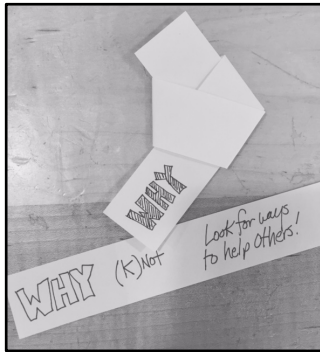## WHY (K)NOT?

I first launched this take-away tool idea on my blog on December 9th, 2012.

FACILITATED OBJECTIVES:

Explore behaviors related to goal setting and commitment. Explore concepts of challenge and success.

NEEDS & NUMBERS:

You'll need to do a little prepping for this one. You can make your "Why (k)Nots" out of paper or short lengths of webbing.

Reflection/Processing

Activity Objective

Each individual in the group, and/or the group as a whole, considers actively pursuing a goal (or goals) using the prompt, "Why (k)Not?" and then writes this goal on a strip of paper or webbing length before "knotting" it.

Paper (k)Nots: I like to use bright colors like yellow or orange so they stand out (but any light color will do). Cutting 1 inch by 8.5 inch strips (using a paper cutter if you have access to one) will get you 11 strips per sheet of paper. Make at least one strip for each participant. The paper Why (k)Nots make nice bookmarks (for those who still read hard-copy books) and can easily be hung up (via pin) on a bulletin board or refrigerator (via magnet). It's also much easier to write out more of your commitment on these paper versions.

Webbing (k)Nots: You'll need some one inch light colored webbing (tubular or flat). I tend to have lots of left-over lengths from different webbing projects I get myself into, but you can easily buy some online by the yard. You want about 10 inches of webbing for each participant in your group. I end up using yellow or pink because it contrasts well with a black permanent marker. However, I've made some blue ones (for school colors) with silver permanent markers and they turned out pretty nice.

The best way to cut webbing is with a hot knife (search "rope cutter" and you'll find the gun-type version and the table-top boxy version – I like the table-top one). The DIY version is a sharp scissors and a lighter to burn the ends of the webbing so they don't unravel. In either case, be very careful with the hot molten webbing ends – they burn. AND, don't inhale the fumes – not good. Cut and burn your webbing in a well-ventilated area!

You will also need some fine to medium point permanent markers. I like to have one for each participant or at least one for every two so there is not a lot of waiting around for a writing implement. (You might not need permanent markers for the paper (k)Nots, gel pens can be fun.)

TIME:

20 to 30 minutes depending on how deep your group takes the discussion.

PROCEDURE:

When I plan to use the Why (k)Not take-aways at the end of a program I like to use the term in my frontloading efforts and also throughout the program. I have yet to actually tell my participants that they will be writing out a Why (k)Not – I keep that a surprise.

Here is one of the simplest ways I present Why (k)Nots: *Now that you are here on this wonderful day, why not plan some things to work on during the program. What do you want to get better at as a group? What did you come here to learn about? Is there something you do as a group that's really good but could be even better? What skill would each of you like to work on while you're here? What might be a lesson for you to remember from this experience?*

Depending on the initial frontloading question(s) I will continue to reinforce them throughout the program with "why not". For example, if the group wanted to get better at communicating clearly I would ask them to consider the behaviors of good communication (often times the opposite of some of the behaviors they are experiencing during their work together). I might say, *If you think that all of you talking at the same time is not working for you, why not…* and then I have them fill in the rest. I might say, *If some individuals are not getting a chance to share their ideas, why not…* they fill in the rest.

I like to get my participants to focus in on specific behaviors, things they can see and hear, when choosing a why not. When choosing behaviors it's easier to measure success because behaviors are more specific – is it happening or not? In contrast, when choosing to work on a concept like good "communication" it's more difficult to gage success since there are so many different behaviors that are part of good communication – which behaviors are leading to better communication?

When we arrive at the end of the program and we're ready to process the experience I can bring up, through questioning, some of the more apparent "why nots" the group (and individual participants) worked on during the program. Then, as a way to transfer and continue some of these learnings I will pull out the untied Why (k)Not paper strips or webbing lengths. Sometimes I will have already written the "Why" on the strips/lengths (see pictures above) and sometimes I'll have my participants do this for themselves – it depends, for me, on the time I have for processing and the program goals of my group.

After handing out the materials to everyone (including pens), I show an example of a tied Why (k)Not. Often times I just hold up the example and ask, *Who can tell me what this is?* It might take a little time but someone always solves the puzzle – especially if I was consistently using the "why not" prompt during the program.

At this point, depending on program objectives, I have proceeded in one of two ways:

Individual Why (k)Not: I ask the participants to consider an individual "why not" – something each one of them will commit to over a certain period of time (e.g., the next month). It could end up being something unrelated to the interactions with the group or something specifically related to the person's interactions in the group. If we are using paper strips more information can be included. If we are using the webbing lengths I ask everyone to consider a word or two that will anchor the commitment.

I will also let my participants know that they do not have to share what they have written with anyone – it can be their own message (commitment) to themselves.

Group Why (k)Not: When it's important that a group take away something for them to focus on as they move forward together I ask them, during the processing session, to choose a behavior they want to continue practicing over the next month (for example) – a behavior everyone agrees will be helpful to the group. In almost every situation I've used Why (k)Nots the behavior comes from something they experienced during the program. After a behavior is chosen I ask each person to write it on their strip/length in a way they will remember the commitment to action – some will use words, some use symbols.

In either case, after writing/drawing out what they want I ask them to "tie in" their commitment to themselves or the group. (You want to take more care when tying up the paper strips – they can easily tear.)

Finally, I always like to leave some time for sharing. Anyone willing can let the group know what they wrote under their knot. I ask that people simply listen without adding comments or suggestions. The people sharing can ask for help with their commitment or just let the group know what they plan to work on over the next month.

Here are a few Why (k)Not commitments made by some high school soccer players (not as behavior specific as I like to get, but the group was enthusiastically engaged in the process – so why stop that!) after a teambuilding program. (I heard from the coach a few weeks later. He said most of the girls tied the webbing "(k)Nots" to their gym bags to remember their commitment to the team.)

- Why not do the best I can?
- Why not get to practice on time?
- Why not watch each other's backs?
- Why not make decisions together?
- Why not share playing time better?
- Why not treat each other like family?

This process is not for every group, but if you have the time and it fits within the program goals of the group, it's a nice connection and transfer of learning from their experience.

SAFETY:

Depending on the type of groups you work with there could be some emotional safety issues that present themselves. Making commitments, and sharing them with others, can be difficult for some people and emotions can surface. If you have a group that might open up more, be sure to allow enough time to work with Why (k)Nots.

FACILITATION:

Most of the facilitation details are included in the Procedures above. However, there is one more important aspect of this activity I want to share. One criterion I have for using this processing activity is having a follow-up in place. In most cases I have established a commitment from the person that set up the teambuilding program with me. He/She agreed to check in with participants over the next month to see how their Why (k)Not were going, and offer support to the participants if needed. (A good example is the soccer coach who was with his team all season.) On a couple of occasions (so far), I was able to do a face-to-face follow-up with my groups after one month. We reconnect with a shorter experiential program that included checking up on the Why (k)Nots.

This is my process. By no means is a follow-up required. You can always trust that any means of getting your participants to think about behaviors that will help them on their journeys is a good thing. I trust my process. You can trust yours. Do what works for you.

OBSERVATIONS/QUESTIONS:
(Since Why (k)Not is a processing activity, I don't tend to process this one. But, if you have a group that you are with on a regular basis, here are some questions to explore.)
- What do you know about goal setting? Have you set goals in the past? How did they work out for you? What gets in the way of accomplishing our goals? What helps us accomplish goals?
- How would you define a commitment? What does it take (behaviors) to keep a commitment? Who is involved in a commitment? How do you feel when you break a commitment to yourself? How does it feel when you break a commitment to someone else?
- What are some of the similarities and differences between a goal and a commitment?
- How would you define a challenge? How do you like to challenge yourself? What sorts of goals are challenging for you? Why do you find them challenging?
- Describe a situation where you thought something was going to be challenging but it wasn't as challenging as you thought it would be. Why do you think that happened for you?
- Describe a situation where you thought something was going to be easy, but it turned out to be really challenging. What were the unexpected factors in that situation?
- What is success for you? How does it feel when you are successful? What are some of the behaviors you have discovered in yourself that lead you to your successes? Which one (behavior) is the most important to you?

VARIATIONS:

- I have had some good feedback about using ribbon for Why (k)Nots. You can find lots of different widths and colors at fabric and craft-type stores.
- I've also heard that you can get very creative and colorful with fabric paint markers and the webbing lengths.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION GRADE LEVEL OUTCOMES:
(www.shapeamerica.org/standards/pe/)
- Middle School: S5.M3 – Recognizes individual challenges and copes in positive ways; S5.M6 – Demonstrates the importance of social interaction by helping and encouraging others…providing support to classmates.
- High School: S4.H2 – Uses communication skills and strategies that promote team/group dynamics.

21st CENTURY LEARNING:
(www.p21.org)
- Creativity and Innovation: Elaborate, refine, analyze and evaluate their own ideas in order to improve.
- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving: Reflect critically on learning experiences and processes.
- Initiative and Self-Direction: Set goals with tangible success criteria.
- Social and Cross-Cultural Skills: Know when it is appropriate to listen and when to speak.
- Productivity and Accountability: Set and meet goals, even in the face of obstacles and competing pressures.

ADDITIONAL IDEAS: