

# Tower of Power Activity

For Team Building

**Goal:** To build the tallest self-supporting structure with the contents of one box of Tinker toys. Divide the class into groups of 4-6 (ensure group sizes are even)

**Timing:** Introduction 5 minutes; Exercise 12 minutes; debrief: 10 minutes (allow 30 minutes overall)

**Supplies:** One box of Tinker Toys per group.

**Instructions:** Announce to the groups that they have 10 minutes to plan a tower and one minute to build a tower. The criterion for the winning tower is that it be the tallest and stable enough to withstand the facilitator blowing it over. Participants do not need to use all the pieces given to them. The tower must be self supporting (*recommend starting from the floor, but a table/desk is okay, too*), that is, not leaning on anything or using objects from the room. During the planning session participants may NOT put the pieces together. They can organize them, plan, but cannot put the pieces together.

**Note:** Groups get 10 minutes to plan. The groups may pour the pieces out, organize the pieces, but NO assembly of Tinker toys is allowed during the planning time. Walk around, watch the groups, and if anyone tries to put pieces together, gently tell them to stop.

You will get a sense of the room; usually by 10 minutes everyone is ready. If everyone seems ready earlier, that's okay (remember you control the time).

During the planning phase, observe the following:

- How group members are working together

- How they communicate

- Whether everyone is involved or someone seems to be disengaged (that is rare)

- Whether people take on a leadership role or other role (e.g. timekeeper)

**\*\*Usually people get really into this. They want to win.**

**Announce:** "You have 60 seconds to build your tower. Ready, go!"

**Note:** The facilitator can take some liberties with time. You might give them about a minute 20 seconds—the time goes VERY fast. I usually time it until a group seems to have a pretty good tower going. Give them a 30-second and a 10-second warning.

There will be a lot of energy in the room, especially in those groups who think they might win. Go to each group; note some of the interesting aspects of the tower (example -"Oh, interesting—using triangles!") and measure the tower. Usually the towers come up to approximately 5 feet tall. Stand next to them to gauge the height next to your body. This is why building the towers from the floor is highly recommended.

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**Debriefing Questions:** shape these around what you want to emphasize with the groups. Hint: You don't have to use all of these—you can also create your own questions.

- **Was this a compelling exercise? What made it compelling?**
  - Concrete goal
  - Competition between groups
  - It was fun
  - Feeling of being on a team
- **Did you have an overall strategy?** (The winning team will always want to talk about this, if no one else does)
- **Did you divide up the task in some way? What are the roles people fulfilled on the team?**
- **Did you use all of your human resources? Did anyone feel left out?**
- **What was the communication like?**
  - An important point to make here is that usually people think the communication was easy and very effective.
  - The next question is, **why?**
  - Here the answers might be:
    - Because the task was clear, compelling goal;
    - Because there weren't status differences (no one was the boss);
    - We didn't know each other that well, etc.
    - You want to show the power of a compelling visual goal to reduce a lot of common organizational communication barriers.
- **How did the groups plan? Were you satisfied with your planning process?**
- **What did you do really well? What could you have done even better?**
  - This is an important way to talk about strengths and weaknesses.

**Note:** You can do longer versions of this exercise by having teams build with other materials, such as newspaper, paper clips, cups, etc.

Make sure to get input from all teams. Share your own observations as well.

You can assess the dimensions of success by using the following set of debriefing questions:

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## **Dimensions of Success—Tower of Power Activity**

Assess the following dimensions of success. Which areas of teamwork or leadership went very well? Which could have been improved?

**Results:** Completion of the task / Achievement of the goal

### **Key Questions:**

- Are the results of high quality?
- Are the results timely?
- Do the results meet customer requirements (internal and external)?

### **Process:**

- How the work gets done.
- How the work is designed and managed.
- How the work is monitored and evaluated.

### **Key Questions:**

- Is the process clear and logical?
- Is the process efficient?
- Is the process appropriate to the task?

### **Relationship:**

- How people experience each other.
- How people relate to the organization.
- How people feel about their involvement and contribution.

### **Key Questions:**

- Do team members feel supported?
- Do team members trust each other?
- Do team members feel valued?



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