

The Graham Cracker Challenge

Examining Risk and Reward

Summary

An experiential activity that allows participants to examine their risk-taking attitudes and behaviors.

Goals

- To take a risk in a safe environment.
- To examine different approaches to risk taking.
- To reflect on a personal experience of risk taking.

Group Size

Several groups of four people.

Time Required

30 minutes.

Materials

- One vertically straight-sided 12-ounce mug or glass or cup, 3 inches in diameter, for each participant.
- Ten ounces of milk per participant.
- Two graham crackers per participant.
- Four prizes of value to participants.

Physical Setting

Participants seated at tables in groups of four per table.

Facilitating Risk Rating

Low.

Process

1. Explain that participants will have the opportunity to take risks and win a prize. Assign four participants per table.
2. Distribute one mug, glass, or cup filled with milk to each participant and one package of graham crackers per table.
3. Ask participants to volunteer to be either an "A" or a "B," ensuring that there are two of each at each table. When they ask what they are volunteering for, simply smile and say it is part of learning about risk.
4. Tell participants that there will be two rounds: first the A round and then the B round. The goal is to keep your graham cracker in the milk longer than anyone else and to put it into your mouth without it falling apart. The winner will win a prize. You may wish to announce the prizes or keep them a secret.

(5 minutes.)

5. Tell the "A's" that on the count of 3 to put their graham crackers halfway into the milk and leave them as long as they dare before putting them into their mouths. Count to 3. When everyone has finished, announce the "A" winner of Round 1. Then tell the "B's" they will do the same thing. Count to 3 and announce the "B" winner of Round 1.
6. Tell participants to discuss at their tables what they learned that can help them be more successful during the second round.

(5 to 10 minutes.)

7. Bring the group back together and repeat the process.
8. Debrief the activity with some of the following questions:
 - How comfortable were you with taking a risk?
 - What did you learn about your approach to risk taking?

- What did you notice about other people's risk-taking behavior?
- How are risk and rewards related? Is it possible to eliminate all risk and still have a chance at a reward?
- What could you have done to be more successful in taking a risk in this activity?
- What can you do to be more successful in taking a risk in your work? In your personal life?
- What does this activity suggest that you might want to do when you return to your workplace?

(15 to 20 minutes.)

9. Summarize for the group.

Variations

- If the activity needs to be shortened, you may wish to use only one round.
- Six or more people can be seated at the same table if needed.

Submitted by John Goldberg.

John Goldberg is a high-energy, seasoned master trainer with an MBA and more than twenty years of corporate, government, and nonprofit experience focusing on meeting company goals through the development of talent. Specialties include increasing efficiencies, identifying and removing obstacles to performance, motivation, leadership, management, supervision, communication, and teamwork.

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