

The Tennis Ball Game

Rationale

This is a team building exercise intended to develop cohesion amongst the participants by using an analogy to introduce crisis resource management concepts. The exercise takes about 5 minutes and then the group debriefs for another 5 minutes to discuss what happened and why and plan how it could be improved in the future. If the group is large it is useful to have one of the participants watch, rather than participate. This helps to introduce the concept of stepping back and seeing the big picture. During the discussion the analogy to a “crisis” is obvious and participants inevitably identify the important principles needed for successful crises management, but from a non-threatening context.

Instructions:

Step 1	Ask participants to stand up and form a circle. Remove any coffee or food items from the table
Step 2	Inform the participants of the rules. I am going to throw this ball with a term written on it to someone. I would like you to accomplish the following tasks: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.) catch the ball 2.) read the word written on the ball 3.) call out the word 4.) throw the ball to someone else 5.) accomplish all of the tasks within 3 seconds
Step 3	Allow the group to successfully juggle the ball. Gradually introduce more balls. Let the game progress for 3-5 minutes
Step 4	Announce “game over” when there is chaos, confusion, laughter, balls on the floor.
Step 5	Ask for the balls to be passed to the right back to you. This will demonstrate the importance of an event manager taking control and suggesting strategy.
Step 6	Debrief reactions and understandings. <u>Reactions:</u> how did they feel? Ask for several responses. Predictably the group will list terms that describe a crisis in a clinical setting: chaotic, confusing, loud, dangerous, fun, the balls were getting dropped, we weren’t communicating well etc. <u>Understanding:</u> I noticed that you weren’t using names. If you had used names then I think it may have eliminated some of the confusion. I’m wondering why you didn’t. <u>Generalise:</u> Does this ever happen in a crisis at the bedside? <u>Apply:</u> how do you overcome it. If you were asked to play this game again, what could you do differently to make the game go more smoothly?