

## **CONTACT POSITIONS**

I first wrote about this variation of the Don't Touch Me (Rohnke & Butler, *Quicksilver*) at my FUNdoing blog on September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015. I learned this symantical version from my awesome friends at Group Dynamix in Carrollton Texas. (Fantastic group outings & team building programs: [groupdynamix.com](http://groupdynamix.com)) I've also seen my friend Tom Leahy run a version very similar to this one.

### **Cooperation/Communication**

#### Activity Objective

In this timed activity, each person in the group is asked to accomplish the same three tasks as quickly as possible.

## **FACILITATED OBJECTIVES:**

Explore behaviors related to effective communication, generating ideas and leadership.  
Explore concepts of innovation, success, motivation and phantom rules.

## **NEEDS & NUMBERS:**

I've facilitated this activity using chairs, game spots, and without chairs or spots (as a no-prop activity) – use whatever resources fit your context. You will also need one “contact” object. This could be a cone, a game spot, a round object (e.g., a dodge ball), a piece of paper, or a stuffed animal. A timing device is also needed. I've seen Contact Positions work with up to 50 participants. However, I think it flows the best with 10 to 30 players.

## **TIME:**

20 to 30 minutes.

## **PROCEDURE:**

Doing my diligence, I looked up the original text for “Don't Touch Me” offered by Karl Rohnke. After circling up his group, Karl asks everyone to “eyeball someone at the far side of the circle” and call this person's name to be sure of the pairing. Then Karl places a hula-hoop [or a cone, or game spot, or...] down near the center of the circle.

To play, Karl continues, “ask the pairs - the players who eyeballed each other - to change sides of the circle; i.e., to reverse positions, and while making this change, make physical contact (one foot's OK) with the interior of the hula-hoop” [or make physical contact with the cone/spot if you don't use a hula-hoop].

During the action, “if any physical contact is made between players a one-second penalty will be enforced - added to the overall time.” To help remind participants of this dilemma, Karl asks everyone to YELL “Don't Touch Me!” while making their way to their new side of the circle. Timing starts when the timer says, “GO” (the facilitator or participant as timer) and ends when all the parameters have been met. Again, this is the original version of, what Karl calls, Don't Touch Me.

As adventure educators, we know that simple changes to an activity can create a brand new experience. So, how does this look? Below are the three “tasks” each participant is asked to accomplish for Contact Positions once the time starts. When everyone accomplishes the tasks the time will stop. The subtle changes in this version, in my opinion, take Don’t Touch Me to the next level of challenge.

For Contact Positions, like Karl, I ask my groups to form a circle before I share the directions. As noted above, if I have chairs I might have my participants sitting in chairs, or I might have everyone standing on a game spot, or they might just be standing in a circle without spots. You will need to decide what “distractions” you want to give your group (because chairs and spots often just get in the way of success – groups create the phantom rule that the chairs or spots are *required* during the task, when, in fact, they are not). Once my group is in a circle formation I would say something like...

*For this challenge, everyone is required to accomplish the same three tasks – which I will share in a moment. You will have some time together [e.g., five minutes] to plan for the challenge. Steve [someone in the group] will tell me when you are ready for me to start the time. When I say GO, time will start. Then, after all of you have completed each of the three tasks, Susan [someone in the group] will tell me to stop the time. Before I share the time with you I will ask if anyone committed a foul – I will share what a foul is in a moment. Each foul will add one second to your overall time. You will have a number of opportunities to improve upon your time if you believe you can do better. Any questions so far? Okay. Here are the three tasks you all need to accomplish and the one foul you want to avoid:*

[Be sure you have your “contact” object ready to show the group and set down near the center of the circle before you read the tasks and foul.]

### **Contact Positions Tasks**

1. Everyone is required to make contact with the object in the center of the circle.
2. Everyone is required to change positions with someone across from them.
3. Everyone must say, "Outta My Way" between when the time starts and when it stops.

**FOUL:** If any physical contact is made between participants after the time starts, a one-second time penalty will be added to the overall time for every person-to-person contact.

(NOTE: You could print and cut out the text box above and hand it to your group so they can be in charge of the task requirements – they don’t have to ask you for directions.)

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Following the original version/rules of Don't Touch Me, in my experience, a group of 30 participants can get down to around 10 seconds. Following the Contact Positions requirements I have timed group members accomplishing all the tasks in under two seconds. When you consider how the group can define the words "contact" and "positions" some innovation can take place. (See Facilitation below for more on this thought.)

Here are some additional considerations. Eric, my friend and colleague from Group Dynamix, does a bit more "leading" (or frontloading) when he presents this one. Eric goes into the middle of the circle and picks up the object in question (usually a cone) while reciting the first parameter – "...make contact with..." He then makes fluid pointing motions with his arms when he shares, "...switch positions with..." (which participants might interpret as switching *sides* of the circle with someone).

Eric's rationale for this facilitation method is to purposefully create a mental model that may lock people into some phantom rules - one of the facilitated objectives he likes to discuss with his groups. Jennifer (another friend and colleague from Group Dynamix), does not add the extra non-verbals. She delivers all the directions while standing in (not inside) the circle with her group. You will need to decide what approach to use with your own groups based on the objectives they are working towards.

### **SAFETY:**

Contact Positions is a fairly safe activity. So far, all the groups I've worked with on this one have chosen to initially move across their circle formation (since I don't let them go "around" the circle), so there is a little risk – however, they don't move too fast. Also, it's important to note that I don't have my groups in a very big circle to start with – an elbow-to-elbow circle is what I ask them to form. If you decide to let your group start off in a larger circle the speed of the crossing can increase. Make sure you let your group know the dangers.

### **FACILITATION:**

As with any experiential activity, be open to creative ways of solving the tasks. Staying in a circle is not required – this was never stated. Touching the object is not required, but is very often assumed at first. You can make contact with the object without touching it (e.g., eye contact). And switching "places" with a partner is not required. However, most of the groups I've worked with change to word positions with places right away. As long as each of the tasks are completed by each participant in the group you can call it acceptable.

With a lot of the activities I present I like to provide a variety of roles within the task. With more roles to fulfill I find my groups have more to talk about. If I time the group I ask for someone to tell me when the group is ready for me to say, "GO." And, then someone different must tell me when to stop the time. More often than not, the group will start before I say, "GO" and the person responsible for telling me to stop forgets. All good stuff to talk about!)

Finally, in every case I've used this activity (I can't recall a group making the shift themselves), after the group has experienced a few attempts with improved times (seconds

in the double digits), the group will be asked, “What’s the best time you’ve seen?” Or, if they don’t ask, I will say, “Are you interested in knowing the best time I’ve seen?” (I program this activity when innovation/out of the box thinking is one of the group’s objectives.) When they find out that I’ve seen times less than two seconds it forces them to start redefining the parameters of the tasks (i.e., innovating). At this point I’m careful not to give anything away while they sort out the new plan of attack. I will also have to decide how long to let the group work on the challenge. Some groups will do really well redefining just one of the tasks, others will redefine a couple to get even faster. In the end, my groups have always recorded better times over several attempts, so success (based on time) is easy to accomplish and discuss.

NOTE: My purpose for sharing the “under two seconds” timeframe is not about minimizing the success of the group, but pushing them to think differently about their process. As educators, there are times when we know our participants/students can do better – so, we encourage them in that direction when it’s appropriate (right?).

### **OBSERVATIONS/QUESTIONS:**

- What did you notice about the way you communicated with each other? What did you like about the way you communicated with each other? What didn’t you like? Did you all get the time you needed to communicate with each other? What prevented you from communicating what you wanted? In relation to communication, what will you want to remember?
- How many of you had an idea related to solving the challenge? How many of you were able to share your idea? What factors helped you share your idea? If you didn’t (get to) share your idea, what prevented you from sharing? If you have an idea in the future, that you believe will help the group, how will you share your idea? What do you need from the group to help you feel more comfortable sharing your ideas?
- Did you notice a leader/any leaders in the group? What did they do to help the group? What did they do to help you specifically during the challenge? What do you look for in a leader - what behaviors do you like to see and hear from a leader (things that would encourage you to follow this leader)? Do you think you’re a leader? What do you do and say that make you a leader?
- Who can define innovation? Was there any innovation going on during the last activity? What did it look like? Who do you believe is an innovative person? What makes them innovative? Have you ever been innovative? Tell us about it. What would allow us to be more innovative as a group? Do you think it’s important to be innovative? Why?
- How did we measure success for the last activity? With that in mind, were you successful as a group? What part did you have in that success? What helped lead you to your success? What would be another way to measure success for the last activity? How do you measure success in the different parts of your life? Who sets those measures of success for you? How would you change those measures if you could? What is it like for you when you’re not successful? In other words, how does failure impact your life? What are the ways we can look at failure? How will we use this information as we move forward together?

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- What motivated you during the last activity? If you found yourself unmotivated, why do you think that was happening? Where does motivation come from? What motivates you in your everyday life? What can you do when you find yourself unmotivated about something you need to get done? Anyone have any motivation tricks they can share?
- Does anyone know what a phantom rule is? How would you define a phantom rule? Where do phantom rules come from? How do we discover phantom rules? How do phantom rules impact a task/project/challenge? What can we do as a group to prevent phantom rules? How can we be PR Busters?

## **VARIATIONS:**

- So far I've only done this once (and plan to try it again with the right groups) with everyone sitting in a circle of chairs. Ask your participants to complete the required tasks while wearing blindfolds (or, closing their eyes). With this version there is no person-to-person physical contact foul. When your groups are working on "problem-solving" (or, using the process of critical thinking), moving without site takes a lot of time (it's a problem). So, can the tasks be completed without moving? Well, yes.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION GRADE LEVEL OUTCOMES:**

([www.shapeamerica.org/standards/pe/](http://www.shapeamerica.org/standards/pe/))

- Middle School: S4.M1 – Exhibits responsible social behaviors; S4.M5 – Problem-solves with a small group of classmates.
- High School: S4.H4 – Solves problems and thinks critically; S4.H4 – Accepts other's ideas.

## **21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY LEARNING:**

([www.p21.org](http://www.p21.org))

- Creativity and Innovation: Elaborates, refines, analyzes and evaluates their own ideas in order to improve; Demonstrates originality and inventiveness.
- Communication and Collaboration: Exercises flexibility and willingness to be helpful.
- Social and Cross-Cultural Skills: Conducts themselves in a respectful manner.
- Productivity and Accountability: Set and meet goals.
- Leadership and Responsibility: Use problem-solving skills to influence and guide others toward a goal.

## **ADDITIONAL IDEAS:**