

## Marble Run

### *Purpose/Objective*

Marble Run is a complex construction activity that requires skills in spatial relations, mechanical assembly, teamwork, communication, individual contribution, and creativity. The game offers a fun and effective way to achieve a variety of teaching goals:

- Break down barriers
- Create a sense of community
- Encourage laughter
- Enhance problem solving
- Improve communication
- Establish or reestablish trust
- Use as an icebreaker
- Teach team-building

### *Group Size*

4-6 participants per group. There is no limit on how many groups may participate.

### *Materials Needed*

One Marble Run set for every 1 to 2 teams

### *Time*

30 – 60 minutes

## *Overview / Goal*

Identify a goal for teams to achieve. Choose the one best for you depending on the level of your groups and the time available for play and debrief. For instance:

1. *Assemble a Marble Run with at least three changes of direction.*
2. *Assemble a Marble Run that reaches at least 2 feet high.  
Invite teams to assign members the following roles: Architect, master builder, assistant (x2), observer.*
3. *Re-create one of the Marble Runs shown on the instruction sheet that came in the game box. Make no explicit mention of individuals' roles—simply let them emerge on their own.*
4. *Have teams create the best Marble Run they can in 30 minutes. Tell them that their structure will be judged on four metrics: functionality, aesthetics, height, and complexity. Suggest that each team assign a “warden” for each of these metrics.*

You can debrief after 5 to 10 minutes or wait until the end of the entire exercise. If you do an interim debrief, ask such questions as:

How is it going so far?

What is hindering your process?

What might you do differently when you resume construction?

If you do wait until the end, you might want to assign an observer to take notes or instruct teams to take notes on some of the debrief question (see next page), so that they can be prepared for the conversation following the activity.

## ***Debriefing / Discussion Questions***

[Paraphrased from George Takacs and Steve Sugar's Games that Teach Teams, pp. 27-30]

Your role now is to help the participants *discover* the learning from what they have done. Remember that your task is not to *tell* them, not to put *your* learning on them, but—through a series of questions—to help them see the lesson themselves. Indeed, the lesson they need to learn may not be the lesson you want to teach.

Break down your review of the exercise into three parts: 1) What happened? 2) What did you learn? 3) How does it apply to work/life? Below are some questions that will help you guide participants in deriving useful insights from the experience that you created for them.

While you gather the group's feedback, record the answers on a flip chart so you can refer to them, or perhaps even distribute important learning points, later.

It might be useful to ask this series of questions for each of the three stages of play:

1) Set-up; 2) Creating a simple chain; and 3) Increasing the complexity.

### **What Happened?**

The first part of processing should be establishing reality—what happened? This can be difficult if there is not general agreement about what occurred!

1. What happened?
  - a. Who did what?
  - b. Who said what?
  - c. What were the results?
2. What surprised you?
3. How do you feel about what happened? Does anyone feel differently? The same way?
4. Was the stated objective achieved or not?

### **What did you learn?**

You are now ready to help the group interpret the meaning of what occurred.

1. What does what happened mean for you? (look for agreement and disagreement)
2. Do you see a consistent pattern of behavior?
3. What does your experience suggest to you about the group? About yourself?
4. Does what happened here happen at work also? Why or why not?
5. Have you had this experience before? If so, where, when, and under what circumstances?

### **How does it apply to work / life?**

Now understanding the facts and their meaning, you are ready to lead the group in a discussion on how they will apply their learning back at work. This application phase is the main reason you facilitated this exercise in the first place!

1. What have you learned from this experience?
2. Because of this experience what might you *do differently* back at work? What might you *continue* doing? What might you *stop* doing? *Start* doing?
3. What/whose help or support do you need to implement these changes?
4. What could you imagine happening if you tried these new behaviors?