

Essential Skills are the Transferrable Skills
Workplace Scenario: Working on a Team
Helium Stick Activity

Description:

- Purpose is to ‘flip’ people’s thinking about the transferability of skills between a variety of contexts and have them immediately connect with and begin to internalize what ES are and why they would be important to success in a workplace
- Set up as a workplace simulation providing an opportunity to highlight the specific ways ES are needed at work

Learning Outcomes:

- Learners will be able to recognize the transferability of skills from different contexts
- Learners will be able to identify Essential Skills vs. technical skills
- Learners will be able to identify specific Essential Skills required to complete task

Instructional Methodology / Activity Plan:

Time – 10 to 15 minutes including debrief.

Resources – thin stick (a dowel works best) long enough to accommodate 3 people on each side

Divide learners into small groups. This activity works best with 4 to 6 individuals working with a stick. Explain to the learners:

- They have a job in a workplace where they work on a team where the task is to lower a stick to the ground – that is the business of the workplace and that is all the work that they do.



- You – as a supervisor - are going to give the verbal instructions: Groups are to line up with some people on one side and some on the other, facing each other. The stick will rest on their index fingers. The stick is horizontal and everyone’s fingers must be touching the stick. (Note: fingers can’t be wrapped around the stick and one finger on top and one on the bottom of the stick is not allowed.)

- They are to work as a team to get the stick to the ground. If they lose the horizontal or if anyone’s fingers come off the stick they must start over. There is a quality inspector who will be circulating making sure that the quality standards are being met (one of the presenters).

Groups work together to lower the stick to the floor. The quality inspector will monitor to make sure that quality requirements are met – if not, groups are instructed to start over. Questions can be answered, but groups must work through any problems themselves.

Allow time for groups to work on lowering the stick to the ground. Continue until groups are finding some success. The activity does not need to continue until all are able to complete the task.

Delivery Notes / Key Points to Review:

The activity is called the Helium Stick for a reason (*although it should not be introduced that way*). Groups find that the task is more difficult than they first thought – the stick will float up and the more they try, the more it continues to go up. Allow the groups to work through this problem on their own. Those that are successful in eventually lowering it are the ones that are able to work as a group to think things through and work as a team (there isn't one solution).

Where there is an opportunity, remember to connect to workplace requirements. For example:

- Workers are expected to listen to and follow verbal instructions.
- Workers are expected to ask questions for clarification if they don't understand something. If workers don't listen or don't ask questions and go ahead and make mistakes it can cost the workplace time and money. Note: If no one asks questions during the instructions, leave this point until a question is asked when you can highlight why this would be important. If no questions are asked, then make the point in the debrief.
- Workers are expected to work to the quality standard set by the workplace. (After introduction of the role of the quality inspector).

Debrief:

- Ask: How many people have taking training for getting a stick to the ground? (Connects to the concept of the 3 types of skills needed to support workplace success. There aren't technical skills, so they can only use their Essential Skills and Personal Management Basics (PMBs) – in this case the focus is on ES. As well, they would have had to have learned the Essential Skills they used somewhere else and transferred them to this task).
- Ask: What skills did you need to use to work with the team to lower the stick to the ground? (Continue to draw out the discussion to more specific ES – i.e., from Oral Communication to explain, ask questions, discuss, coordinate, listen, instruct, persuade, etc.)
- Ask: What seemed hard for the group? What seemed easy? What have you learned about Essential Skills?