



Tower of Power Instructions



Tower of Power is an exercise in communication, collaboration and team interaction. Because up to 24 people must work together to stack eight wooden blocks into a single stable tower, it demonstrates much of what we do in organizations – planning, coordination and teamwork. You can use it to address manager-employee communication, group problem solving, and systems thinking.

How does it work?

Standing in a circle, each participant holds one of the strings connected to the metal crane in the center. Eight wooden blocks start upright on the floor and the group must use the crane to lift all the blocks up and place them one on top the other to form a tower. The objective is to build the highest and most stable tower possible.

The task appears easy, but each block is cut at a different angle and stability is harder to maintain as the tower grows taller. Participants must plan effectively and coordinate their actions with excellent communication every step of the way. If they fail, feedback is immediate!

What do you need?

People: (min / optimal / max): 6 / 12 / 24

Time for Activity: 20-25 minutes

Materials: 1 wooden case, 8 wooden blocks, 1 crane with 24 strings

Workspace: 24 x 24 ft

Instructions

1. To prepare for the activity, rope off an area and randomly set the eight wooden blocks on the floor. Make sure the blocks are vertical with the slots near the top. There is one block that can stand on its own when the slot is near the bottom, and because of its stability, it will be the base of the tower. Place this block in the middle of the space.
2. Ask everyone to gather around the blocks, and to take either one or two strings (depending on the number of participants) by grabbing the wooden ball at the end of the strings.
3. Explain the goal of the activity. You can say something general like, *“Your task is to create a tower by stacking all the blocks vertically.”*
4. Outline the rules:
 - You cannot touch the blocks with your hands or feet, only the metal crane.
 - You cannot shorten the length of your string.
 - You cannot enter the roped-off activity area.
5. Observe the activity.
6. Lead the debrief, basing the conversation on your original intent for the activity. Here are some sample questions to ask:
 - During the activity, who played which roles?
 - What part of the activity was the hardest and how did you succeed?
 - What role did communication play? How did managers and employees communicate?
 - Were some members delivering clear directions and/or positive feedback, while others remained silent? Why or why not?

Variations

- Limit the space for the activity so the group has less room to maneuver.
- Attach numbers to the blocks and have the team stack the blocks in numerical order.

- After the activity, divide the group into two and ask everyone to rank their cooperation with each other on a 1-10 scale, with 1 being the worst possible and 10 being the best. Have both small groups discuss their rankings, then present them to the entire group.
- Assign the role of manager to two people. Explain the activity and rules to them privately, then ask them to lead the exercise. They can offer directions during the activity, but not hold any strings. During the debrief, split the group into two smaller groups and ask each new group to discuss whether the manager-employee interaction was successful or not, and to present their findings to the entire group.

Common Sense Caution

This activity requires participants to move up and down, kneel, squat and move around on their feet. Some participants may experience dizziness, nausea, vertigo or headaches, and may fall or stumble as a result. If a participant suffers from balance problems, vertigo, dizziness, lightheadedness or orthopedic problems, he or she should refrain from participating in this activity or sit in a chair while participating.

Participants who are pregnant or suffer from back pain or other orthopedic injuries should consider refraining from participating in this activity.

Choose the room or area for this activity carefully. Participants will move around and could lose awareness of their environment as they focus on the exercise. Choose a room or area free of steps, posts, furniture, debris or other potential trip hazards. The floor should be dry, level and stable.

Tower of Power includes potential choking and strangulation hazards, such as strings and small balls on the end of strings, and should not be used with children. Please limit usage to adults and use with caution.