

Customer Connection: a team-building game

Overview:

Connections is an initiative which mirrors how business processes flow (or don't). Each participant is an integral part of a business system which must perform their role and link with other participants to deliver product or service to the customer.

Outcomes:

1. Roles and responsibilities
2. Customer service
3. Business systems and performance
4. Continuous flow/lean thinking
5. Teamwork
6. Continuous improvement

Equipment:

1. A marble (which represents the customer, product or service).
2. Lengths of PVC pipe cut into various sizes with holes (represents each participant's role in processing customer, product or service). One pipe for each participant.
3. 20 foot length of rope. Lay the rope on the ground in a curving line. At one end place the bucket, the other end is the starting point.
4. A bucket (representing ultimate customer satisfaction/delivery of product or service).

Instructions:

1. Put the PVC pipe in the middle of the floor.
2. Instruct everyone to pick up a single piece of pipe.
3. Describe the objective and the rules.

Objective:

The marble represents your customer. You are seeking to deliver ultimate customer satisfaction! Each of you has a role to play in processing this customer's order from inception (beginning of rope) to final delivery (bucket). Your role is to create a processing sequence for your customer. You must roll the marble from the starting point of its journey, through the tubing, and into its final destination - the bucket, in the fastest time possible, without dropping it (your customer).

Rules:

1. The tubing you chose is your part of the connection. You may not substitute your tubing with anyone else or exchange your tubing with the remaining unselected pieces of tubing.
2. You may put your tubing close to other tubing, but you may not attach your tubing in any way to any one else's tubing. You may not touch anyone else's tubing.
3. The marble must go through everyone's tubing at least once.
4. If the marble hits the ground or stops it must begin again at the starting point. Dire consequences may occur if you drop your customer.
5. Only the tubing may touch the marble (no hands).
6. The marble must follow the path laid out by the rope to its final destination.
7. The marble must travel in a continuous forward motion (no backwards motion). The marble may not stop.
8. You may not move your feet when the marble is traveling through your tube.
9. The rope and bucket may not be moved.
10. You have 5 minutes for planning and then you will be timed to see how quickly you can deliver customer satisfaction.

Any questions?

Notes to Facilitator:

This initiative works well indoors or out. It is helpful to ask the team to suggest a product or service their company makes or delivers. Use this as the metaphor for the initiative. Watch closely especially at the beginning for team members holding onto one another's PVC tubes. Also, be strict against any violations the first few times the marble rolls through the tubes. You can relax a bit after that as most groups will begin to police themselves. When the marble drops or stops call time and make up some kind of customer complaint, "Oh, Bob the customer does not like to be put on hold for that long...or, Bob, just told 17 of his friends about the poor service he just received from your company. He says if he is treated in such a rude manner again, he will take his business elsewhere." If the marble (customer) continues to be dropped over and over again, you can begin to impose penalties like: you may now only hold your tubing with one hand, or blindfold someone, or downsize someone to a smaller tube with the excuse that "upper management has decided to cut costs because they are losing so many customers so your position has just been downsized."

Debrief Questions:**EXPERIENCE**

- Q. What frustrated you with this experience?
- Q. What did it take for your team to finally achieve success?
- Q. How did you find yourself reacting to the customer being dropped?

TEAM DYNAMICS

- Q. What process did you use to plan your strategy?
- Q. How effective or ineffective was your planning time? What made it so?
- Q. If you were to do this again, what would you change about your planning time?
- Q. What stopped the customer from smoothly flowing through the process?
- Q. How did you deal with the resource limitations you faced in delivering the customer?
- Q. How did the team respond to the breakdowns?

APPLICATION

- Q. In what ways is this experience similar to what goes on at work?
- Q. Where do the breakdowns happen with your customers right now?
- Q. Once you identify a problem on your team, or with customer service, what process do you have in place to create a solution?
- Q. Can you think of breakdowns which have occurred over and over again in your company?
- Q. Why do these breakdowns keep re-occurring?
- Q. What process do you need to bring around the problems to ensure the breakdowns stop?
- Q. What kinds of new roles or responsibilities might you need to take on in order to solve the problem?