

Team-building Initiatives

Team initiatives are a tool that we have found to be extremely effective in teaching leadership lessons, developing team trust, and preparing teams to work together. In this document you will find a collection of team initiatives that we have found to be very beneficial and easy to use. Most of these initiatives require relatively few supplies and are easy to instruct.

How to run an effective initiative

The basic outline for running an initiative is as follows:

Set-up: Prepare all materials and the initiative prior to team arrival (Supplies, Layout)

Set the stage: Tell the team the story of the initiative (Basic Description).

Allow the team time: Let the team struggle through the initiative. Every one of these has more than one solution to solving the problem.

Pause the action when necessary: If a team is really struggling don't be afraid to pause the action and ask the team questions to get them thinking about other possible solutions. You can also ask them questions to point them to leadership principles or team dynamics (Teachable Moments).

Celebrate the victory: After a team has accomplished the goal celebrate the victory.

Debrief the experience: Take time to teach through the initiative. What did they learn about themselves as a team? What did you notice about them as a team (Debriefing Questions).

A note to Instructors

While all of these initiatives have an end goal in mind the object of the initiative is not necessarily to accomplish the goal, but rather to teach through the initiative. These initiatives will be most effective when you see them as an opportunity to teach your team something about themselves, leadership, or teamwork. Step back and take in all that is happening. Watch how team members respond to each other. At the end of the initiative take time to debrief the experience with the team.

Island Game

Estimated Time:

30 - 60 min

Supplies:

9 blocks (wooden blocks, cinder blocks or pieces of cardboard); a flat roomy area

Layout:

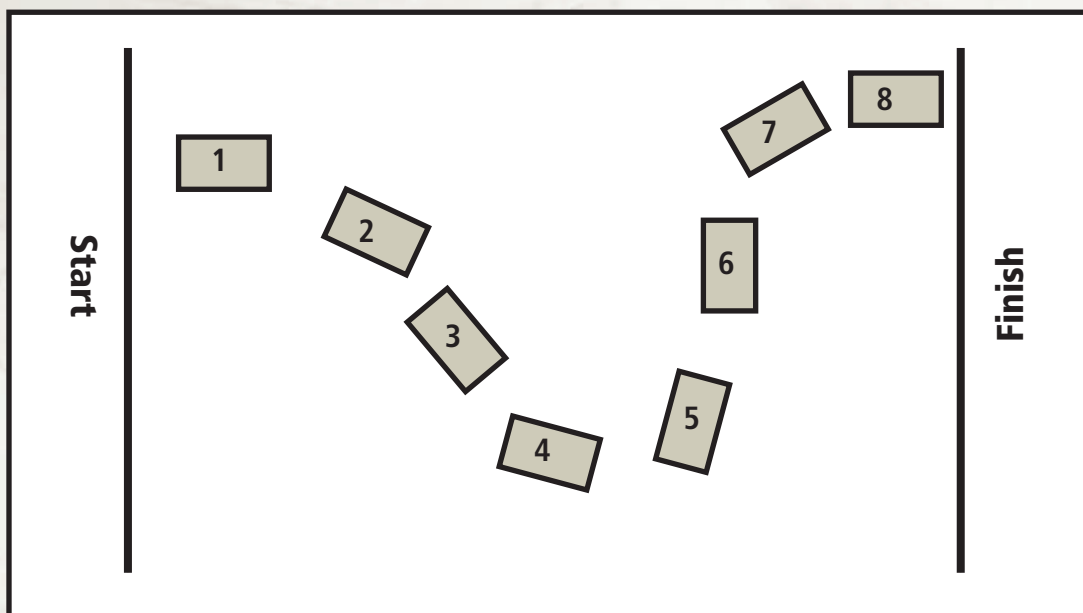
- 1) Blocks should be one medium size step apart - about 1.5 feet.
- 2) Make sure the blocks are level and cannot tip.

Basic Description:

Your team is on an expedition discovering new lands and territory to be conquered by your home country. Your team has just reached the brink of new discovery when you find a river of hot lava blocks your way. Luckily there is a line of islands that reach across the stream. Your team must cross the islands to reach the new land. There are a few catches. Your team must hold hands while any one is on the islands to make sure no one falls in and after a foot touches an island that island must have a foot on it at all times until the last team member removes his foot.

Rules:

- 1) The initiative begins when the entire team is connected (holding hands), behind the starting line.
- 2) The team must use the islands, and in numeric order (1-9). They cannot skip over bricks.
- 3) If any member of the team touches the lava at any time during the initiative the entire team must start over at the starting line.
- 4) The team must be connected at all times (holding hands) if the team disconnects at any time the entire team must start over at the starting line.
- 5) Once the team has touched a block, a member of the team must always have contact with that brick (a foot on it) until the last team member passes the brick.
- 6) The team successfully completes the initiative when every team member makes it past the finish line using only the bricks - with no lava touches, brick misses, or disconnections.



The Key:

The way to complete this initiative is to have the team work in rhythm. Each member in the team must know when, and where, they must step. Communication is a major key to accomplishing this task.

Debriefing Questions:

What made you succeed?

How important was communication?

Who took charge?

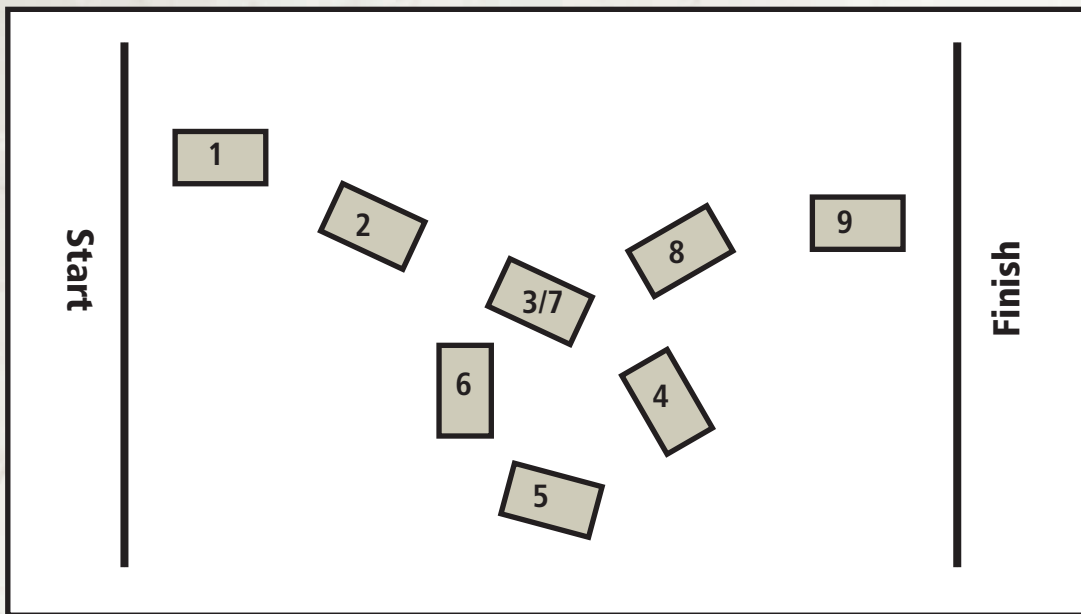
Were all ideas listened to? Why or why not?

Teachable Moments:

The block initiative helps teams focus their individual desires and goals on reaching one team goal. Groups will hear and experience first-hand how they communicate and act in high-pressure situations when they must succeed. Facilitators should focus groups on seeing how they can improve their communication and actions to complete tasks. Leaders will emerge and facilitators will be able to see who is the voice of the team.

Additions/Changes for increased challenge:

- 1) Use blindfolds - first and last person, every other person, etc.
- 2) Two feet must be on the bricks at all times instead of just one (See rule 5 above).
- 3) Allow only one person to talk.
- 4) Mix the line up - switch the order.
- 5) Re-arrange the blocks and put a loop in it:



Magic Shoes

Time:

15 - 45 min

Supplies:

A large open area, start / finish line markings

Layout:

Set a starting and finish line about 50 feet apart.

Basic Description:

Your team has been wandering through the desert for weeks. You are stranded at an oasis where the water has been completely used up. You can see an oasis across the way, but the sand is too hot to walk on. Unfortunately the hot sand melted all but one pair of shoes. These magic shoes have some special properties: they can only be worn once in one direction by each team member, they may not be thrown, they may not be separated and your whole team must get to fresh water.

Rules:

- 1) The game begins when the entire team is behind the starting line.
- 2) The hot sand is never ending - the team cannot walk around to reach the oasis
- 3) The "magic shoes" are not an actual pair of shoes - they are imaginary.
- 4) The team must declare who is "wearing" the magic shoes before they enter the desert.
- 5) Only one person can wear the magic shoes at a time.
- 6) When a person is wearing the magic shoes, they are wearing both of them - the shoes cannot be split up.
- 7) Each person can only wear the magic shoes one time (one-way) to cross the desert.
- 8) If anyone touches the hot sand the entire team must go back and start again behind the starting line.
- 9) The team successfully completes the initiative when the entire team crosses over the lava, using the magic shoes, with no lava touches.

The Key:

There are many ways to solve this initiative all of which include carrying team members across to the oasis. The most effective way to complete "Magic Shoes" is when a team plans the entire "mission" before they start sending team members across the desert. The team will have to physically carry each other across the lava and must plan ahead to insure no one is left behind. Teams often will think that only guys can carry girls or only big team members can carry two other members, but it is always surprising what team members can accomplish with a little encouragement.

Debriefing Questions:

What made you succeed / fail?

How important was communication?

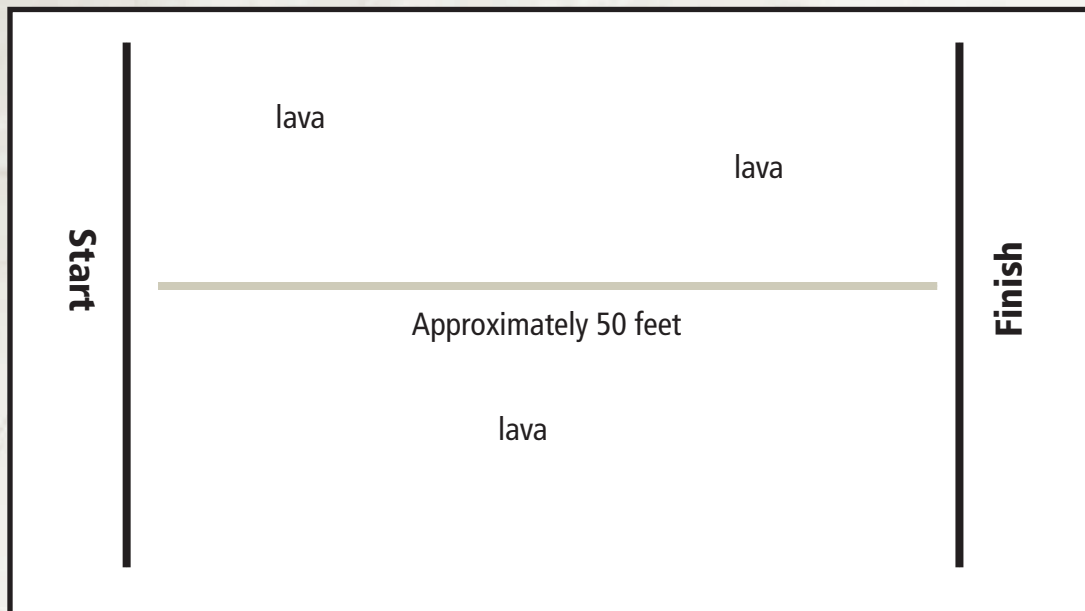
Who was in charge?

Were all ideas listened to? Why or why not?

What was the hardest part about this initiative?

Teachable Moments:

"Magic Shoes" not only teaches problem solving skills -it teaches teams to navigate ahead, focusing on what is going to happen in the future. There is a definite process to "Magic Shoes" that must be followed to be successful. Facilitators can teach teams the dangers of not navigating ahead, being impulsive, and not thinking through all ideas. The initiative is meant to be physically challenging as well - groups must be fit enough to carry each other and navigate ahead so the smallest person is not left carrying the largest.



Rules:

- 1) All team members must be used to complete the initiative.
- 2) Each team member can only use one "tube."
- 3) The ball must start at the starting bucket..
- 4) When the ball is on a tube the individual holding it cannot move his or her feet.
- 5) Once "start" or "go" has been called the ball cannot be touched by the individual (hands, face, etc).
- 6) The team must follow the route or course the facilitator has set up.
- 7) If the ball is dropped, it is brought back to the starting line and the team must start over.
- 8) The team finishes when the last person drops the ball in the canister at the finish bucket.

Additions/Changes for Increased Challenge

- 1) For high performance teams, ask them to set a time goal for themselves, and then have them keep shortening the time.
- 2) Increase the length of the course
- 3) Have the course go up or down a flight of stairs

The Key:

There is no "trick" to successfully completing this initiative. The obstacle the team must overcome is time. The team must work together to get all individuals to execute perfectly so that maximum speed may be achieved. Many ideas will arise and different techniques used, but the key is practice, communication, and flawless execution.

Debriefing Questions:

- What was the key to our success?
- How important was communication?
- What was it like having to handle the pressure individually to succeed?
- What was your best? What does it mean to do our best? What is excellence for us?
- How do we encourage and motivate each other?

Teachable Moments:

The teachable moments in this initiative seem to be limitless. Often teachable moments will vary, as they always do, depending on the team and with what part of the initiative they are struggling the most. When groups just cannot do it, but keep racing to get done in a certain time - facilitators can talk about focus, how to focus on getting it done right, and worrying about time later. Groups that are good, but cannot reach a time goal - and members may want to quit, facilitators can teach about perseverance, what is excellence for them as a team, when to give up. Facilitators can talk about how team success is dependent on individual success and how everyone giving their all is important.

The Diamond

Time:

30 - 60 min

Supplies:

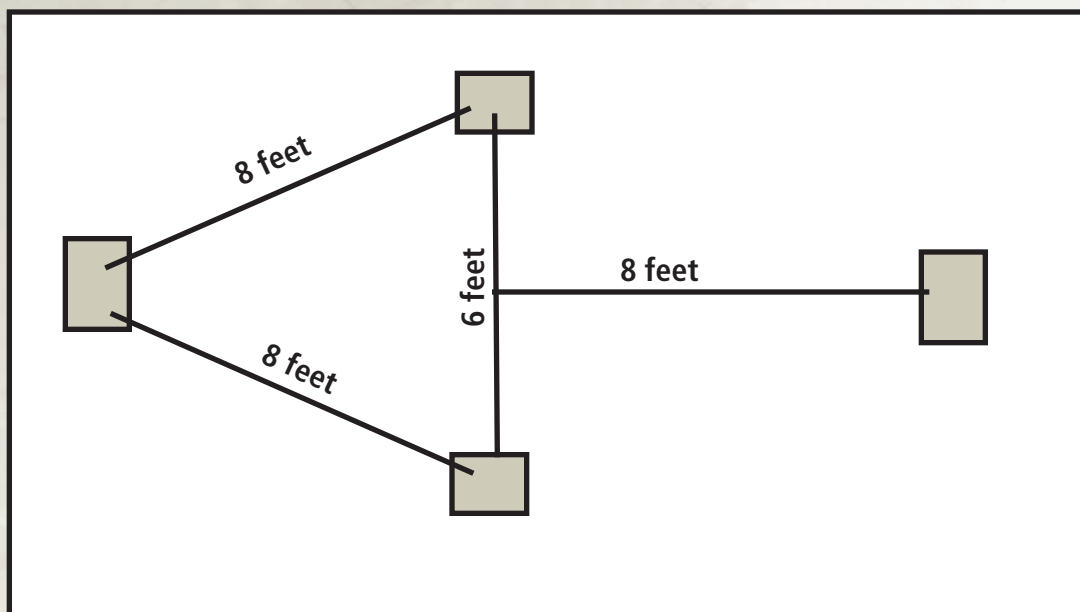
4 Concrete blocks or equivalent

1 very strong 4x4 or 2x4 board 8 feet in length

1 very strong 4x4 or 2x4 board 6 feet in length

Layout:

The blocks need to be carefully placed otherwise the activity will not be that difficult.



Basic Description:

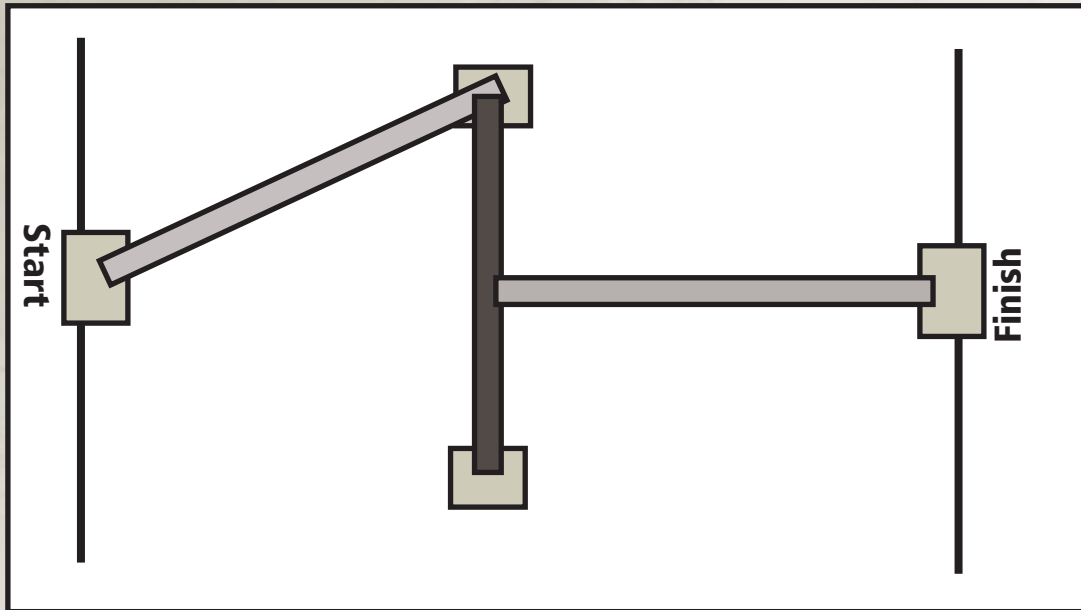
Blocks are islands in a sea of hot lava. The team must use the blocks and the two boards, which serve as bridges to the islands, to get the entire team from the starting line to the finish line.

Rules:

- 1) The initiative starts when the entire team and all the boards are behind the starting line.
- 2) If any team member touches the hot lava the entire team and all the boards must start over again behind the starting line.
- 3) If any board touches the lava it burns up and must be brought back behind the starting line before the team can use it again.
- 4) The team may only use the blocks and boards to complete the initiative.
- 5) The team successfully completes the initiative when the entire team and all the boards cross the finish line - with no lava touches by people or boards.

The Key:

Due to the length of the boards and the spacing of the blocks there is only one way to successfully complete this initiative. Notice in the "Basic Layout" diagram: boards 1 & 2 must be in a T, connecting blocks 2, 3 & 4 - this is the only way the team can successfully complete the initiative.



Debriefing Questions:

What made you succeed?

How important was communication?

How did we perform as a team? Focused, scattered, excellent?

Were all ideas listened to? Why or why not?

Who are the problem solvers and thinkers? Who are leaders?

Teachable Moments:

The block and board initiative is an intellectual challenge. Teams must use their problem solving skills to figure out how the boards fit. Facilitators must explain the rules very clearly so that groups can use all their resources to their advantage, yet not break any rules. The teams "thinkers" and "problem solvers" will emerge and facilitators can challenge team leaders to delegate responsibilities and use the strengths of the team to succeed. This is a great initiative for teams with individuals who have great ideas, but don't speak up or share them with the team. A facilitator can point out ideas that were mentioned but never followed through... ask why, talk about how to listen to all voices and ideas...and how to speak up and be heard.