

BOX CARDS

This is a playing card variation of When the Chips Are Down, from the book *Raptor and other Team Building Activities* by Sam Sikes. I shared this activity on my blog Dec., 16th 2014. (Find all of Sam's books at his website: DoingWorks.com)

FACILITATED OBJECTIVES:

Explore behaviors related to helping, communication, and identifying and solving problems that take up time. Explore concepts of delegation, problem solving and critical thinking, and "policing" a task.

NEEDS & NUMBERS:

You will need one standard deck of playing cards and the box the cards are in (I like using the JUMBO sized cards – but smaller cards work just as well) for each group of eight to 24 participants. For the procedure detailed below you will also need four spot markers (e.g., cones, carpet squares, or lengths of webbing) and a timing device.

TIME:

20 to 30 minutes.

PROCEDURE:

First you need to set up a square (all sides being equal) boundary area. Place something at each corner like a cone, carpet square or a length of webbing - the larger the square the more (cardiovascular) movement. Initially, after taking out the cards, the empty card box will be placed down in the center of the square (see Variations for another card box suggestion).

Before trying Level 1 (if you plan to start at the easiest level) divide out and shuffle each suit of the deck - hearts, diamonds, spades, and clubs (you end up with four sets of cards). If you are going to start with Level 2 or 3 you simply need to shuffle all 52 cards before play (don't forget to take out the Jokers).

Level 1:

I call this one, **Straight Suits** and consider this an easy challenge. Divide your big group into four smaller groups (you can call them "teams" if this works within the program goals). Put one small group/team at each corner of the square boundary area (behind the spot markers at the corners) and give someone from each small group/team a full suit of (13) cards - tell everyone they should not look at the face/rank of the cards until you start the activity. Share the activity objective before giving out the final details.

Challenge/Problem Solving

Activity Objective

The group is challenged to line up all the playing cards as fast as possible, by their suit, in sequential order, starting with the Ace of each suit touching the "box" that is in play.

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Activity Objective (here's how I say it): *Each small group/team has a full suit of cards – either hearts, spades, clubs or diamonds. When I say, "GO!" time will start and you are allowed to turn over the card(s) you will be holding. Your objective, as a group, that means all of you, is to place down each suit of cards in ascending order, inside the square boundary area, from Ace to King, as quickly as you can. The Ace of each suit must be placed down first and it must be touching the box [1 point to the box]. The remaining 12 cards of each suit must then be placed down IN ORDER from the Ace – the two must be placed down before the three, the three must be placed down before the four and so on. The King of each suit will be the last card to be placed down by each small group/team. When all 52 cards have been placed down, following the required rules, time will be*

stopped. Before sharing your time I will determine if any foul time needs to be added. Five seconds will be added to your overall time if any card is placed down out of order and if anyone fails to place down at least one card. [Note: Keep in mind, the rules do not say the cards have to be touching each other – only the Ace is required to touch the box.]

Once you've shared the objective and the group (the four small groups/teams) understands the task (up to this point), tell everyone that after two minutes of planning time each participant in every small group/team must have at least one card in his/her possession (still not looking at the face/rank of the cards until "GO" is called). In other words, the person from each small group/team who was given the cards initially will deal them out to his/her group/team-mates. The number of cards each participant receives will be determined by the plan established by each small group/team (or, large group if they plan together). Every participant in the whole group must place down at least one card. And, the card(s) each participant is dealt must be placed down by this person - cards cannot be given away to another person in the group once "GO" is called.

Give the group their two minutes to plan and ask questions. Remember, no one is allowed to look at the face/rank of his/her card(s) until the "GO" is called.

Okay, after the two minutes of planning, game on! "Ready? GO!" After all the cards are placed stop the time. Don't forget to assess any fouls (if you saw them or if the group calls their own foul(s)), and then share the time for the round.

You can play a few rounds at this level if it proves to be a good challenge for the group. Simply collect the cards of each suit, shuffle them up and hand a suit to each small group/team – maybe each small group/team keeps the same suit, maybe they get a different suit. The hope is that times will improve as the small groups/teams get better at the process they've developed (but this is not always the case). And, if small groups/teams share ideas with each other wouldn't that be cool!

This first level of Box Cards can be a stand-alone activity – moving on to another initiative all together – or you could move to one of the more challenging levels (2 & 3) of Box Cards.

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Level 2:

I call this one, **Mixed Up** and consider it a moderate challenge. Mixed Up plays the same as Straight Suits but the start is a little different. I explain the activity objective and the other details before handing out any cards. Instead of giving each small group/team the same suit of 13 cards, I shuffle the entire deck together. Then, after I give out all the directions and the small groups/teams are planning their strategy, I give each small group/team 13 random cards off the top of the deck – remember, no one can look at the faces/ranks of the cards until you say “GO!”.

As in Straight Suits every participant in each small group/team must have at least one card in hand before play can begin. At this level it is pretty obvious that the small groups/teams will need to communicate with each other in order to work out the task details (however, I have seen groups just go for it on the first round to see what happens - then they usually plan prior to additional attempts).

When the two minutes of planning are over you can say “GO!” Cards are placed down with the same rules as Level 1. Aces need to be touching the box and the rest of the cards must be placed down in sequential order from each Ace – the twos must be placed down before the threes, the threes must be placed down before the fours and so on. The King of each suit will be the last card to be placed down by each small group/team.

At Level 2 my facilitated objective is to get everyone to work together on solving the task. Since participants are not allowed to give away any cards they are dealt, they will need to “work around” each other to get all the cards lined up. Playing a few rounds at this level usually produces lower times and a feeling of group success. (But, not always. Be ready to discuss the reasons for longer times – What behaviors are keeping the group from a better time?)

Level 3:

I call this one **Mixed Up In the Dark** and consider it a more difficult challenge (being unsighted during this one also makes it a “trust-building” activity for some programmers). It plays the same as Mixed Up but with an un-sighted challenge. When participants enter into the square boundary area they must close their eyes (or cover their eyes with a blindfold if it's okay to use them with your group) until they place a card (or cards) down. Participants from outside the square boundary area will be (safely) guiding the unsighted participants inside the boundary area until cards are placed.

After placing a card down the participant is allowed to open his/her eyes in order to exit the boundary area – if that is in the plans. (I've found sighted exits to be safer and it does speed things up a bit). If the plan is to stay in the boundary area to place more cards eyes must stay closed (or covered). Note: So far, based on time constraints, I've only used this version with smaller groups of 12 to 14 players working on trust-related objectives.

Playing just like Mixed Up, stop the clock when all the cards have been placed, assess any fouls, and share the overall time for the round. Play a few rounds in hopes of better times and a better group process.

SAFETY:

For me the first two levels have been very safe since the action is not very dynamic (unless the boundary area is really big). So, if you decide to make the boundaries really big, for more movement, be sure to make your group aware of collision issues. (See Variations for a good, safer, cardio option with bigger boundaries.)

If you go for Level 3, teach your participants the “bumpers up” position – at least one hand up in front of them so they can detect anyone close by and avoid the head-butts. In my experience, at each level, head butting can occur when too many people are near the ground placing cards. Be sure to use your safety cues (e.g., Watch out for others!) during play.

FACILITATION:

The main facilitation aspect of this activity for me is monitoring fouls and keeping the time. I always encourage participants to have the integrity to monitor their own fouls, but due to the face-paced nature of Box Cards, fouls (especially setting cards down in order) often go unnoticed. So, one of the facilitated objectives of this activity, for me, has been “policing” a task. I will be the judge/official over the rules and assess foul penalties. There is a lot to talk about around this concept.

As for keeping time, for some groups I will do the timing, for others I will let the group assign the role to someone – it all depends on the objectives of the group. If the group comes in wanting to work on the behaviors of task management I will be asking the group about roles and responsibilities during tasks – How do they know what roles are involved in a task and who gets assigned to them? So, letting group members fill all the roles of a task gives us more to talk about.

Another aspect of facilitating here is equipment management. For some groups I will go around to collect and shuffle the playing cards after each round while the small groups/teams are in their planning session. If I have more time for the activity I will have someone from each group collect up the cards for me and then shuffle them up a bit before I collect the sets. After that I will hand out the sets/suits in random order around the groups/teams.

OBSERVATIONS/QUESTIONS:

- Think back on the activity. How did you help someone in your group? How did someone help you? Did anyone ask for help? Why did you ask? Was there a time during the activity where you might have needed help but did not ask for it? Why do you think that happened? Is asking for help a good thing or a bad thing? Why do you think so?
- How would you describe the way you communicated with each other during this level of the activity? Did it change over time? Why did it change? Why didn't it change? How would you describe good communication? How would you like to communicate

with each other during the next level of the activity – what do you want to make sure you do?

- What problems did you encounter during the activity? Which of these problems took a lot of time? Were you able to solve any of these “time” problems? How did they get solved? Which time problems did not get solved? Why do you think they didn’t get solved? What does it take to solve a problem – What do you have to do and say?
- Who knows what delegation is? How would you describe it? When you are faced with a task or challenge who delegates task roles and responsibilities? Did any delegation take place during the activity? What did it look like? What did it sound like? How would you like the delegation of responsibilities to look in the future?
- What is involved in “critical thinking?” What aspects of the critical thinking process did you use during this last activity? How did they work for you? Were the aspects you used helpful? Which aspects were missing from your process? Did you need them? If so, how would they have helped your process? How can we remember the aspects of critical thinking in the future? How might critical thinking be useful to you in the future?
- Who knows what “policing” means? What parts of your lives right now are being policed? How do you feel about this policing? What policing do you think is good for you? What policing do you believe you can live without? What would it be like for you if policing did not exist in your life? What if we could all just do whatever we wanted? What would that be like? What is the best way to handle “over policing?” What can you do about it? Are you policing anyone in your life right now? How is that going for you? Do you believe the policing is necessary? Do the people you are policing think it’s necessary? Do you want to change anything about your policing behaviors? When do you want to start?

VARIATIONS:

- If using playing cards is an issue for any group you work with you can create numbered index cards. Make four sets of index cards. For each set use a different colored marker to number the cards one through 13 (or even 20 – more cards, more work to manage). Instead of using a box for the starting point of the sequences, use a spot marker (e.g., a poly spot).
- If you have a smaller group (e.g., 12 participants) you could use only three suits of the deck and use a triangle shape for the boundary area.
- The card box does not have to stay in the center of the boundary area. Maybe after the first or second rounds at any one level, pick up the box when the small groups/teams are planning, and place it somewhere else in the area. This change might have some interesting discussion points – How did you react to the change of the box being in a different place?
- Here’s a nice **cardiovascular option** that keeps game-play a little safer. Playing at Levels 1 & 2 make the boundaries nice and big (appropriate to the age and fitness level of your group). Allow one participant from each corner area to run into the boundary area at a time to place one of his/her cards. Once this player places his/her card and starts to run back to his/her corner the next player can start running in to place his/her card (or, if you have concerns about collisions here, the next player

cannot run into the boundary area until the previous player is out of the boundary area). For this cardio variation require that the cards in each set/suit touch each other in sequence. Stop the time when all cards are placed.

- Be careful with this idea – use it when the group objectives fit the challenge (or, deception as one group put it). On a couple of occasions (so far), I have taken one random card out of each suit (secretly) before handing out the sets to each small group/team before the third round of Level 2 (could be done during Level 1 as well). My facilitated objectives around this version relate to resource management and problem solving – Will small groups/teams take inventory (count) of the cards they receive and how will they manage (problem solve) what's missing. Both experiences lead to meaningful conversations. (Be ready for the emotions that could surface.)

PHYSICAL EDUCATION GRADE LEVEL OUTCOMES:

(www.shapeamerica.org/standards/pe/)

- Middle School: S4.M1 – Exhibits responsible social behaviors; S4.M3 – Provides encouragement and feedback without prompting (encourages group effort); S4.M5 – Cooperates and problem-solves with a small group of classmates.
- High School: S4.H2 – Exhibits proper respect for others while engaging in physical activity (especially when participating in the cardiovascular option variation); S4.H3 – Uses communication skills and strategies that promote team/group dynamics; S4.H4 – Accepts other's ideas.

21st CENTURY LEARNING:

(www.p21.org)

- Creativity and Innovation: Develop, implement and communicate new ideas effectively; Be open and responsive to new and diverse perspectives.
- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving: Analyze how parts of a whole interact with each other (Level 2) to produce overall outcomes; Reflect critically on learning experiences.
- Communication and Collaboration: Articulate thoughts and ideas effectively; Assume shared responsibility for collaborative work (Level 2 & 3).
- Flexibility and Adaptability: Deal positively with setbacks.
- Initiative and Self-Direction: Reflect critically on past experiences in order to inform future progress (critical thinking).
- Social and Cross-Cultural Skills: Conduct themselves in a respectful manner.
- Leadership and Responsibility: Act responsibly with the interest of the larger community in mind.

ADDITIONAL IDEAS: