

FLIP FLOP TOWER

Activity Objective: Build the tallest freestanding cup tower in 60 seconds using the resources provided.

Facilitated Objectives:

1. Planning and implementation of a plan.
2. Resource management and recognizing resources.
3. Risk taking.
4. Failure and success.
5. The impact of expectations and goals.

Needs Per Group

- 36 cups
- A solid building surface (e.g., a tile floor)

The facilitator will also need a timing device and a nice loud bell or horn to signal the end of the 60 seconds (a loud voice works well too).

NOTE: A wind-free environment is also a good idea if you are not working on objectives like frustration or anger management!

Numbers: Two to five players in a group. You can have up to 20 (or more) of these small groups playing at the same time if you have enough cups.

Time: 15 to 20 minutes for three rounds of play.

Procedure: We've been using Flip Flop Tower at the beginning of a program as an energizing team-builder with a little tension. It doesn't take long to present and play, the directions are simple, and it provides a nice starting point to talk about the types of activities a group will be going through during their program.

Now, this doesn't mean you can't put this activity anywhere within a program. With the proper frame/frontload you can make it fit within your groups objectives.



No matter the size of your overall group (so far our biggest group has been 50), divide them up into small groups of two to five players. Have a stack of 36 cups for every small group ready to go. We have these off to the side of the playing area. Ask each small group to find some space in the activity area to build their tower and then send someone from their group to pick up a stack of cups and bring them to their building area. After everyone is settled into their spots, provide the challenge and the rules.

Challenge: You have 60 seconds to build the tallest cup tower you can following the rules provided.

Rules for Building:

- The tower you build must be free-standing - cups can only touch each other and the building surface.
- Only one cup can be added to the tower structure at a time - nested cups are not allowed in the structure. (Note: Each group is building only one tower structure.)
- Cups can be orientated either open end up or open end down.
- Each person in the group must add one cup to the tower structure before anyone adds a second cup to the structure. Then, everyone must add a second cup to the structure before anyone can add a third, and so on until the time is up. (Note: The order of turns can change during each round of turns.)
- When the horn blows (whistle sounds or "STOP" is called), all hands must be off of your tower structure. What remains standing will be counted for your score.

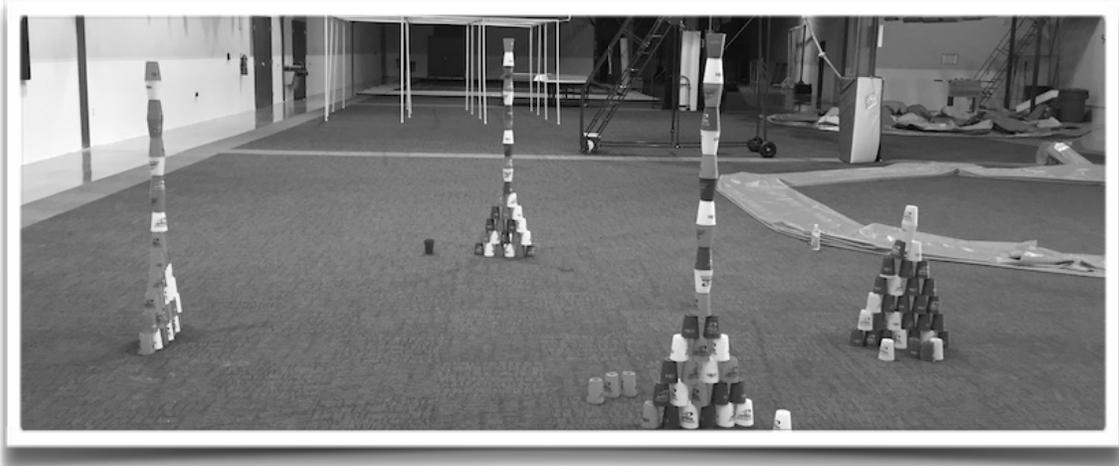
Scoring:

Tower structures are scored by the number of rows that are left standing after 60 seconds. Rows can consist of one or more individual cups. (Note: The score for the cup tower in the picture above is 16 - pretty good for 60 seconds.)

Once all the groups understand the challenge we let them know they will have three attempts to build the tallest tower possible. Before the first building attempt, all groups are given **three minutes to plan and practice**.

Here's something else we tell everyone before each building attempt:

The first row of cups in your structure (the one's touching the building surface) can be set up and ready to go before time starts. The rest of your cups can either be in your hands, set down on the ground, or a combination of both.



After questions are answered in order to clear up any confusion about the directions, the three minutes of planning begins (before the first build). After three minutes we tell the groups to set down the first row of their structure. When all groups are ready, “GO” is called and time begins.

We like to give the groups 15-second updates and a countdown along the way - “45 seconds remain...30 seconds, 15 seconds, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.” Errrrr.

After the 60-second signal to stop, all players must have their hands off of their cup tower structure. After the dust settles (cups have fallen), have the groups count the number of rows still standing. This is their score for the first attempt - tell the groups to remember their score.

At this point, before the second build, you could take some time to find out what was working within the groups and what wasn't. Also, we like to ask everyone to look around the area to see what the other structures look like. (The idea being to suggest a collaborative mindset - can they learn from each other.)

When it's time to move on, give everyone **two minutes to plan and practice** for the second build attempt. Encourage the groups to try and "better their score." (See Variations below for the “Expectation” version of Flip Flop Tower.) After the two minutes groups follow the same process as the first round.

After the second build, each group makes a note of their score - better or worse. Again, you can take some time to discuss the dynamics of the second build or move on.

Give all the groups **one minute to plan and practice** before the third and final round. Have them note their score for the third round. After all three attempts

take some time to focus on one or more of the questions (suggestions) below based on your group's objectives for their program.

Safety: At this time we find Flip Flop Tower to be a physically safe activity to lead. Now, be aware that this one can be very frustrating for some people triggered by the collapse of cups (“All that hard work!”), and certain group dynamics. Keep an eye out and an ear open for any opportunities to discuss what is coming up emotionally for the players.

Facilitation: Flip Flop Tower is very group-centered - once they know what is expected they are free to work on their own. We like to mingle around the playing area “ease dropping” a little to pick up some of the dynamics. Since there are always a number of small groups working at the same time we will not pick up everything, but it’s good to be seen. Walking around also gives the groups the opportunity to ask more questions if needed.

After each building round it will be up to you to decide (based on the objectives of the group) if you spend some time talking about the previous round (or rounds), or simply push them on to the next build. All the reflection can be saved for the end to get the overall experience of three builds, one right after the other. It’s pretty amazing how much we’ve pulled from this “simple” activity - they’re just building a cup tower after all!!

There has been one particular dynamic we have encountered so far that is worth mentioning - combining resources (groups coming together and sharing cups). We do not discourage this. However, the rules stay the same. Particularly the “only one cup can be added to the structure at a time” rule. Most groups realize, after just one build (or even before), that more resources doesn’t always mean a better outcome. It’s a very “experiential” moment!

Observations/Questions:

1. Planning and implementation of a plan:
 - A. What do you remember about your first three minute planning session? What did it sound like? Where did ideas come from? Did everyone contribute to the discussion?
 - B. Who had ideas for the plan? Did you all agree, disagree or were some of you on both sides?
 - C. How did you decide on what to do for your build? In other words, how did you decide on the plan?

- D. Once you got into your first build, did you stick to the plan? Did anything change? If so, why did the plan change?
 - E. How did the planning go for the second and third rounds? Were they different from the first round? How so?
 - F. Where did you get ideas for the second and third rounds?
 - G. How did your experience influence your plans for future builds?
 - H. How did the experience of others influence your plans for future builds?
2. Resource management and recognizing resources:
- A. What were your resources during the activity?
 - B. Are there any other possible resources around that you might have missed?
 - C. Was I a resource? How could I have been a resource?
 - D. Did you use your resources to the best of your ability? What could have been better?
 - E. If you could add any other resource to the activity, what would it be? How would this resource be useful to you?
 - F. Did any of you collaborate during the activity? In what ways?
 - G. What did you learn from your collaborative efforts?
3. Risk taking:
- A. What “risks” presented themselves during the activity?
 - B. How did you manage the risks that you identified?
 - C. Was anyone in the group unwilling to take on any of the risks during the activity? What were you thinking about when considering any of the risks?
 - D. Who was willing to take on any of the risks involved? What were you thinking about when considering any of these risks?
 - E. Looking back on the activity are there any other facets of the process that could be perceived as risky? Explain what you think about that.
 - F. How do we learn about “risky” things? How do we learn how to define risky things? How do we decide what risks to take?
4. Failure and success:
- A. How do you define success? Are there other ways to define success?
 - B. What would you identify as successes during the activity?
 - C. What would you identify as failures during the activity?
 - D. What can you remember learning from your successes?
 - E. What do you remember learning from your failures?
 - F. How did you “feel” when there was a failure (mainly, when the cups fell)?

- G. What did you think about after a failure and then what did you do after the failure?
- H. Why do you think we see, or interpret failures as bad things? What makes them bad?
- I. What are some others ways to define failure?
5. The impact of expectations and goals (if expectations were set):
- A. How did the expectation(s) set for you influence your plan?
 - B. How did the expectation(s) set for you influence your performance?
 - C. Share your thoughts about people setting expectations for you versus you setting expectations for yourself?
 - D. What's the difference between expectations and goals? Is there a difference? If so, what's different?
 - E. What was it like for you when you fell short of the expectation?
 - F. What was it like for you when the expectations were set even higher (and you didn't even meet the last expectation)?
 - G. What do we know for sure about expectations?

Variations:

- Expectations: With some of the groups we work with, we set up expectations for each build. Typically, in our experience, 17 rows tends to be the average build in 60 seconds for most adult groups. With youth groups, 15 rows is about average. So, with this in mind, we might tell an adult group that we expect them to build a structure 15 levels high for the first round. Depending on how they do, we might change the expectation to 16 for the second round, and then 17 for the third round. If some groups meet, or beat, the expectation requirement, we specifically add one row to what they just did, and expect them to meet it - even if it is “different” from the other groups. There are great discussion points around meeting expectations (or goals), and why some people might be held to different expectations than the rest of the group.
- Some groups might exceed their reach during the build and will ask for (or just go grab) a chair to stand on. If you are going to allow this (which is a nice example of knowing your available resources), be sure there is at least one spotter, with hands up, keeping an eye on the player on the chair.
- If you have access to Speed Stacks® cups (e.g., school physical education programs might have a number of sets), they work well for Flip Flop Tower (and other Cup It Up activities) .

