

Chapter 16

The Rest of the Springboard Exercises

These are the exercises that don't fit the criteria for chapters 11 through 15, so they share certain characteristics:

- They take more than five but less than fifteen minutes.
- They are suitable for groups of moderate size (generally between 8 and 30 people).
- They require either open floor space or room for the group to sit or stand in a circle, but they are not for an audience or for people seated at desks or tables.
- While some are quite active, they don't involve tagging.

They are useful for many different purposes and can help your group meet a variety of goals.

All Aboard

Goals	Group problem solving, Group introspection, Surfacing group dynamics
Time	5-10 minutes (not including processing)
Physical contact	Requires the whole group to squeeze into a small space.
Physical challenges	Could require the ability to balance oneself or to be surrounded by a lot of people.
Number of participants	Fewer than 20
Space requirements	Open floor space
Materials needed	Masking tape
Preparation	Use the tape to create a small, enclosed space (square or rectangle) on the floor. It is important that the space be small enough to make the exercise difficult, but not so small as to make it impossible. This requires some practice, and by adjusting the level of difficulty you can make different points or bring new dynamics to the surface. These changes will have a significant impact on how you process what occurs in the group.

Instructions

1. Tell the group that the instructions are simply for the whole group to fit into the space on the floor at one time.
2. Once everyone is in the space, walk around it and ensure that no one's feet are outside.
3. Have the group count to three before they get out of the space. You can make the task more difficult by having them sing "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" completely through three times before they leave the space.

Processing suggestions

- This exercise can be used to surface issues of motivation by raising the question of whether everyone is "on board" with the work of the group.
- Discuss the points in the exercise at which people chose to get involved. Who went in first? second? last? Are these the same people who are always first and last to take initiative in this group? How do we as a group make sure that everyone is "on board"?
- It also illustrates the way the group deals with a challenge and how they solve problems. Did some people or the whole group give up?
- How was leadership manifested? Were there clear leaders, or did everyone have a role?
- How well does the group adjust to different stresses?
- Can everyone fit within the space that this group represents?



Variation – All Aboard, All Ahead

Time	10-15 minutes (not including processing)
Additional physical challenge	Must be able to leap from one space to another.
Number of participants	Fewer than 20
Preparation	Create two enclosed spaces with tape on the floor, a good long step away from each other. Vary the size and shape of the spaces. The spaces must be big enough to make the task possible, but not so large as to make it too easy.

Instructions

1. Have the group start out by getting into the bigger space, just as you would in ALL ABOARD.
2. Then have them move into the smaller space without anyone stepping outside of the taped lines.

Additional processing suggestions

- When a group can work together under difficult circumstances and experience success, many opportunities open up. People can grow and feel free to take risks and try new things.
- Sometimes the difficult work of building trust, respect, and communication must be tackled first. As the group moves through these stages successfully, members may then feel more comfortable physically and emotionally, and be ready to take on bigger challenges together.
- Some people fall into patterns of always or never taking the lead. If this dynamic is present in the group, it will emerge in the exercise and can be discussed.
- The exercise can also be used to help a group reflect on acting strategically (for example, do they just keep trying the same thing even when it is not working?), and on how they make decisions (for example, who is listened to when deciding order, etc.).

Variation – All Aboard, Some Ahead

Preparation	Tape out three enclosed spaces of decreasing size on the floor, a good long step away from each other. The spaces can be different shapes (for example, square, circle, triangle). Decide how many people you want to fit into each space, and make the spaces big enough so that the task is possible, but small enough so that it is a challenge.
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Instructions

1. Have the group start out by getting into the biggest space, as in ALL ABOARD.
2. Tell the group to have a certain number of people, fewer than the whole group, move into the second space. The group decides who will move ahead.
3. Tell the group how many people must move to the third space.

Additional processing suggestions

- Work becomes more focused in small groups as we move from the big picture to a more detailed level.
- As the group moves forward in its work, they will confront more and more difficult choices.
- You can also use this exercise to talk about dynamics of race and class preference in society, or more generally about group selection processes. Who got moved ahead and by what criteria? Who took the leadership during the exercise, at what point, and what were the decisions based on about who gets to go forward?

Further Variations

You can vary ALL ABOARD in a number of other ways. For example:

- To illustrate getting out of a stressful situation, have the group move from a small space to a larger space.
- To raise the issues associated with a group that has experienced changes in its form or membership, have the group move through a series of spaces of different shapes.

Additional processing suggestions

- Even subtle changes to an exercise can have a significant impact on the dynamics that emerge. Try to maintain a heightened awareness to how the changes play out and what messages they might convey to the group.

Bag Toss

Goals	Interconnection, Focus, Communication
Time	10 minutes (not including processing)
Physical contact	Minimal
Physical challenges	Must be able to throw and catch a beanbag.
Number of participants	12-30
Space requirements	Open floor space
Materials needed	Between 5 and 15 beanbags, depending on the size of the group
Preparation	None

Instructions

1. Have people stand in a circle.
2. To begin, establish an order for throwing the beanbags (see “Establishing a Pattern”).
3. Once the pattern has been established, begin the exercise by calling someone’s name and throwing a beanbag underhand to that person. Tell the group to throw underhand throughout the exercise.
4. While the first bag is making its way around the circle, tell the group that you are going to start adding more bags. Remind them that it is important to continue calling names.
5. Start throwing out more beanbags. By varying the number of bags and the speed at which you are throwing them, you can make the exercise more manageable or more overwhelming, depending on the needs of the group and the issue(s) to be illustrated. Note that when someone drops or fails to catch a bag, they simply pick up the bag and continue.
6. When you are ready to end the exercise, hold the beanbags as they come back to you, rather than sending them around the circle again.

Establishing a Pattern

You can establish the pattern with handshakes or with beanbags:

1. With handshakes, the facilitator (person A) calls the name of someone (person B) across the circle, makes eye contact with the person called, then walks across to shake their hand. Person B calls the name of someone else (person C) and shakes that person’s hand. Person C calls someone else who has not yet been called. This continues until everyone has been chosen once (and only once). Everyone is free to choose whomever they want among those who have not yet been chosen. The last person to be called closes the loop by calling the name and shaking the hand of person A. Ask everyone to remember whose hand they shook, as that is the person to whom they are going to throw the bag. Before moving on with the exercise, practice the pattern with another quick round of handshakes to make sure that everyone remembers to whom they are throwing.
2. With beanbags, the procedure is to call the name and then throw a beanbag.

Processing suggestions

- You can use this exercise to demonstrate the various ways in which everyone is connected, both giving to and receiving from each other.
- We choose to whom we throw, just as we choose with whom we connect in the group or in our lives. (Often people will throw to someone with whom they have a higher comfort level, or someone they want to get to know better.)
- You can also talk about the importance of names and eye contact. Did anyone stop calling out a name? What happened?

- People or pairs often find ways to adapt to the circumstances, giving cues to each other or helping each other out. What strategies did people use to focus on catching and throwing the bags? How do these relate to the strategies people use in their lives?
- In this exercise, and in the work of the group, everyone needs to maintain focus if the group is going to “keep all its bags in the air.” When many bags are used, the exercise can be used as a metaphor for how people react when conditions feel overwhelming. How did people cope? Did they drop bags, start whipping the bags, throw more than one at a time, or hold on to some bags and wait until their catcher was ready?
- BAG TOSS also shows the importance of establishing a clear structure, and how much fun and how productive working within a structure can be.
- Was the group functional or dysfunctional, and were you as an individual contributing to the order or contributing to the chaos? We each have power over the function of the group.

Variation – Bag Toss with a Reverse

Instructions

1. Follow the instructions for BAG TOSS, but tell the group that at some point in the exercise you will say “reverse.”
2. At that point, everyone should switch the direction they are throwing the bag—that is, they will start throwing it to the person who had been throwing it to them, and they need to switch to saying that person’s name as well. They will now be receiving the bag from the person they had been throwing it to.

Additional processing suggestions

- Adding a “reverse” to the exercise is helpful in talking about having to adjust to new circumstances or to change direction in your work together.
- It also shows how the group can fall apart and then with practice (experience) come back together again.
- Depending on the speed with which you call out reverses, the exercise can show how quick changes, or many changes in a row, can lead to chaos.

Variation – Bag Toss with Movement

Additional goal	Different perspectives
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Note: This exercise works well with a group that is very familiar with BAG TOSS and some of the other variations, but it is too complicated for a group that is new to the exercise. This variation is very challenging and chaotic. Expect it to fall apart a bit.

Instructions

1. Play BAG TOSS using only one bag.
2. After the bag has gone around a few times, stop the exercise and tell the group the new procedure: Once they have thrown the bag to the next person and that person has caught it, they are to move to that person’s place in the circle. Meanwhile, the person to whom they threw the bag will be calling the name of the next person in the order, throwing the bag to them, waiting for them to catch it, and then moving to *their* place in the circle.
3. Have the group practice once to help them remember the order of the tasks they must complete.
4. Start the bag and the movement
5. Add bags, as in BAG TOSS, up to or beyond the group’s tolerance level.

Additional processing suggestions

- If your group is dealing with changes, or looking at making changes, this variation can get every-

one thinking about how changes affect them and how the group can make adjustments that help it succeed through the change.

- It can be challenging to see things from another person's point of view.
- There is a fine line between chaos and dynamic movement within a group, and each individual plays a part in determining whether the group crosses the line.
- You can use this exercise to talk about the importance of speaking directly to someone and getting their attention. Communication is essential to the success of this exercise and to the work of the group.

Variation – Think Ahead Bag Toss

Additional goal

Planning

Note: This variation should be used with a group that has played BAG TOSS before.

Instructions

1. Before you begin throwing the bags, ask the group to think ahead about the exercise. For example:
 - What are some useful strategies?
 - What are some things to watch out for?
 - How many bags can the group handle?
 - How many bags do you predict might be dropped?
2. Then ask the group to set a goal regarding the number of times that bags will be dropped.
3. Play Bag Toss, keeping count of the dropped bags.

Additional processing suggestion

- Consider how planning and thinking ahead changed the experience of the exercise. For instance, were there fewer dropped bags when the group set a goal regarding keeping the bags in the air?

Variation – Bag Toss with Left Outs

Additional goal

Group introspection

Note: This variation can be high-risk depending on the group. It brings out issues of exclusion, which can be difficult for people to deal with.

Instructions

1. Begin by playing regular BAG TOSS.
2. Stop the exercise and arbitrarily pick someone from the group (person X). Tell the group not to throw the bag to X anymore. You will have to readjust the order so that the person who was throwing the bag to X now throws to the person that X was throwing to.
3. Continue with the exercise.
4. Stop several more times, taking more and more people out of the exercise. Do not give those who are taken out any particular instructions, but instead watch what people do as the exercise goes on without them.

Additional processing suggestions

- The exercise illustrates the experience of being left out and being an outsider. It can be used to illustrate a dynamic in the group, or to represent how someone on



- the margins of society (for example, a homeless person) might feel.
- How did those who were left out react to being excluded? If there were dysfunctional responses, talk about where the behavior came from.
- The exercise can show age, class, and race dynamics, what it feels like to be excluded, and how people who are excluded sometimes resort to dysfunction to try to get power.

Variation – Bag Toss with Outs

Instructions

1. This is the same as regular BAG TOSS except that people are “out” whenever they drop a bag or fail to catch a bag.
2. People who are out must drop back from the circle, and everyone else must adjust for their absence.

Additional processing suggestions

- This exercise could be used to talk about how the group might respond to losing a member.
- It can also be used to discuss the feelings that come out when things are high-stakes (when failure has immediate and significant consequences). How did it feel to be out? Did people pay more attention because they knew they would be out if they dropped the bag? How does our work and effort change when we are accountable to someone versus when we are working of our own accord?
- If group members expressed anxiety at seeing people pushed out, you can comment on the level of interdependence in the group.
- Did people try to intentionally get each other out by throwing the bags in a manner that made it difficult to catch them? What does competition do to a group? Does it help or hurt?

Variation – Hot Bag

Preparation

Choose an object to be thrown from person to person that is easily distinguishable from the ordinary beanbags. It could be a beanbag with a special marking or wrapping on it, or it could be a different object such as a small rubber toy.

Instructions

1. Play BAG TOSS using the “hot bag” along with the regular beanbags.
2. When you say “Freeze,” whoever is holding the hot bag is out.
3. If play continues from that point, people must adjust so that the person throwing to the person who is out will now throw to the next person in the order.
4. You can continue playing until several more people are out.

Additional processing suggestions

- This exercise exposes how people respond to a person who is marked as the “outsider.” Often the response will be to shun them or make comments about them, which will force the group to reckon with its own assumptions and attitudes.
- The exercise can show what happens when people begin to pass responsibility off to others. (For example, the person who’s holding the hot bag may throw it to another person or onto the floor when you say “Freeze.”)
- It can also be used to demonstrate the arbitrary nature of who gets passed by for opportunities (since people are stuck with the bag and its consequences through no fault of their own). Through this exercise you can set up discussions about power in society, as well as dynamics such as racism and classism.

Variation – Object Toss

Additional goal	Group introspection
Preparation	Collect a number of objects that are small enough and safe enough to be thrown from person to person.

Instructions

1. Follow the instructions for BAG TOSS using the objects instead of beanbags.

Additional processing suggestions

- In this exercise, groups and individuals must throw and catch objects of different shapes and sizes. Problems or issues also come in all different shapes and sizes, and that can throw us off unless we learn to adapt.
- What was the most difficult item to catch? What are the more difficult things we encounter as a group or as individuals? How do we deal with the more difficult objects/issues? What are the strategies we use?
- Did anyone feel overwhelmed or unable to handle an object? If so, how did they feel or react? How did others react?

Variation – Bag Toss with Words

Additional goal	Group introspection
Preparation	Write words on slips of paper or stickers and affix a word to each bag. The words should be related to the group's work; for example, they could be about the group's goals or about issues that will be discussed at the meeting.

Note: This exercise is similar in many ways to WIND BLOWS WITH WORDS (p. 378), except that it does not put anyone in a position where they must speak.

Instructions

1. Begin by playing regular BAG TOSS.
2. After a while, yell “Freeze” and ask if anyone would like to speak about the word on the bag they are holding.
3. Continue playing and freezing periodically.

Additional processing suggestions

- Focus on the type of words that people chose to speak about and some of the points that were made. Were some words skipped because of their complexity?
- Who chose to speak about their words, and why did they choose to do so?
- Having to speak extemporaneously can be difficult. You can use this exercise to make this point, to give people practice with impromptu speaking, and to discuss the benefits of being prepared.
- The exercise can also look at the fact that the external work of the group must give way at times to the need for discussing important issues inside the group.

Variation – Long Distance Toss

Additional goal	Group introspection
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Instructions

1. Have the group stand in a circle and establish a pattern, as in BAG TOSS.
2. Have everyone take 5-10 (or more) steps back.
3. Follow the instructions for BAG TOSS with the circle spread out.

Additional processing suggestions

- LONG DISTANCE TOSS can be used to illustrate a range of barriers that separate people (such as race, class, or different parts of a large organization). What kind of “bags” need to be thrown in order to make connections across these barriers?
- It can also show how much more difficult, yet exciting and empowering, it can be to make connections when people are separated by social distance, conflict, or lack of trust.

Bigger and Bigger

Goals	Communication, Acting
Time	Roughly one minute per participant (not including processing)
Physical contact	None necessary, but there may be some if participants choose to initiate it.
Physical challenges	None
Number of participants	15 or fewer
Space requirements	Open floor space is ideal, but the exercise can also be done around a table.
Materials needed	None
Preparation	None

Note: This exercise can be hard work emotionally, and it is likely that some people will not be able to do it. If someone is having difficulty, allow them to pass if they wish.

Instructions

1. Have the group stand in a circle.
2. Explain that each person will take a brief turn (less than a minute) telling a story to the person to their left, who faces the speaker and listens to what they have to say.
3. There are three rules for the storytelling:
 - (a) Your story cannot make sense.
 - (b) You must start softly and quietly and get more and more emotional and physically animated (bigger and bigger) through your tone, gestures, and volume as you tell your story. You may want to give an example for the group to demonstrate the range you are looking for.
 - (c) You must begin your story where the last person left off, but then may take the story in any direction.
4. Ask for a volunteer to start and then go around the group. The facilitators should participate. The person who listens is always the next to speak.

Processing suggestions

- While there are many issues that this exercise can be used to examine, be careful not to lose the energy that the exercise can create by “overprocessing.” This is a powerful exercise that opens up the subconscious without much processing.
- This exercise can be used to talk about the importance of bringing emotions into speeches or acting, and the importance of having a large range of emotional and physical expression when trying to engage an audience. What kinds of emotions did people see in this exercise?
- What did it feel like to let things get bigger? Was there a point when you pulled back? How did the listener have an impact on what you did?
- What was it like to listen to the story? What was the body language of listening?
- Body language and other non-verbal forms of communication can be very powerful, even in everyday conversation.



Variation – Smaller and Smaller

Instructions

1. As each person tells their story, they start out very animated, but then make their tone, gestures, and emotions “smaller and smaller” as they go along.

Additional processing suggestion

- SMALLER AND SMALLER can be used to look at the nuances of emotions and emotional expression.

Blind Walk

Goals	Interconnection, Trust
Time	5-10 minutes (not including processing)
Physical contact	Holding hands
Physical challenges	Must be able to walk without using sight.
Number of participants	10-20
Space requirements	Open floor space
Materials needed	None
Preparation	Decide on the route for the walk and check it for safety (for example, look for places where people might trip). The walk need not be long; a short walk, even circling around in one room, will be enough to allow you to process the exercise effectively.

Note: If possible, one or more facilitators should stand along the route as monitors.

Instructions

1. Have everyone line up behind you, holding hands.
2. Explain that you are going to lead the group on a walk, but that everyone (except for you) will have their eyes closed. Stress the need to walk carefully and quietly, with no pulling or fooling around.
3. Ask people to close their eyes, and begin the walk.

Processing suggestions

- BLIND WALK can surface issues of connection and trust in the group as people struggle with giving up control and trusting themselves to someone else's leadership.
- Were people able to keep their eyes closed the entire time? If not, why not? Did people feel safe? Did people trust the leader?
- In a group that is preparing for leadership, you can discuss the role of the leader in this exercise. A leader needs to have vision and perspective that will help others to move forward.