

# Shape Up

May 29, 2014 | by [Abigail R. Kies, MBA and Michelle Tillis Lederman, CPA, MBA, CEC](#)

## Primary Market

Teambuilding, Corporate Training

## Character Focus

Communication, Project Management, People Development

## Items Needed

Toobeez (see chart below for details), Blindfolds (one per participant), Video camera (recommended), Flip chart

## The Overview

“The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn’t said.”

Peter F. Drucker

## Description

A group of blindfolded people attempt to form a perfect square (or other shape) form a perfect square (or other shape) using Toobeez.

## Materials

- Toobeez (see chart below for details)
- Blindfolds (one per participant)
- Video camera (recommended)
- Flip chart

## Time Required

**Activity:** 30 minutes

**Debrief:** 30 minutes (minimum)

**Group Size:** 10 – 30 participants

**Space:** 20 x 40 (minimum room size)

Open space – no chairs, tables, etc.

## The Activity Setup

Count out the Toobeez needed for the shape you have chosen (see chart below). Keep them out of sight of the participants until the activity begins.



### Shape Options

SHAPE	MATERIALS
Square	4 of each color 16 connector spheres
Rectangle Option 1	2 red 2 gold 1 blue 1 green 6 connector spheres NOTE: Double pieces for larger group
Rectangle Option 2	6 red 2 gold 1 blue 3 green 13 connector spheres

## Instructions

### Facilitator Script

*To begin, stand in a circle facing in. Now put a blindfold on so none of you will be able to see. When I ask you to begin, you will find something inside your circle. Keep your hands out in front of you and move slowly to avoid bumping into each other.*

(Once everyone is blindfolded, quietly place the Toobeez inside the circle. Then continue with the instructions.)

Keeping your eyes closed and blindfolded at all times, find the objects in your midst. Make sure all of them are off the ground and in someone's hand.

(Once they find all the Toobeez, continue.)

Now, use the objects in your hands to make a perfect square (or other shape). Here are some guidelines:

1. You may only make one perfect shape, and you must use all the pieces.
2. You may only use the objects inside the circle to form the square.
3. Everyone must be standing along an edge and touching the shape for you to be complete.

You will have 20 minutes to complete this activity.

Any questions on the material covered? (Answer any questions and get teams situated). Begin.

## **Observations and Modifications**

Once the activity begins, your role as facilitator is to observe and watch for safety. You may need to remind people to move slowly with their hands out to avoid collisions .

Listen and look for the following: How people manage the project, work together, support each other, and communicate. The questions below, based on the primary Learning Intentions, are provided to guide your observations.

### ***Project Management***

This activity is a great opportunity for people to assume project management responsibilities. Everyone starts in the same position, and someone needs to take on the role of managing the process in order to have it work out. During the activity, observe.

- How people manage the task.
- How people support and encourage each other.
- How people demonstrate their sense of ownership over the outcome.
- Does anyone know how much time has elapsed?
- Do they complete the shape? What do they do with the remaining time?

### ***Communication***

In this activity, communication is key. People may be all speaking at once or not at all. They may be clearly articulating ideas or direction, or they may be speaking without any sense of how their team is hearing and comprehending what they're saying.

Regardless, observe how they exchange ideas with their team. Listen and notice:

- How are people addressing each other (orderly, respectfully, deferentially, or confrontationally)?
- How do people deal with and communicate around a failed attempt?
- How do people listen, and to whom do they listen?
- What non-verbal communication do you observe?
- Does anybody “check out” and stop participating in the activity?

### **Concluding the Activity**

After 20 minutes, regardless of how complete the shape is, conclude the activity.

#### **Facilitators Choice...**

In Ending the Activity, let the team choose when to open their eyes. Tell them they can open their eyes when there is agreement that they have successfully formed the shape requested.

NOTE: Use the complete 20 minutes. Even if the shape is complete, let the team use that time; see what they do with it.

### **Variations**

Variations are optional and will highlight additional skill sets.

#### **1. Highlighting: Strategic Thinking**

*In addition to the instructions above, videotape the exercise to use during the debrief.*

## **The Debrief**

The debrief should be an interactive discussion. Lead it by offering a series of questions and soliciting responses from the participants. To begin, ask questions about the activity itself and continue with specifics related to the skills you want to address or highlight. You may stick to one area of focus or choose to cover many topics. Suggested questions are offered below to guide you as you facilitate this debrief.

The debrief is organized with an Opening and Closing and then by Learning Intention, and it may be used in a variety of ways. You may use just the Opening and Closing for a basic debrief or add the Learning Intention-specific debriefs in between. To include the Learning Intention specifics in your debrief, either pick one or two questions from each area in order to touch on

many topics or work in depth on one or more areas of learning and go through all of the questions for that topic(s). Look through the questions, TIPs, FCs, and Transitions prior to the training session in order to choose which ones you will cover (see “How to Use this Book”).

## **Opening**

The intention of this activity is to develop project management skills and enhance communication among participants. However, this activity offers many lessons, so let the participants share with you what they learned and their comments as to the purpose of the activity.

- What was the point of this exercise?
- How did you handle the lack of control?
- What was the biggest challenge of this activity (being blindfolded, coordinating with the team, communication or other)?

## **Closing**

Project management includes planning, organizing, implementing, and measuring the results. When working on project, determining the needs in each of these phases can be a great challenge. To succeed, you must communicate clearly and openly, define roles, support the contributions of the team, accept responsibility for the project’s outcome.

### ***Concluding Questions***

- What did you learn about communication and project management?
- What could have been done differently?
- Where else in your professional life do you act with partial information, relying on those around you?
- What can you now do differently to optimize those situations?

### ***Action Plans***

- How many ways can you apply what you’ve learned in this activity to:
  - Meeting team goals
  - Coworker relationships
  - Professional development
- Based on your new experiences and insights, what could be different in going forward?
- What three action steps (with specific, measurable results) will you take this month to begin incorporating what you’ve learned into your daily routine?

## **LI: Communication**

People are always engaged in many levels of communication. The following questions offer participants the opportunity become aware of their communication, the impact it has on others, and the results it creates. Through this awareness people will then get to choose the alternatives that serve their goals.

### ***Speaking***

- Did you speak up when you had ideas?
- Were you clear and specific when describing or asking questions?
- What did your tone indicate about your mood, level of participation in, or acceptance of the project plan?
- How did your tone or participation change when your ideas were ignored?

### ***Listening***

- How did you listen throughout the activity?
- Did you exclusively listen to one or two people, or did you listen to everyone?
- How did your listening change when the speaker's tone changed?

### *Non-verbal*

- What body language did you notice in yourself and others, regardless of whether you could see at the time?
- How did your body language change as decisions were made and actions were taken?
- How did your position in your organization impact how you communicated with your team?

### *When using Variation #1*

- Now that you can see your own body language, what do you think it communicated about you?
- How would you respond if someone displayed that body language to you?
- Whose body language worked for you?
- What else do you see?

### *Summary Script*

Observing your own verbal and non-verbal communication is an opportunity to recognize communication pitfalls and create awareness of what works, what doesn't, and how your communication is received. Use this awareness to identify role models and adapt your behavior, as well as to encourage an open, supportive communication style in others.

## **LI: Project Management**

Successful project management means meeting stated objectives. However, even though the goal is clear, the means to achieve those goals usually is not. Determining project scope, gathering resources, planning, organizing, implementing and ultimately measuring and monitoring the project are all elements of project management. Use the following questions to generate a discussion about how people managed each other and the project of forming a perfect shape.

- What role did you assume in relationship to others?
- How did you manage the project overall?
- Who did you treat as the Project Manager? Why?
- What tasks did you interpret to be the PM's responsibility versus yours?
- What distinct stages of the project did your team work through?
- What could have been done differently?

## **LI: People Development (S)**

Being a member of a team means contributing as well as supporting your teammates and empowering them to make their contribution. To

continue to develop, you must not only accept feedback, but also be willing to provide it. You must challenge yourself and others to work outside your comfort zones. Using the following questions, generate a conversation to expand the participants' abilities to develop themselves and others.

- What did you notice about how you and your teammates participated in this activity?
- How can you support people to optimize what's working?
- How can you provide feedback and guidance effectively?

### **When using Variation #1**

- What are some personal pitfalls you discovered? How can you avoid them?

- Whose actions did you admire and want to encourage?
- What feedback would you give yourself after viewing your actions?
- What feedback do you have for your team?

### ***Key Take-Aways***

- You can effectively manage projects even when you cannot see everything going on.
- Constructive, sensitive, and supportive communication contributes to a team's success.
- Being an effective manager can mean supporting the contribution of your teammates as much as directly contributing to the project results.

### **About Author**

#### **Abigail R. Kies, MBA and Michelle Tillis Lederman, CPA, MBA, CEC (9 Activities)**

**Abigail R. Kies, MBA** is the founder of Play To Win Coaching, a leadership development company. Combining her business background and powerful coaching skills, Abigail works closely with individuals, teams, and organizations from diverse backgrounds in varied situations... entrepreneurs, managers, Fortune 500 executives, artists, teachers, lawyers... to enhance communication, enrich relationships, develop leadership, and realize visions.

**Michelle Tillis Lederman, CPA, MBA, CEC** is the founder of Executive Essentials, a training company. She has delivered seminars internationally for corporations, universities, high schools, and non-profit organizations including: JPMorgan Chase, Deutsche Bank, Columbia Business School, and The Museum of Modern Art. Michelle is an Adjunct Professor at NYU's Stern School of Business in the Management Communications department and serves on the faculty of the American Management Association.

[All Activities of Abigail R. Kies, MBA and Michelle Tillis Lederman, CPA, MBA, CEC](#)