Building Castles in the Air

OVERVIEW: Many people will say that their most rewarding team experiences resulted from some sort of challenge. You have probably heard the stories of mediocre groups that responded to a challenge with heroic success. The challenge itself was the motivating factor. So for ongoing teams, periodic stimulation in the form of a worthy challenge is one method of maintaining motivation.

Discussion Guidelines: Here's the Scoop:

- Divide the group into teams of 3-6 people each.
- Provide each team with a deck of playing cards.
- To conduct the “castles” activity with the group, verbally take them through each of the steps listed below.

Step 1) “Using one deck of cards per team and no other materials, build – from the tabletop up – the tallest freestanding card castle you can. I’ll award a prize for the tallest castle. You have four minutes. Begin!”

Step 2) Announce when time is up, measure each card castle, and award a prize to the team with the tallest castle.

Step 3) Ask the group, “If I gave you a few minutes to discuss a strategy with your team members, do you think you could achieve measurably better results using a new deck of cards?”

Materials Needed:

1) Two packs of different color playing cards per team
2) One measuring tape
3) Small prizes for winning teams
Discussion Guidelines (Continued):

Step 4) “I’m going to give you three minutes to discuss how you can achieve a better outcome in Round Two using a new deck. During your planning session, please set a height goal and do not touch any of the cards. At the conclusion of the planning session, you will be required to take down your first castle. You have three minutes. Begin!”

Step 5) Announce when time is up and ask them to take down their first castle. Distribute a second deck of cards to each group. It’s best for this deck to be a different color than the first deck.

Step 6) “Using only the new deck of cards, you have four minutes to build the tallest castle and strive for the height goal you set. Begin!”

Step 7) Announce when time is up, measure each card castle, and award a prize to the team with the tallest castle.

Debriefing & Discussion:

- How many teams did better the second time around?
- What made that possible?
- What was the impact of more planning time?
- How did setting a specific goal help?
- Did you consider combining resources and joining the teams together? Why/Why not?
- How does this activity relate to our team and our workplace?

Teams learn from their successes and failures...and they learn best together. Improved planning, communication, and delegation can motivate a team to make even the most difficult challenge achievable.

Adapted from 12 Simple Do-it-Yourself Team Building Games and Icebreakers by David Greenberg