



MagicNails Instructions



Participants often take one look at this activity, and say, "It's impossible!" It's no wonder. The challenge is to balance 17 nails on a single nail and not one of the 17 nails can touch the base of the box or the table. It certainly seems impossible, but with a little experimentation and creativity, it can be done.

MagicNails is the perfect activity for teams that are confronted with seemingly hopeless challenges in the workplace.

How does it work?

Groups of up to 10 people are given a box of 18 nails, which is emptied and turned upside down. One nail is inserted into a hole in the bottom of the box, and the other nails are spread on the table. The group is given 5-8 minutes to find a way to balance all 17 nails on the single nail without them touching the box or the table.

Because this is usually not enough time, the group will think the challenge is impossible. The trainer then asks the group to approach the problem from a new, more creative perspective. If necessary, the trainer can suggest a few ways to reframe the challenge.

Once the group has a new plan, they try again. If they are still unable to succeed, the trainer can intervene to provide a few clues.

What do you need?

People: 1-10

Time for Activity: 5-20 mins (not including debrief)

Materials: 18 nickel-plated nails, 1 wooden case, 1 set of instructions

Workspace: Table for participants to sit around

Instructions

1. To prepare for the activity, take the nails out of the box and turn the box upside down. Insert one nail into the hole in the bottom of the box, and spread the remaining nails out on the table.
2. Explain the goal of the activity and its relevance to your group. For example, you might introduce it as an exercise in creative problem solving or reframing difficult challenges. The more you customize how you introduce, facilitate and debrief the activity for your group's specific needs, the richer the learning experience will be for everyone.
3. Introduce the activity itself. Say something like, *"Your challenge is to balance all 17 loose nails on top of the single nail stuck in the box. The nails may not touch the box or the tabletop, and no other material such as glue or rubber bands may be used."*
4. Observe the activity. Watch the group for 5-8 minutes.
5. If the group has not balanced the nails after 5-8 minutes, have them pause. They will probably be frustrated by now, so it is a good time to encourage a new approach. Ask the group to describe all the different ways they tried to accomplish the task. Note these methods on a flip chart, and ask them to approach the problem from a new, more creative perspective. To help, you might suggest that they change places or use pen and paper to visualize new solutions – anything as long as they do not try their original methods again.
6. Observe the group's second attempt at a solution. If they are still unable to succeed, you can intervene to provide a few clues. Try asking *"Have you thought about building a nail structure away from the box then moving it back to the box and attaching it to the single nail?"*

7. If they are still unsuccessful after you provide a few clues, explain the solution. Say, *"Put one nail on the table. Then lay all the other nails except for one on the base nail in a perpendicular fashion. Place them so the pointed tips alternate left and right, and the nail heads do not touch the base nail, but instead extend a half inch from the base nail. The pattern will resemble a fishbone."* (See Photo 1.)



Photo 1

8. Continue to the next step. Say, *"Now, set the last nail on top the other nails (so that it's perpendicular to them). Place it in the gap formed by the alternating nail heads and make sure it points in the opposite direction of the bottom nail."* (See Photo 2.)

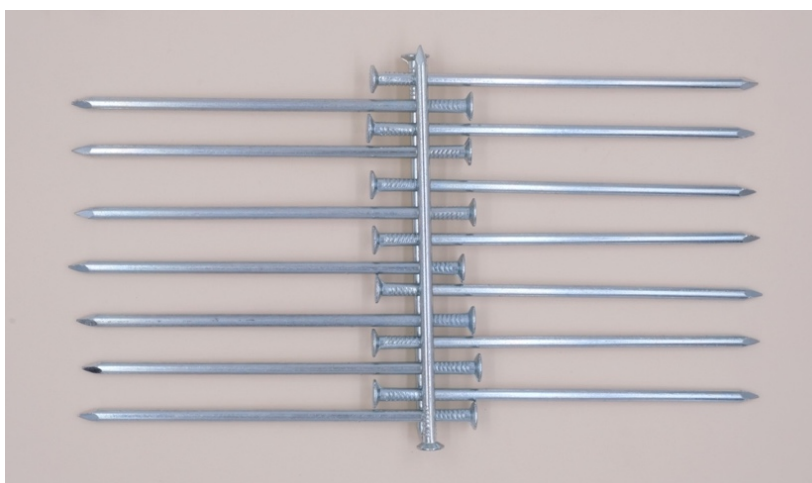


Photo 2

9. *"Then, while pressing the base and top nails together, lift all the nails up off the table. Gradually release the pressure, which will lock the nail heads together and stabilize the new nail structure, then balance the new structure on the nail attached to the box. It should look like the roof of a house. Voila!" (See Photo 3.)*



Photo 3

10. Lead the debrief and record the group's feedback on a flip chart. Here are some sample questions to ask:

- What was the key to this activity?
- What steps were helpful in completing the task?
- Was there something else you could have done to find the best solution possible?
- How did you deal with the complexity of the activity?
- What are the parallels between this exercise and your experience at work?
- How can you put into practice what you learned from this activity?