

BOBSLED TEAM

OBJECTIVE: To build teamwork and communication

- **Group Size** - Any, split into teams of four
- **Materials** - none
- **Time** - 10 minutes

PROCEDURE

In the world of athletic competition, few sports can surpass the teamwork required in bobsled team competition. The following activity will explore that level of teamwork and collaboration and incorporate elements of communication, coaching, and mentoring, adapting to change, and community building, all in a high-energy environment. And best of all, this activity doesn't require any props, making it a perfect energizer and team-building activity for any size group.

To begin this activity, invite your audience members to create bobsled teams of four people. Teams with three or five members are fine, but four people is optimal.

A gold-medal-winning bobsled team is not only great at teamwork but also in adapting to changing conditions. For this reason, coaches (facilitators) teach their bobsledders the following commands:

- **Change:** The participant (athlete) in the first position moves to the last position.
- **Switch:** The participants in positions two and three change places.
- **Rotate:** Every person individually turns 180 degrees and faces the opposite direction.

For the first level of competition in this activity, each bobsled team will be asked to complete an increasingly difficult series of commands: "Change. Rotate-Switch. Switch-Change-Switch. Change-Change-Change. Rotate-Switch-Change."

At this point, you are sure to observe some general confusion and occasionally some absolute chaos among your bobsled teams. If you ask which teams believe they are delivering championship-level performance, you might get a few raised hands. For the rest of the group, a bit more practice is probably warranted before more competition.

At this point, invite each of your teams to practice independently and help each other be successful. Have them practice the change, switch, and rotate commands on their own, but be prepared to deliver a higher level of performance for the next round of competition. This independent practice time is one of the best features of this activity and will be revisited during the reviewing process at the completion of the activity.

For the second level of competition, increase the energy of the activity by inviting each group to turn to their teammates and say, "We can do this!"

Next, deliver a series of challenging commands to your audience: "Rotate-Change-Switch. Change-Change-Rotate-Change. Switch-Change-Switch-Rotate. Switch-Change-Rotate-Switch-Change." At this point, some of your teams are likely to be feeling pretty good. They've worked hard, practiced well, and are ready for the finals.

The final level of competition is not only the most challenging, but it involves one additional command. If the coach (facilitator) yells the phrase by "Loose caboose!" everyone scatters from their present team and quickly collects three other people to form a new bobsled team of four people. The transitional chaos caused by this command is well worth the effort. By forming new teams, participants quickly learn how to respond to change and perform at their highest level, even with new teammates.

After informing teams of this new command, invite them to turn to their present teammates and say, "I think we can do this!" Ready? Here we go! Change-Change-Rotate-Switch. Switch-Rotate-Change-Rotate. Loose caboose! Change-Switch-Change-Rotate. Rotate-Switch-Rotate-Change. Loose caboose!"

As a debriefing discussion, ask each group what they would need to do so that they could perform any of these commands flawlessly. It is also a great idea to ask participants what happened in their group when someone made a mistake. Did the other members of the group perhaps give them a push in the right direction? A helpful push in the right direction from a colleague is a great opportunity to discuss mentoring and coaching in the workplace.

Discussion Questions

1. How did your original team perfect their performance during the independent practice time? How could this same process be used in the workplace?
2. When you switched teams, how well did the new team work together? What contributed to this?
3. How do we make sure each of our teammates is on the right track?
4. What does it take to build consistent communication?

