

# **Top 4 High Impact Team & Leadership Development Activities**

*Transformational Exercises Every  
Teamwork Facilitator Must Know*

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[www.IATFconnect.com](http://www.IATFconnect.com)

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One of the tools commonly used by Teamwork Facilitators is experiential learning exercises (aka teambuilding games). When facilitated well, this type of learning experience can produce learning “shifts” that are both deep and profound.

The four activities in this e-book are “high impact” in that they have been found to consistently produce the kind of learning opportunities that help teams move from good to great.

### **A Leadership Note**

Lead these activities in such a manner that the participants understand they have choice as to the degree to which they participate. Encourage each person to communicate their comfort level with the activity and to join in at the level they choose (full, partial, none) rather than be coerced into participation.

To get the most out of the experience, facilitate a discussion with the group afterwards. Suggestions for starting a conversation (debriefing / processing) are offered in each

description. The key to learning through experiential teambuilding exercises is the combination of activity PLUS discussion.

Challenge and adventure activities can present elements of physical and emotional risk. The information presented in this activity guide is for your reference, and you are ultimately responsible for judging the suitability of an activity and safely supervising the activity.

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No single source of adventure-based experiential education can substitute for practical experience and education. While this activity guide serves as an introduction to the use of experiential learning exercises, it is only an introduction. Studying the material in this activity guide is no substitute for professional training. You can receive professional training and development through the IATF.

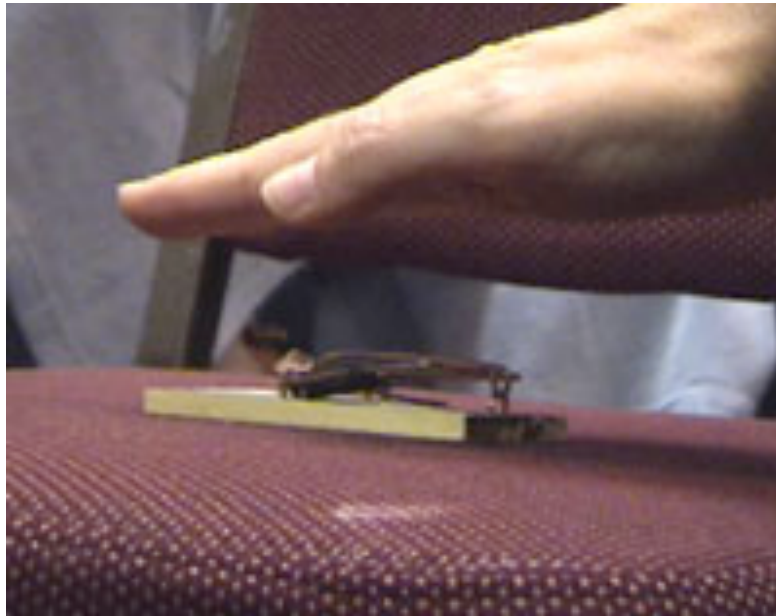
Enjoy!



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## Activity # 1

### Mouse Trap Trust



**Group Size:** People work in pairs

**Age Range:** Adult

**Intensity:** Mental=3, Physical=1

**Time:** 20 – 30 minutes

**Space:** Minimal – Medium -- Lots

**Set Up Time:** 3 minutes

**Props:** One “traditional” wooden mousetrap per pair

#### Objective

Coach your partner (who's eyes are closed) into placing their hand on top of a set mousetrap.

#### Skills Developed

Communication, Trust, Planning, Coaching

### **Set Up / Preparation**

1. This is an advanced activity to be led by a skilled facilitator with groups that are ready for the challenge.
2. Prior to leading this activity you must accurately assess your group's ability to safely participate in this activity. Do not attempt this activity if your or your group isn't ready.
3. Make sure your group understands that participation in this activity is purely voluntary. If you don't want to participate than don't do it. Find some other way to add value to the experience (observe and give feedback, etc.).
4. When you're group is clear on the rules of engagement tell them there will be four stages to this activity:

### **The Four Stages (Steps)**

Step #1	Leader demonstrates how to set a mousetrap. Partner up, each pair gets 1 mousetrap, practice setting the trap. Plan on this taking about 4-5 minutes
Step #2	Partners each get a chance to set a trap with their eyes closed. Plan on this taking about 4-5 minutes
Step #3	Show the group how to safely un-set a trap by placing your hand directly on top of the trap and then taking your hand off the trap. This step can be a shocker for some. They might find it hard to believe what you're doing. Plan on this taking about 5 minutes to have pairs try.
Step #4	Person A closes eyes then person B sets trap and places it on a hard surface. Person A is coached by person B to un-set trap. Switch roles.

- Pacing is important. Don't rush this activity.
- Speak clearly and confidently. This is not the time and place for jokes (by you or anyone else).
- Don't show all 4 steps at one time. Show one step then have the group do that step.

## **Safety Warning**

A high degree of trust is required to successfully accomplish this challenge. This challenge is best left for a group that is advanced as far as maturity and their ability to safely care for one another. People can get hurt in this activity but it is unlikely they will get seriously hurt (that's one reason we use a mouse trap instead of a rat trap!).

## **Facilitator Notes**

- This is one of the most amazing activities I've ever seen. It's so portable and yet so powerful in it's ability to create growth possibilities within individuals and a group.
- If you are familiar with the trust building activity called the Trust Fall (described in the online archive of teambuilding games at the International Association of Teamwork Facilitators) you'll find this activity to be similar in it's impact.
- Expect some people not to participate in this activity at all. Expect others to stop participating half way through (like when you tell them to put their hand on top of the trap).
- This activity can be powerful with a small group (two or four people) and just as powerful with a room full of people (500+). I'd even go so far to say that this activity will be transformational for many.

## **Debriefing Suggestions**

- Which did you prefer, to coach or be coached? Why?
- If this mousetrap represents a fear in your life, what did you like about how you handled it? What would you change?
- What did you observe in the interactions between partnerships around you?

## **Variations**

Hand out a mousetrap to each person. Have them write on the trap a fear they are choosing to face in their life.

## **History**

This activity comes from the brilliant mind of Sam Sikes who has authored several teambuilding games books. [www.doingworks.com](http://www.doingworks.com)

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## Activity # 2

### Minefield



**Group Size:** 2 – 50

**Age Range:** elementary – adult

**Intensity:** Mental=2 or 3, Physical=1

**Time:** 15 – 30 minutes (without debrief)

**Space:** Minimal – Medium -- Lots

**Set Up Time:** 5 minutes

**Props:** 70 feet of rope or tape to create a playing area, 50 – 100 objects that act as obstacles/landmines (ex. Tennis balls, pieces of foam, mousetraps, etc.)

#### Game Objective

Travel through the minefield with the help of your partner.

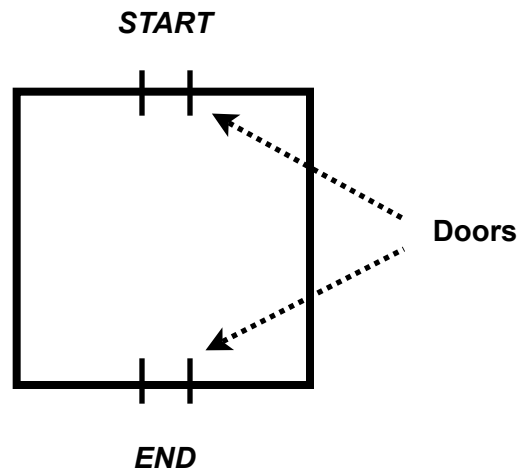
#### Skills Developed

Trust, Communication, Planning



### **Set Up / Preparation**

1. Create the playing area. For a group size of 12 people start by creating a 10 ft x 10 ft square on the ground out of rope or tape (larger groups need a larger size playing area). On the “start” and “finish” sides of the box create “doors” using 6-inch long strips of tape - - these short pieces of tape need to be two feet apart (refer to diagram below).



2. Create obstacles (land mines) in the playing area by filling the square (playing area) with tennis balls or pieces of paper, etc.. The more obstacles you add the harder the game will be. Adding approximately 30 obstacles into the square will provide a medium level of difficulty for most groups. Spread out the obstacles in such a way that there are no straight pathways through the minefield.

NOTE: During the actual activity, you may find the group has located an easy pathway which you did not see until the game has started. I allow myself the option to change/adjust the minefield playing area midstream by rearranging the obstacles. If the group challenges me on this I usually say I'm attempting to mimic real life in that things change and you can either adapt or complain.

### **Presenting the Challenge**

1. Have everyone find a partner and stand on the “start” side of the square playing area.

2. Presentation Script: “Your challenge is to travel through the playing area to the other side of the square. You’ll be working in teams of two. At the beginning of the game everyone will start behind the line on the “start” side of the square. Teams of two (partners) can work independently of other teams. When traveling through the playing area (minefield) your eyes must be closed which means your partner must coach you / guide you (verbally) through the minefield helping you avoid the obstacles (land mines). When the first person in your partnership makes it to the other side he/she can open his/her eyes and the rolls switch - - now that person becomes the coach and guides his/her partner (verbally) through the playing area from the start side to the end side.” [read the rules below]

### **Rules**

1. No running or fast moving.
2. People must stand behind the start line or the end line or be walking through the playing area (minefield). No one is allowed on the sides of the playing area.
3. Anyone inside the playing area must have their eyes closed.
4. Multiple people can be inside the playing area.
5. You must enter and exit through one of the “doors”.
6. If anyone touches a land mine or the perimeter of the playing area, they must return to the start side and try again.
7. The participants may not alter the playing area but the facilitator can.
8. Violation of a rule may result in a penalty.

### **Safety Warning**

1. The playing area must be safe because people will be walking around with their eyes closed. Make sure the playing area is level and flat.
2. If someone needs to open their eyes to feel safe that’s fine.

## **Facilitator Notes**

1. If you have an uneven number of people just create one team of 3 (Person A, Person B, Person C). Person A goes through the playing area first then coaches Person B through who coaches Person C through.
2. I've led this activity effectively with groups as small as 4 people and as large as 80. The great thing about this activity is people work in pairs and can be somewhat independent of the other people.
3. When the activity is in full motion, there is lots of talking and things can get loud (larger groups get louder). With large groups it can feel somewhat chaotic (mostly because of the noise) because multiple teams are working simultaneously.
4. This is a wonderful activity to practice coaching (coaching others and being coached). Every moment of this activity provides ample opportunity to practice clear and precise communication.
5. Once the first person makes it to the other side he/she will typically only coach his/her partner through. However, that same person may choose guide people other than his/her partner. I've deliberately provided rules that allow teams/people to collaborate.

## **Debriefing Suggestions**

Land mines (obstacles) are metaphoric problems the group faces either personally or as a team. They are everywhere in life (personal & public). Some land mines are big and some are small - - they all do damage when we hit them. In this exercise, there are lots of land mines separating the participants from their desired outcomes (goals).

Life is full of obstacles. Some people allow obstacles to prevent them from succeeding. Others keep running into the obstacles. What are the obstacles in your life (in your team) that you must recognize and then avoid?

We can go through life trying to avoid the obstacles but it's easier when we have help. Where do you get help in real life? Are you effective at asking for help? How

are you at receiving help? How do you know? Are you good at giving help? How do you know?

### **Variations**

1. Provide the team with a time limitation. For example, the team has 20 minutes to get the entire team from one side to the other.
2. At the beginning of the activity before the group actually starts (but after you've supplied the instructions), warn them that a "communication breakdown" may occur during the activity. If this happens, people will not be allowed to communicate verbally. Don't tell them how long it will last (make it last no more than 60 seconds). This will allow people to plan (or not) for this possibility.
3. Provide each person with one index card and have everyone write down an attribute they bring to the team on their card. These cards will then be scattered (writing side down) throughout the playing area (inside the square) among the obstacles. During the game each person is to pick up ONE card while traveling through the playing area (while remaining sightless) and carry it to the other side. The metaphor here is that everyone brings talents and skills to the team and yet we must work together to bring forth and utilize these talents.
4. Divide the team in half. Group A will start on one side of the playing area and Group B will start on the other side of the playing area. Follow the basic set of rules with this one twist - - Group A must move to where Group B is and Group B must move to where Group A is (teams moving in opposite directions). Make sure people in Group A partner up with each other and people in Group B partner up with each other. Hopefully the two groups will realize that the game runs better if they collaborate.
5. In the basic setup of this game I provide two "doors" - - one at the start and one at the end of the playing area. For larger groups you may need to not only create a larger playing area (square) you may need to add more doors.
6. To take this activity to an entirely new level use mousetraps in the minefield and have participants walk through with bare feet.

## History

This teambuilding game was described by Karl Rohnke in his famous book "Quicksilver" published in 1995. [www.karlrohnke.com](http://www.karlrohnke.com)

## Related Quote

*"Faith means living with uncertainty - feeling your way through life, letting your heart guide you like a lantern in the dark"* ~ **Dan Millman**



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## Activity # 3

### Helium Stick



**Group Size:** 8 – 20

**Age Range:** high school – adult

**Intensity:** Mental=3+, Physical=1

**Time:** 20 - 60 minutes (longer is more realistic)

**Space:** Minimal – Medium -- Lots

**Set Up Time:** 60 seconds

**Props:** Helium Stick (aluminum tent pole)

#### Objective

Lower the aluminum tent pole to the ground.

#### Skills Developed

Problem Solving, Planning, Communication, Focus

### **Set Up / Preparation**

1. Divide your group in half and then have them create two parallel lines where the lines are facing each other. The lines are close to each other (approximately 12 – 18 inches apart). The members of each line stand shoulder to shoulder.
2. Once the two lines are formed, everyone holds out their index fingers at waist level.
3. You (the facilitator) then announce to the group that you will be placing an aluminum tent pole on top of their fingers. THIS PART IS IMPORTANT - - when you place the tent pole on their fingers, do so from behind and in the middle of one of the lines ALWAYS KEEPING YOUR HAND ON TOP OF THE TENT POLE to prevent the group from raising the pole in the air. Apply enough pressure on top of the pole to prevent the group from lifting it up. It seems every group I've worked with wants to raise the tent pole with their fingers even before they understand or know the directions.
4. Finally, with your hand on top of the tent pole (the helium stick), you will give them the following directions: "Your directions are as follows...as a group, you must lower this tent pole to the ground without even a single person on the team losing contact with the tent pole. Should someone lose contact with the tent pole you must start again." Then, release your hand from the tent pole. '

### **Rules**

1. No one may lose contact with the tent pole. If anyone loses contact with the tent pole the entire group must start again. The starting position is with the tent pole at waist level.
2. Both index fingers must be used and *only* the index fingers may be used. The index fingers must be placed below the tent pole. Nothing else is allowed to touch the tent pole (other than the ground at the end of the activity).

### **Safety Warning**

The ends of the tent pole can be dangerous if the pole starts moving quickly and hits someone in the face. Take precautions to prevent injury.



### **Facilitator Notes**

1. This is a VERY CHALLENGING activity. Do not do this with groups in serious conflict.
2. Here's what typically happens in this activity: When you (the facilitator) give the directions and then release the pole, the group will often times RAISE the pole (not lower it)! The group will usually laugh and find this somewhat strange. Its likely to take several attempts to just keep the tent pole steady (not lowering or raising).
3. This is a communication intensive activity where each person must be absolutely committed to doing his or her part. People will likely get frustrated and it's common for some blaming to occur.
4. The group will likely throw out many ideas on how to solve this challenge. What it usually comes down to is the entire group focusing, doing their job with the direction of one leader. Groups that have the most difficulty are usually all talking at once.
5. You may have to stop this activity several times mid-stream to help the group process how they are approaching this activity.

### **Debriefing Suggestions**

I've successfully used this activity to help the leadership of an organization realize that having a company mission is one thing and making it a reality is another. I did this by leading the group in a four-hour company vision statement workshop. After everyone was in agreement about the vision statement and understood it I had the group do the Helium Stick activity. Here is the metaphor I shared with the group: The tent pole was the company vision and by successfully lowering it to the ground they achieved their vision. What happened next was eye opening! The tent pole immediately went in the OPPOSITE direction from where they were trying to go – UP! After 50 minutes of trying to lower the tent pole to the ground they succeeded. In the debrief I asked the group if they experienced any parallels to real life while doing this activity. YES they said...everyone had to be committed to the process, blaming and excuses didn't make things better, staying calm and focused was critical, and so on.



## **Variations**

Have people pair up and supply each pair with a very short tent pole (18 inches). Have each pair lower their own pole to the ground so they can experience success. Then have people form groups of 4 and then provide them with a tent pole just long enough for 4 people. Have the groups of 4 work together to lower the pole. Continue making bigger groups until you have everyone working together on one tent pole.

## **History**

I was taught this game by master teambuilder Viva Pizer.

## **Related Quote**

*"Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee."* ~ **Muhammad Ali**



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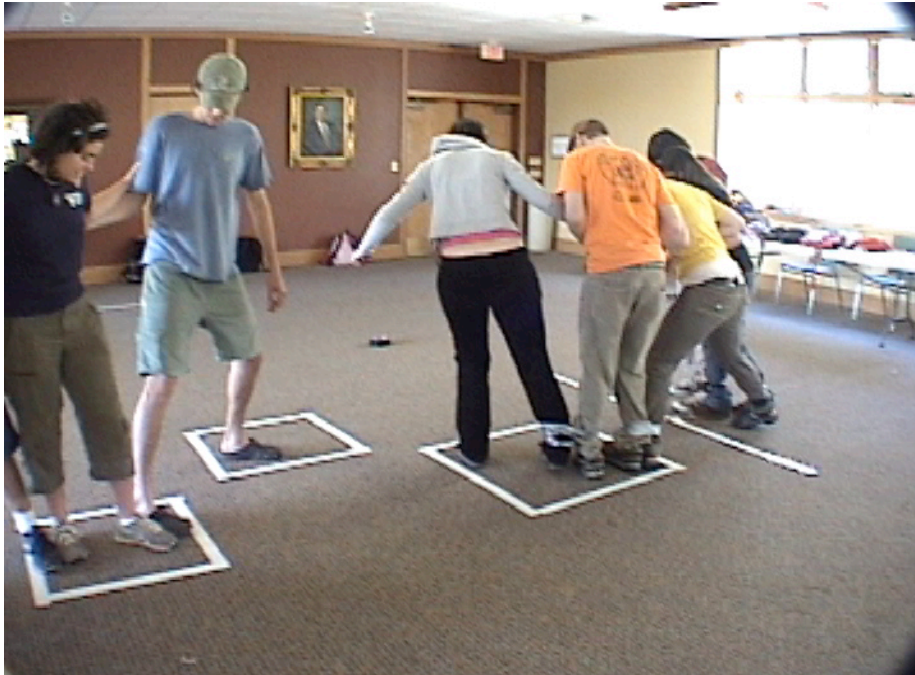
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## Activity # 4

### Caterpillar Traverse



**Group Size:** 4 – 12

**Age Range:** high school – adult

**Intensity:** Mental: easy.....♦.....hard  
Physical: easy.....♦.....hard

**Time:** 20 – 40 minutes (without debrief)

**Space:** minimal.....♦.....lots

**Set Up Time:** 5 minutes

**Amount of Duct Tape Required:** 40 - 50 feet

#### Game Objective

With ankles taped, the team travels as a unit from Point A to Point B.

### **Skills Developed**

Clear Communication, Trust, Planning, Patience, Goal Setting and Achievement, Resource Management

### **Set Up / Preparation**

1. Tape two parallel lines (boundary lines) on the ground 9 - 10 feet apart.
2. In between the parallel lines, tape three squares on the ground with sides of the squares measuring approximately two feet. The squares can be placed in a straight line or in a zig-zag (see photo). The squares should be no more than 12 inches apart from each other and the end squares no more than 12 inches from the parallel lines.
3. Start by asking the group to stand behind one of the boundary lines.
4. Have the team line up shoulder to shoulder (and ankle to ankle). Provide each person with a piece of tape long enough to tape feet (or ankles) together. Suggest participants reach down and tape their right foot (or ankle) to their neighbor's left foot (ankle). NOTE: Do not tape skin. Be aware that duct tape may damage some types of shoes and clothing.

### **Rules**

1. The boundary ropes and hoops may not be moved.
2. The group must remain in a line with ankles tied throughout the activity.
3. Stepping outside of the hoops while traveling to the rescue ship is not permitted.
4. No other equipment may be used.
5. Violation of a rule may result in a penalty. (Example: touches outside of the hoops will require the team to start over)

### **Safety Warning**

1. People with knee, ankle or back injuries should not participate.
2. Ankles should be taped together loosely to help reduce the likelihood of injuries.
3. It's important for the group to move slow so no one gets hurt.

4. Do not allow people to put tape on bare skin because removing the tape will cause injury.

### **Facilitator Notes**

1. This activity is best left for groups that are patient. Do not attempt this activity with a rambunctious hyperactive group.
2. The group movement will remind you of a centipede.
3. This activity emphasizes communication, careful steady movement and team coordination.

### **Debriefing Suggestions**

Prior to starting the activity, have the group identify their current situation (spaceship) they are leaving behind - - metaphorically this ship represents all that they no longer need and/or those things that no longer serve them. Also identify the new destination ("rescue ship") and it's qualities. What do the squares on the ground represent? What does the tape around the ankles represent?

### **Variations**

1. Supply the group with a limited amount of time to complete the task (example: 20 minutes).
2. Require two or three people to close their eyes for part or all of the activity.
3. Divide the team in half. One group starts on one side and one group starts on the other. The groups must switch places before time runs out. Will they work together or against each other?
4. Do this activity in a room that you can turn the lights off so as to make it completely dark (facilitator has a flash light to look for rule violations). Warn the group that you might turn the lights off during the activity. If you do turn the lights off, keep them off for a short time (5 to 10 seconds).

### **History**

This game was taught to me by an intern.

**Interesting Quote**

*"What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls a butterfly." ~*

**Richard Bach**



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