1. “Just a Glimpse”
Purpose of activity: This game encourages problem solving and helps groups learn to communicate effectively.

The leader of the activity builds a small structure with some of the wooden building blocks from the set of blocks and hides it from the group.

Divide the participants into teams of 3-4 people.

Each team is given the same set of wooden blocks so that they can duplicate the structure created by the leader.

One member from each team comes up at the same time to look at the block structure for 30 seconds. They try to memorize it before returning to their team. After they return to their teams, they have 30 seconds to instruct their teams about how to build an exact replica of the leader’s structure using their own set of wooden blocks. The team cannot start to build until he has finished his instructions. Once he has given instructions and they are building he can no longer say anything.

The team then gets 1 minute to try to recreate the structure. After 1 minute of building another member from each team can come up for “just a glance.” They get 30 seconds to look at the structure before returning to their team, explain for 30 seconds, and the team continues to try to recreate the structure. The game continues until one team is the first to successfully duplicate the original structure of building blocks.

Debrief: Here are some discussion questions to be used after the activity.

What difficulties did you face as a group?
What successes did you have as a group?
Who in your group communicated most effectively?
What was it that made their communication effective?
What frustrations did the person explaining have with those building?
What frustrations did the “builders” have with the “explainers”?
Did your group have a leader?
What made that person an effective leader?
What would you have done differently to accomplish your goal more efficiently?
2. “Working as a Team”

**Purpose of Activity:** To explore how people in your group work together and how each member contributes a different style to collective work. Understanding group members’ different approaches to collective work will help you work more effectively together.

This activity requires very little context, however, it can take between 30-60 minutes.

In fact, the minimal directions and explanation are essential to the process. Have participants sit in a circle. Dump the blocks in a pile on the floor, leaving the container somewhere in the circle. Tell your group, “This is a game that will help us think about how our group works collectively. We’ll go around the circle and take turns moving the blocks. There are two rules: move only one block at a time, and no one talks.”

As the facilitator, begin the game by going to the center of the circle and moving a single block – then sit down in silence. Model being present with the game and keeping silent. Play continues around the circle, allowing each participant a turn to move a single block. There is no end in itself to moving the blocks. The group isn’t necessarily aiming to build a tower or any sort of structure, and you’re not working to clear all the blocks from the center. The action of moving the blocks according to so few directions is a means to examine how your group works together.

Eventually, someone in the group will want to make the game more interesting; moving a single block can get boring pretty quickly. This person will do any number of things to break or bend the rules – moving multiple blocks, going out of turn, knocking over a block someone else has moved, etc. Having someone break the rules is essential to your end reflection. If, after four or five rounds, all participants are still abiding by the rules, you should introduce rule breaking yourself.

Ending the game: Play continues until someone finds a way to create an ending or you end the game yourself because of time constraints. (This could be up to 30 minutes, depending on time restraints.)

**Debrief:** After the game has ended, continue in the pattern of the circle for the debriefing. Tell your group, “That game may have seemed simple, but I’ll bet you have some feelings about it that you’d like to share. We’ll have three rounds of questions, and everyone will have a chance to speak during each round. Please listen deeply to everyone’s reflection and hold your comments until it’s your turn to speak. If you don’t want to speak when it’s your turn, you can pass. At the end of each round of sharing, I’ll ask those who passed if they’ve changed their mind about speaking, but it’s okay to pass then, too.” You may choose to use a talking piece to reinforce that this debriefing is a time for every person to be heard rather than a free-for-all dialogue.

**Discussion 1:** Tell your group, “Whenever a group works together, it’s looking for the wholeness of the group – what will make the overall work come together. Sometimes, a person needs to let go of something for the group to be able to do its work – to be whole. When you reflect on this experience, what did you learn that you needed to let go of or give up to support the wholeness of the group? Start the discussion with a personal example, such as: “I had to give up my judgment of others” or “I had to give up my certainty about how the structure was supposed to look” or “I had to give up my perception about how this game was supposed to be played.” The most powerful example is one that has genuinely come up from your experience of the game.

**Discussion 2:** Say to the group, “This game reflects a lot of what it’s like to work in community. People work together, but they all have a different idea about what they’re building and how to value previous contributions. Someone with a different idea comes along and tears down what’s been built together. Then you start again, without a clear sense of when you’re finished or when the game will be done. So consider this question: What does your experience of this game tell you about what you need to do to stay in the game of working in your community? What helps you stay connected to and caring about the work?” Again, begin the discussion with a personal example, such as: “I love seeing the creativity of how people respond to change” or “I was curious to see what would happen next” or “I was totally frustrated but I stayed because I wanted to be part of this group.”

**Discussion 3:** Say to the group, “Remember that this game is a reflection of working together in community, and there were many different energy flows – people coming together, competing visions, destructive forces, adaptation. So, think about what happened throughout the flow of the game and your relationship to all of those forces and to the other players. Now, what did you learn about how you play off others and how you see and respond to what others need? What did you see about how others helped the group move toward wholeness? What is your contribution to wholeness?” Begin the round with your own example, such as: “I found that I was very patient with what others needed and could easily wait my turn” or “I found myself getting anxious about how others would feel whenever someone knocked over a structure” or “I tried to make a connection with the person knocking blocks over so he would stop.”
After you’ve completed these three rounds, you may open up the conversation for a general reflection about the participants’ experiences – what they learned about themselves and about the group.

3. “Sum of the Parts”

PURPOSE OF ACTIVITY: Challenge a team to think about how communication is needed to improve work morale and help bridge differences. Teaches how each one doing their part can meet a team goal through effective communication. Great communication activity that proves that sometimes everyone is right!

TEAMS OF 6 PEOPLE EACH

TIME REQUIRED: 30 mins.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Set of wooden building blocks for each team. Separate instructions for each team member.

OBJECTIVE: Participants must build a shared tower using the wooden blocks provided. Each member of the team has their own instructions that the others are not aware of.

RULES: Participants must not share their instructions with each other at any point.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR TEAM MEMBERS:

Team Member #1: Your tower must be 10 levels high.
Team Member #2: Your tower must be built with cubes, and triangles.
Team Member #3: Your tower must be built with cubes, rectangles, triangles and arches.
Team Member #4: The 4th level of your tower must include arches.
Team Member #5: Your tower must include at least 30 blocks.
Team Member #6: Only you may build the tower.

Remember team members may not share their instructions with the other team members.

Game ends when each team has completed their structure. They then share with each other their individual instructions and see if they have met all the requirements.

Debrief: Discuss the following after the activity.

Have the team rate their effectiveness on a 1-10 scale (1 meaning you didn’t work well together, 10 meaning you were extraordinary).

How many of the individual instructions did we complete?

What instructions did we not complete? Why were you not able to complete them?

Was there a leader in our group?

What did that person do to help our group accomplish our goal?

What difficulties did you face?

How did you resolve difficulties?

How did you feel throughout the activity?

Who in the group communicated the best? How did they communicate?

What can you learn about team differences and team morale from this activity?
4. “Director, Runner, Builder, Observer”

**Purpose** - to illustrate the importance of clear communication, and allow the group to explore their communication style and make improvements as necessary.

**Materials and Preparation** - 2 matching sets of children's building blocks (or Legos), with 10 blocks in each set. Using one set of blocks, build a random object using the 10 blocks. (Optional - 2 bags to contain each set of building blocks.)

**Time** - 45 mins

**Group Size** - minimum 3 people, up to about 7.
(You can have duplicate exercise running in parallel if group is larger, but will need more sets of building blocks).

There are 4 roles in this communication skills game.

- Person A - director
- Person B - runner
- Person C - builder
- Person(s) D - observer(s)

Person A is given the built-up set of blocks, and is the only person who can see the object. It is the director's job to give clear instructions to person B, the runner, so that person C can build an exact replica of the model.

Person B listens to the director's instructions and runs to a different part of the room to where person C is sitting. The runner then passes on the building instructions, without seeing the building blocks, to Person C, the builder. The runner can make as many trips as required within the time allowed for the exercise.

Person C listens to the runner's instructions and builds the object from the set of building blocks. The builder is the only person who can see the object under construction, and building materials.

Person(s) D observe the communication game, and make notes about what works, what doesn't work, and how people behaved under pressure etc., to pass onto the group later.

Set a time limit for the exercise of 10 minutes.

When the time is up, allow the group to compare the model and the replica, and see how closely it matches. Generally, the replica will bear little resemblance to the original, which usually causes heated discussion!

**Debrief:**
Allow the group to reflect on how the exercise went, and agree 1 thing they did well, 1 thing that didn't work, and 1 thing they would do better next time.

Run the exercise again, either switching or keeping original roles, and see if any improvements have been made. Make sure you de-construct the "original" model and create a new design!

This simple communication skills game can be run many times without losing learning potential. Teams can add layers of sophistication to their communication by making use of aids such as diagrams, codes, standard procedures and using active listening techniques.
5. “Tower Building: Giving Direction”

Purpose: This exercise gives participants first-hand experience of how management style affects the performance of a team. It shows different styles in action, demonstrating, for example, that what managers intend is not always what comes across. It’s an engaging, enlightening exercise that has real impact and generates live, behavioral data you can work with.

Divide your participants into groups, each containing one manager and three team members.

Instructions: As a group, they have to build a tower using the blocks. Sounds easy – until you tell them that team members must be blindfolded and use their non-dominant hand.
Managers cannot touch either the blocks or their team members.

The Tower Build Exercise gives participants first-hand experience of the impact of management style on the performance of the team. This is a chance for participants to think about what makes a great leader, and it provides rich data upon which to draw important conclusions about leadership behavior and its impact.

Debrief: Discuss some of these important messages.

What a manager intends is not always what comes across to others. How can managers make a difference by providing a perspective on what the team is trying to accomplish?
Did you notice a difference in active and reflective learners?
What did you learn about others in your group?
What did you learn about how you can influence your team?
Did you notice different managerial styles in action?

6. “Senior Management, Middle Management, and Workers”

Start with three rooms with a phone in each room. It is best if the rooms are far apart, or on different floor but the key is to make communications inconvenient. Have a complicated building block image or lego project description/picture.

Divide your participants into three equal groups: Workers, Middle Management and Senior Management.
Each group has one of the rooms.

Workers are told they have a contract to build something. They get all the building block pieces. No instructions, no pictures, nothing. All they get are blocks.

Middle Management is told to wait for instructions from senior management.

Senior Management is given the picture and instruction to build the product. They are also told that the end product is worth $1,000,000. They have two hours to deliver. Management was informed the cost of material and the labor cost per minute. Each minutes late will cost them $5,000.00. They get a bonus if they can get it done within 90 minutes.
Then they are told where the workers and middle management are located.

Allow a few minutes (20 or so) for the groups to decide what to do with the instructions provided to them.

Debrief: Come together as a group, and discuss what happened.

Did the project get accomplished? Was it correct? How long did it take, and accordingly, how much money was brought in?
Did the pictures and instructions ever leave the senior management’s room? (How long did it take? Often they get too busy arguing about how to proceed.)
Did senior management contact middle management?
Did the Workers ever contact Middle Management to see what they were supposed to do?
How did middle management respond—where they overwhelmed? Where they left in the dark?
What could we learn from this in our facility?

Split into small groups, with each group given an identical set of blocks.

The facilitator should circulate among the groups observing team interactions during this activity.

Part one:
Each team is to appoint one manager. The managers should be pulled aside, and instructed to tell the individuals in their group that their goal is to build the tallest free standing tower possible within a given time limit. This should be accomplished by following explicit instructions from the manager.

These instructions should include HOW to assemble the tower with a stack of blocks, in what order, in what relationship and EXACTLY what they should do. (For example, put “A” on the bottom, but place it on its left side. Put letter “t” on the left side of the “A” block, but with the “T” facing downwards.) The manager can make it up as they go along, but should be very detailed in giving instructions.
After 5 minutes, stop part one.

Part Two:
Tell them they are going to try a different approach. (Take the towers down.)

Pull the managers aside to return to their group and simply instruct their group that their goal is to create the tallest tower. They are not to provide any specific instructions, but rather allow the team members to work together. They are able to contribute, but should welcome feedback, interaction and discussion, but should not provide explicit or detailed instructions from the entire group.

Facilitator Notes: In Part one, they, in fact, will probably assemble quite different towers and quickly lose both interest and motivation. It is probably not as fun for them, just doing something they are told to do.
This contrasts part two of the activity, where their job is to “create the tallest tower.” This is a very general framework that is likely more engaging. (Keep in mind, there is not necessarily a “right” or “better” way in part one versus part two- it can vary greatly depending on the manager’s style and delivery.)

Debrief:
This debriefing is quite flexible and can be linked to personal style inventories, teamwork discussions, leadership, work / task analysis, etc.

What were your feelings on the motivation of part one versus part two?
What was your personal preference in the managers’ style?
How does it relate to productivity and quality, etc. in the workplace?

Other discussion items: collaborative team interactions, successes and failures, and personality styles of the team and team members (aggressiveness, leaders, followers, etc.)
8. “Engagement and Ownership of Quality/Productivity”

Note: this activity was created to use LEGO blocks, not building blocks.

Select a number of the same LEGO assembly kits (there are many possibilities and your selection depends on your store's inventory. Have one kit for each team of 4 or 5 people. A less expensive option is to purchase one very large set of regular LEGO and assemble a series of sets of the same pieces.

From your inventory of parts, construct written step-by-step Instruction Sheet that is specific and detailed as to the assembly of what you will describe as "a device. " This device should use 20 to 25 parts (20 to 25 assembly steps) to create some object, possibly one of your own design or that of a specific kit. You will give participants very detailed step-by-step instructions as to how to make this device.

Without knowing the desired end result of their assembly activities, the likelihood of failure is fairly high and the directive nature of the instructions will generally create a conflict among the participants, even though instructions are exact. There will be initial "new employee" interest, but the team, after a few steps, will gradually shift responsibility for the task to one or two people, with the others becoming passive observers.

Instructions to participants might be as follows -

Read the following or give this to one of the participants who will function as group leader, who will read them. You can repeat your instructions but you cannot explain in any additional detail.

"Each team is to create a device that will be used later in the day. You have sufficient parts in your plastic bag. Please follow instructions exactly - your cooperation is appreciated. Quality and Productivity are both important."

Follow these instructions carefully:

1. Take one of the ten by two long red double thick pieces.
2. Center a four by two double thick blue piece on top, at the end, perpendicular to the red piece, flat to the end.
3. Center a four by two double thick white piece on top, at the other end, perpendicular to the red piece flat to the end.
4. Parallel to the red bottom piece, place a four by two double thick yellow piece so that one space is visible at each end on each side.
5. Take the two red Roof pieces and place them on the perpendicular blue two by four block on the end so that the 8 of the bottom holes are exposed and you can still see four of the blue dots are visible.
6. Do the same thing with the other red Roof piece, only have the piece face in the same direction as the other red Roof piece, leave four white dots showing on the end and have the red Roof piece cover two of the dots on the parallel yellow piece.

Continue this until you complete your kit or until you have 20 steps.

(Note to facilitators: As you develop this list, you should simultaneously construct your Standard Model so that it is available for side-by-side comparison at the end of the exercise. Continue building your list based on the specific kits that you purchased or the general supply of LEGO blocks -- you can purchase large tubs of them relatively inexpensively).

Present the exercise in a dry and straightforward manner. At the end of the exercise (and you can stop anytime prior to completion), ask participants to discuss what happened to their team and in the activity. You can also compare the finished products to that of a pre-assembled Standard Model to make the point of how difficult things can be even with a straightforward task when the vision is unclear. Jo Clarke and Darin Ulmer both had somewhat similar suggestions.
Debriefing questions might include:

Was there any pressure to perform? How did pressure to perform show itself? What was positive? What was negative? How might this parallel situations we face at work?
What might have been motivating to you as a team? As individuals?
Did team members support each other? Explain.
What kinds of things were demotivating to your team? As individuals?
What were some of the factors that contributed to quality problems?
What communications system(s) did the team establish and how successfully did they work?
Why is general understanding of the nature of the task important for generating consistent products and services?

Comment on some of the group dynamics that were generated by the nature of this activity.
- Boss to Crew
- Crew to Crew

Can you think of an example where someone in the group expressed a strong feeling non-verbally? How did they do it? How was it noticed by others. (then) Are these non-verbal communications important to teamwork?
What did you personally learn from this activity? How did you feel when you finished?
What might we learn about work design and group dynamics?
What is the advantage of taking the time to talk about the work we completed and the groups’ goals on a regular basis in the workplace? How might this be done effectively to improve quality or productivity?


Objective: This is an icebreaker that helps teams quickly understand that communication is key and there are different ways to explain things to people.

Materials:

- 2 bags
- 2 chairs
- Using the larger size LEGOs for toddlers works best.
- In one bag are there are the same pieces (size, color, and number) but they are NOT put together. (Use about 7 blocks)
- In the other bag bag are the same pieces (size, color, and number) but they are ARE put together in any model you wish. (Use about 7 blocks)

Set-Up

1. Place two chair back to back in front of the group.
2. Ask for two volunteers and have them sit in each chair.
3. Hand one bag of LEGOs to one participant. In this bag is a model put together. They may pull it out for themselves and the group to see. They may NOT show it to their partner behind them.
4. Hand one bag of legos to the other participant. In this bag are the same pieces (size, color, and number) but they are NOT put together. Again, they may pull it out for themselves and the group to see. They may NOT show it to their partner behind them. Call this person the Builder.

Facilitation: (2 Min. max each time, you may stop if they get very frustrated.)
Total time: 10 minutes with group interaction and discussion

Round 1:

1. **Tell the participants:**
   a. The participant with the model: You may talk, but you may NOT use words that are colors or shapes.
   b. The Builder: You may not ask any questions.
   c. The group: You may not help.
2. Begin Round 1:
a. If anyone breaks the rules, you must call them on it as the facilitator.

b. After 2 min., no one turns around and the participants are asked.
i. How did you feel?
ii. What would help you do a better job as a team?

Round 2:

3. Tell the participants:
a. The participant with the model: You may talk, but you may NOT use words that are colors or shapes.
b. The Builder: You MAY ask any questions.
c. The group: You may not help.

4. Begin Round 2:
a. If anyone breaks the rules, you must call them on it as the facilitator.
b. After 2 min., no one turns around and the participants are asked.
i. How did you feel?
ii. What would help you do a better job as a team?

Round 3:

5. Tell the participants:
a. The participant with the model: You may talk, but you may NOT use words that are colors or shapes.
b. The Builder: You MAY ask any questions.
c. The group: Now you will invite one more person to come and help from the group. They may do anything to help the team, and they CAN NOT use the words that are colors and shapes.

6. Begin Round 3:
a. If anyone breaks the rules, you must call them on it as the facilitator.
b. After 2 min., no one turns around and the participants are asked.
i. How did you feel?
ii. What would help you do a better job as a team?
c. To the group: What did this teach you about working together as a team?

Results: The exercise shows teams:

1. We all communicate differently.
2. There are other words to use to make people understand.
3. Sometimes we need a 3rd party to help us hear each other.
4. Working together is important and a process. Sometimes it takes more time than we think to reach our goal but with understanding and patience, we can achieve our goals.