because you have another exercise named Consultant. The objective of that exercise is to help teams become more productive. Productivity is another area that The Business Sources customers have told us is a critical area. Could you tell us a little bit about The Consultant Exercise?

Brian: The Consultant Exercise is less game-ish. There is not really a winner or a loser, but it is a technique for getting at some solutions or some answers for some business problems.

What you do is you get the group together. You explain to them what the activity is, why you're going to do it, and what you expect the payoff to be for the group so that they will want to buy into the process. You then pass out papers and have the participants each write down a problem or a concern that they're struggling with right now.

The beauty of this one is unless it's a really, really technical problem that no one else in the group understands but you, it really doesn't matter whether it's something that the group doesn't understand terribly well. You can put down something and I can be a customer service rep saying, "I have this claim that I got a call on. I'm not sure where to go with it." Someone else looking at it doesn't really have to know the ins and outs or the exact answer to it, just be familiar enough with the work to be able to understand basically what's going on.

What each person does is write down one problem or concern that they are currently facing at the top of a piece of paper. Once they've done that, assuming that everybody is sitting in a circle in some kind of order, then you can have everybody pass the paper ...

Marty: Let me interrupt you real quick, Brian. This is a problem or a concern overall in their job or a problem or a concern about

productivity. Would you clarify what they're supposed to be writing down or is it really vague?

Brian: Marty, absolutely I would clarify. I'm being vague right now because I'm not dealing with a specific client. Yes, to give an example you could say, "Okay, folks you all complain that you have too much on your plate. What I want you to do is think of the thing that is bothering you the most about what's on your plate right now, the thing that's perplexing you the most that you just can't seem to figure out how to address quickly and efficiently. I would like you to write that on top of the paper."

Or, you could say, "You know folks, we have project XYZ sitting here and we all have a piece of project XYZ and it just doesn't seem to be moving. Or we have a piece of project XYZ and it's moving but it's not moving fast enough," or, "We're looking at project overruns," or, "We're looking at whatever is the problem."

"Here is what I would like you to do. I would like you to look at what you affect and how you impact that project and what's bothering you the most about that. What's perplexing you the most? What's the most difficult part of your piece of that project and put that on the top of the paper?"

Marty: Okay.

Brian: The more specific you can guide them the better although you don't want to be too specific in terms of, "Sally, I want you to write this. Or you know, Jim, you told me the other day that you were really worried about that. Why don't you write that on your paper?" You don't want to be too directive.

Marty: Okay, so keep going.

Brian: Okay? They've all written something on the top of the paper that's a problem that's bothering them right now. Then you have everyone pass their paper to the person to their left.



The person on the left reads the problem at the top that the person next to them wrote and they have a minute or two minutes to write down the first thing that comes to their mind. This is a brainstorming activity, obviously. They write the first thing that comes to their mind in terms of how this person might approach it, what they might want to look at.

It may be that they write down, “I think you need to check your assumptions because it sounds like you’re assuming X.” It could be they write down, “You should look at so and so as a resource.” It doesn’t necessarily have to be a solution. Whatever it is it needs to be something helpful for ultimate resolution of that problem or issue that’s on the top of the paper.

Everyone gets one to two minutes to do this. You blow a whistle or make a signal somehow and pass the paper to the next person on the left again. Now when I get the paper I have a problem at the top. I have one person’s recommendation or solution or resource or helpful tip or whatever. I’m going to add to it and I write something down. You keep going until the papers go all the way around.

When I finally get my own paper back I have my issue at the top. There are ten people in the room. I have nine people’s ideas on how I could address this and be more effective with it. Then I can go forward. At that point you can either stop the exercise and do something else, or you can stop the exercise and go even further with it.

You can go further into, “Okay, let’s explore each of these and let’s talk about some of the ideas,” because in talking about them we may be able look at them. By talking about it we may then begin to determine, “Oh God, here’s where we’re going with this. Here is what we could do with it.” Light bulbs are going off and people are making better connections and coming up with better solutions.

Marty: Help me debrief on this one. I’ve stated what my problem is and we’ve passed the paper around. People have given me ideas or resources. What’s my take away from here? How does that help me be more productive in my job?

Brian: A couple of ways we could go with this, Marty. One could be simply you got some help. What you go away with is your piece of paper with some ideas. That could be one approach. Another approach we could take would be in the debrief. The debrief would be things like, “Did everybody get helpful hints?”

You may even want to go around the room, “I would like you to look at your paper. Pick the one thing that is the most helpful to you, and let’s all share that.” Then you share it.

I could share this and Marty could say, “Oh, that’s the one I wrote.” “Oh, God, Marty. That was great. We’ll have to talk later because



I really want to explore this more with you.” That could be the way that one goes.

Another way of looking at it could be a slightly different emphasis which is, “Look how much we could help each other. Why don’t we do this more back on the job? Why did it take us having to sit in a room and write on a piece of paper rather than just going to people and saying, I’m dealing with this and I’m really struggling here? Can you help me?”

“Why are we so reluctant to ask for help? Or why are we so reluctant to offer help when we see that it is needed?” It could be either or is going on with the organization. That could be the route that we take with the debrief questions.

Marty: Okay, that’s a great point to add...asking for help and offering help...

Brian: Your question is a great one in terms of emphasizing once again that every activity can have several different focuses. Go back to my first point. You need to be really clear on what you want to get out of the activities so that you can frame your debrief questions to drive it home.

Marty: So we’ve talked about team building. We have productivity that we’ve talked about. We’ve talked about communication and those are definitely some great areas that our customers told us they are interested in hearing about.

There are two other areas that our people said they need help with. One is on decreasing stress. The other one is on improving morale. Do you have any exercises off the top of your head that might help with those two issues?

Brian: I do for the improving morale one.

Marty: Okay, let’s talk about improving morale.

Brian: One of the exercises that I really like to use with groups that boosts morale would be the one I call Kudos.

Brian: Kudos is an exercise. The word Kudos means recognition or appreciation or whatever. There is actually a candy bar called Kudos. I use those.

What I do is I buy a box of six or twelve Kudos. I stick the box in the middle of the room. I always use this one at the end of a meeting to bring the group back up. If the meeting was about how we're going to cut costs and who we're going to layoff or something negative like that or if the group is just feeling low morale at that point. I usually do it at the end to end on a high note.

I'll stick the Kudos in the middle of the room and this is one where I don't explain a whole lot of why we're doing it other than just saying, "I want us to have an opportunity to recognize each other." How the activity goes is the Kudos are in the room and anyone and everyone in the group is invited to pick up a Kudos candy bar and give it to someone else in the group in recognition for something. All they have to do is explain what the recognition is for and be specific about it.

I'll give you these examples just to get them in the same place as I'm at. For example I could pick up this Kudos and give it to you, Janet, and say, "Here, Janet. This is for all you do. You're just so great. You're just so wonderful. Thank you."

That would not be an appropriate use of the Kudos because it's not specific enough. It's not really clear what I'm recognizing other than I'm just trying to make her feel good.

What I would rather see is you picking up this Kudos and say, "Kudos to you, Janet, for helping me out the other day. I had to get out of here really fast to get to the soccer game and yet I still had that proposal not quite ready for client XYZ. Without even being asked, you came in and you knew what was going on.

"You took it from me and finished it up for me and actually you did a better job than I would have done. Thank you very much, Janet." Janet gets it. That is not incumbent on Janet to then pick up a Kudos and giving it to Fred. She doesn't have to do anything. All she has to do is say, "Thank you."

We clap or whatever and then someone else can come up and pick up a Kudos and give it to someone else. You just go until the box is empty. I have never played this game where it ends when the box is empty. Every time I've played it, and I've played it probably hundreds of times, the box is empty and at that point they are getting into it.

Some people who have been sitting back for awhile get up their



courage. They're like, "Oh, there's no more Kudos!" Invariably someone will say, "Here, you can use mine." They'll give it to the person and she'll stand up and say, "Okay, I want to give this to Logan here because of what he did."

Pretty soon people are just taking the Kudos from anybody and giving it to someone else. It's no longer about holding the candy bar. It's about recognizing each other.

Marty: I would be the guy that already ate his.

[Laughter]

Brian: Yeah, you know I actually saw that once and they used the wrapper.

[Laughter]

He ate it and then he said, "I didn't realize this was going to be so good. I still want to give Kudos. Can I just give the wrapper?"

[Laughter]

Actually that became the joke for the next couple of months in terms of reinforcement. The reinforcement was people talking about wrappers. "Are you going to give me a Kudos wrapper for that?" People joked about it a lot.

Marty: Oh, that's funny. So by giving Kudos and being very clear about the specific reasons why they are thanking somebody, the Kudos became a kind of a catalyst. Then it really began to take on a life of its own within the group.

Brian: Right. I do have a group that worked with that and for the next couple of staff meetings they used Kudos and after that they stopped using candy bars. They just did the activity anyway. They got to the point where it became part of their staff meeting norm to always leave five minutes at the end for Kudos.

It wasn't Kudos about what happened in the staff meeting, although it could have been. It was just from last week what have we done. The beauty of this one is it's not about that stuff that we get bonuses for or raises for. It's not stuff that even goes in your performance review most of the time. Usually it's just the little stuff that people feel unappreciated for, they get appreciated for it.



The other beauty of this one is the manager rarely gives out Kudos. It's all about peer recognition and peer appreciation which most people appreciate more because it feels more genuine, especially when it's as specific as I drive it to be.

Marty: What's the debrief on this one?

Brian: There isn't a debrief on this one.

Marty: You just let it go.

Brian: Yep. You let it skip.

Marty: It's good for a closing exercise wouldn't you say?

Brian: Yeah, I use it for a closing exercise.

Marty: Alright. Are there others that you don't have debriefs on or just very rare ones?

Brian: Rarely do I not have debrief. There is a whole other category, if you will, of activities like this that I would call icebreakers or meeting openers. Those are activities whose sole purpose is to warm a group up for a meeting or for a training experience or for some kind of a presentation. When that's the one and only sole purpose of the activity then there is usually not a debrief after that.

Those are the things that you've probably seen. It's like people bingo. People walk into a room and they have a big bingo card with things on it and they have to find people. They walk in and they're given a playing card that's a heart and they have to find two other people that have hearts and sit next to them at the table so they get to know them better, that kind of stuff. There is no debrief after those. Those are purely to get people introduced and/or get them warmed up for a meeting.

Actually I have a book of those activities and just those activities coming out.

Marty: So you have [Quick Team Building Activities for Busy Managers](#) which is what we've focused on today. Then you have [More Quick Team Building Activities for Busy Managers](#) which has some of the virtual activities that we talked about as well as physically present activities. Then your new one is called [Quick Meeting Openers](#)

for Busy Managers, Ice Breakers, Energizers and Other Creative Activities.

Brian: Yes, and that last one you mentioned has nothing but ice breakers and meeting openers, introduction activities. It also has several ideas on how to divide groups into smaller groups.

Marty: Okay, fantastic. We've had a very, very productive time here. I really appreciate the information you've given us. Let's just kind of look back over what we talked about. We talked a little bit about why you want to do these exercises. They are not just about games. They are about actually accomplishing something and making a positive impact on your team or organization.

We talked a little bit about the problems that people have with doing the exercises and how to overcome those. We talked about some of the most important things we can do to get people engaged, which is by identifying what's in it for them?

You gave us a very clear understanding of the steps to making an exercise successful. Seven steps about goals, preparing for the activities, explaining why and how, check for understanding, reflect the activity, the all-important debrief and then how to reinforce learning on the job. You have also given us some fantastic examples that pertain specifically to the needs of our listeners and readers. I appreciate that.

Can you give us a summary? Tell us some final parting thoughts on these activities. It sounds like you've done many of these activities thousands and thousands of times. What is the big, big takeaway or nugget that our audience should know before we sign off?

Brian: First of all, great summary, Marty. You captured it all. I would say that the main thing I want them to take away is the thing that I've probably said several times already.

They're just going to hear it again which is, when you do team building activities, the far most important thing in the world is to be very clear on what you want. I'm really going to emphasize that. Be clear in what you want. When you think you know what you want I would ask you to be even more clear.

The reason I said it is because I've worked with several people. I'm coaching them on doing stuff like this in organizations and they'll say, "Okay, I know what I want." Well, what's that?" "I want people



to have better teamwork.”

While that is good, better teamwork is too broad. I’m going to go back to improve your seating arrangement. Improve teamwork? How clear is that? Teamwork can take on so many aspects of so many things. I would much rather them say, “I want them to be better on teamwork.” Specifically I want them to be offering help to each other rather than be waiting to be called upon. Okay, now that’s specific and that we can dive into.

Maybe we can dive into a book and find an activity. We can create an activity and say, “Let’s give it that one.” Or, “I want them to be better at team X. Specifically what I want them to do is take greater liberty at making decisions without the leader having to be involved in the decision making process.

That’s still part of teamwork but it’s very different from the one I just said before. It’s also specific enough where we can grab a team building activity that will really drive at that rather than generic teamwork which is a “Let’s all play together and be nice” kind of thing.

My final thought would be very, very, very specific on what you want to accomplish with the activity. Then the subset to that is to make sure the debrief questions you prepare for the activity drive that point without you having to lecture it.

Marty: That’s a great final thought. I appreciate you sharing that with your audience. Ladies and gentlemen, you’ve been listening to Brian Cole Miller, the author of Quick Team Building Activities for Busy Managers. We’ve been talking about different activities and exercises that are in that book.

I know that I’m going to rush right out and buy all three of your books, Brian. That’s very exciting. Those virtual activities that you talked about which I think are very useful for a lot of people because more and more people are working virtually in today’s society. That’s great that you have identified that niche and put that together.

We do appreciate you so much for sharing your knowledge with our audience. I thank you for being with us, Brian.

Brian: You’re welcome. Thank you for inviting me, Marty.

Marty: Thank you very much.

Marty: Once again, thank you very much for joining us. That was Brian Cole Miller with Quick Team Building Activities for Busy Managers.

On behalf of The Business Source, my name is Marty M. Fahnce. I would like to thank you all for joining us today. I hope you learned a lot. Have a wonderful day. Bye bye.

