

# Top 5 “High Torque” Team Building Games For Developing Trust & Communication



teachmeteamwork.com



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## Introduction

Show me a high performing team and I'll show you a team that has excellent trust building and communication skills.

If you work with or lead a team and you're ready to become a high performing team, you must teach and promote the foundational skills of trust building and communication and this activity guide will show you 5 activities that do just that.



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*Team Leader Coach*

The activities you'll find here aren't just any activities - - they're what I call "high torque" activities. To be considered "high torque", the activity must be challenging either emotionally or physically or both. These activities require a high level of focus and concentration to accomplish

My name is Tom Heck and I've traveled extensively teaching leaders how to help teams. I now share the strategies, tactics and tools I've learned and developed through my website, e-books, multi-media CDs, team building games and more.

Some of my credentials include:

- Through my online training program ([www.teachmeteamwork.com](http://www.teachmeteamwork.com)) I train people in 69 countries.
- I've lead hundreds of live (in person) workshops and worked with thousands of people from virtually all walks of life.

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- I've invented and licensed over 20 team building games that are sold worldwide (all are available at my website).
- I've published several team building games books.
- I've developed multi-media training CDs which teach team building games.
- I'm a highly-trained coach of team leaders (personally participating in thousands of hours of training).
- I've been identified by leaders in the field of experiential education as one of the most creative forces in the industry and have been called a "master teacher" and leader of team building games.

And now I'm ready to share all I've learned with you. Your success is my number one goal.

### **A Leadership Note**

Lead all of the activities found in this activity guide in such a manner that the participants understand they have choice as to whether they participate or not. Encourage each person to communicate their comfort level with the activity and to join in at the level they choose (full, partial, none) rather than be coerced into participation.

These activities are wonderful and they can help create a positive shift for your group. And yet, the most important thing to remember is this: what you will end up teaching your group is WHO YOU ARE. In other words, if an un-centered person whose primary operating emotion is fear (rather than love), it won't make any difference how cool or unique the activity is because the primary message communicated to the group will be: "I am a fearful person".

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You must develop who you are as a leader because who you are will be the first message you send to your group (and there's no way of avoiding this). To be a highly effective leader and team facilitator you must dedicate yourself to personal development. A practical place to start on your path of personal development is the Personal Foundation For Leaders Program offered through [www.teachmeteamwork.com](http://www.teachmeteamwork.com)

The activities at TeachMeTeamwork.com can be done just for fun without going into a discussion about what was learned. However, it's my hope that you will use the activities to create opportunities for dialogue. Suggestions for starting a conversation (a "debrief") are offered in each description. The key to learning through experiential teambuilding exercises is the combination of activity PLUS discussion. You can learn to be an effective leader of teambuilding activities at [www.teachmeteamwork.com](http://www.teachmeteamwork.com)

Challenge and adventure activities can present elements of physical and emotional risk. The information presented in this activity guide is for your reference, and you are ultimately responsible for judging the suitability of an activity and safely supervising the activity.

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No single source of adventure based experiential education can substitute for practical experience and education. While this activity guide serves as an introduction to the use of adventure based experiential learning, it is only an introduction. Studying the material in this activity guide is no substitute for professional training. You can find professional facilitator training at [www.teachmeteamwork.com](http://www.teachmeteamwork.com)

Enjoy!

Tom Heck  
Team Leader Coach  
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## Activity # 1

### Mouse Trap Trust



**Group Size:** People work in pairs

**Age Range:** Adult

**Intensity:** Mental=3, Physical=1

**Time:** 20 – 30 minutes

**Space:** Minimal – Medium -- Lots

**Set Up Time:** 3 minutes

**Props:** One “traditional” wooden mousetrap per pair

#### Objective

Coach your partner (who’s eyes are closed) into placing their hand on top of a set mousetrap.

### Set Up / Preparation

1. This is an advanced activity to be led by a skilled facilitator with groups that are ready for the challenge.
2. Prior to leading this activity you must accurately assess your group's ability to safely participate in this activity. Do not attempt this activity if your or your group isn't ready.
3. Make sure your group understands that participation in this activity is purely voluntary. If you don't want to participate than don't do it. Find some other way to add value to the experience (observe and give feedback, etc.).
4. When you're group is clear on the rules of engagement tell them there will be four stages to this activity:

### The Four Stages (Steps)

Step #1	Leader demonstrates how to set a mousetrap. Partner up, each pair gets 1 trap, practice setting the trap. Plan on this taking about 4-5 minutes
Step #2	Partners each get a chance to set a trap with their eyes closed. Plan on this taking about 4-5 minutes
Step #3	Show the group how to safely un-set a trap by placing your hand directly on top of the trap and then taking your hand off the trap (see video). This step can be shocker for some. They might find it hard to believe what you're doing. Plan on this taking about 5 minutes to have pairs try.
Step #4	Person A closes eyes then person B sets trap and places it on a hard surface. Person A is coached by person B to un-set trap. Switch roles.

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- Pacing is important. Don't rush this activity.
- Speak clearly and confidently. This is not the time and place for jokes (by you or anyone else).
- Don't show all 4 steps at one time. Show one step then have the group do that step.

### **Safety Warning**

A high degree of trust is required to successfully accomplish this challenge. This challenge is best left for a group that is advanced as far as maturity and their ability to safely care for one another. People can get hurt in this activity but it is unlikely they will get seriously hurt (that's one reason we use a mouse trap instead of a rat trap!).

### **Comments**

- This is one of the most amazing activities I've ever seen. It's so portable and yet so powerful in it's ability to create growth possibilities within individuals and a group.
- If you are familiar with the trust building activity called the Trust Fall (described elsewhere at [teachmeteamwork.com](http://teachmeteamwork.com)) you'll find this activity to be similar in it's impact.
- Expect some people not to participate in this activity at all. Expect others to stop participating half way through (like when you tell them to put their hand on top of the trap).
- This activity can be powerful with a small group (two or four people) and just as powerful with a room full of people (500+). I'd even go so far to say that this activity will be transformational for many.

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### Debriefing Suggestions

- Which did you prefer, to coach or be coached? Why?
- If this mousetrap represents a fear in your life, what did you like about how you handled it? What would you change?
- What did you observe in the interactions between partnerships around you?

### Variations

Hand out a mousetrap to each person. Have them write on the trap a fear they are choosing to face in their life.



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## Activity # 2

### Elastic To Bucket



**Group Size:** Groups of 6 – 8 people

**Age Range:** middle school – adult

**Intensity:** Mental=2, Physical=1

**Time:** 10 – 20 minutes (without debrief)

**Space:** Minimal – Medium -- Lots

**Set Up Time:** 60 seconds

**Props:** One piece of stretchy elastic (6 feet long) for each group

#### Objective

The group must release the stretched out elastic circle in such a way that the elastic falls into the bucket.

### **Set Up / Preparation**

1. Purchase elastic cord from a fabric store and cut into 6 foot long (2 meter) pieces. Tie the elastic cord in a circle. Supply each group with one elastic circle.
2. Each person in the group holds onto the elastic with two fingers and then the group backs up so the elastic is stretched out in a big circle (people are spaced evenly from each other). Place the bucket in the center of the circle.
3. The group must now release the elastic simultaneously and in such a way that the elastic falls into the bucket.

### **Rules**

1. The group must keep the elastic fully stretched just before the release.
2. The group must release the elastic simultaneously.
3. The bucket must stay in the center of the circle.
4. The elastic can only land inside the bucket as a result of the simultaneous release of the elastic by the group (example: the elastic cannot be thrown in to the bucket by one person)

### **Comments**

If you're looking for a team challenge that is easy to transport and very difficult for a group to have success with, this is it! Very rarely will a group actually solve this challenge - - it's that difficult. What this activity will do is get a group to engage in dialogue and creative problem solving. Because the group will likely experience non-success, it will provide them with an opportunity to determine what non-success means to them.

### **Debriefing Suggestions**

1. Frustration. Blame. These are things you'll likely be helping a group process through with this activity. Especially if you allow/make them do the activity for a long time (i.e. 30 minutes).
2. Is it possible to solve this challenge? Yes. But it's very rare (in my experience). Why do it then? Offer this activity up BECAUSE it's nearly impossible to complete. If you have a group that can get any challenge done quickly and easily then this is a great challenge to give them. This activity may be the thing that helps them evolve and play a bigger game.
3. Your ability to debrief this effectively will determine the outcome of this lesson. Are you able to work with a group that is trying to process non-success?

### **Variations**

Don't use a bucket - - use a piece of string tied in a circle instead. Just place the string on the ground and have the group release the elastic in such a way that it falls into the center of the string. If you want the group to experience success, make the string circle really large and then after they have success, make the string circle smaller and smaller with each attempt.

## Activity # 3

### Minefield



**Group Size:** 2 – 50

**Age Range:** elementary – adult

**Intensity:** Mental=2 or 3, Physical=1

**Time:** 15 – 30 minutes (without debrief)

**Space:** Minimal – Medium -- Lots

**Set Up Time:** 5 minutes

**Props:** 70 feet of rope to create a playing area, 50 – 100 objects that act as obstacles/landmines (ex. Tennis balls, pieces of foam, mousetraps, etc.)

#### Objective

Retrieve as many of the “goals” on the other side of the minefield as time will permit.

### **Set Up / Preparation**

1. Using the 70 feet of rope, create a boundary that is shaped more or less like a rectangle. Shape the rope on the long sides of the rectangle somewhat irregular, which will prevent the participants from following the edge of the rope as a potential “path”.
2. Spread out the 50+ obstacles inside the boundary in such a way that there are no straight pathways through the minefield. NOTE: During the actual activity, you may find the group has located an “easy” pathway, which you did not see until the group started. I allow myself the option as the facilitator to change/adjust the minefield playing area midstream by rearranging the landmines (obstacles). If the group challenges me on this, I usually say I am attempting to mimic real life (i.e. things change and you can either adapt or whine about it).
3. Provide the group with large index cards and have them write down personal and/or team goals on the cards. These cards can be used as the objects this group retrieves from the other end of the minefield. If you don't want to do a goal setting session with the group you can use everyday objects to represent something valuable or use gold coins (real or not) and ask the group to retrieve those.
4. Place the team's goals / desired outcomes at one end of the rectangle. Have the group start at the opposite end and travel through the minefield to pick them up and then return back through the minefield.
5. Before you start, people need to partner up.

### **Rules**

1. The group must start at the designated starting area.
2. You must work in pairs (partners).
3. When one partner is inside the minefield (inside the perimeter rope), the other must remain on the outside - this person may travel anywhere outside the minefield to assist their partner.
4. People traveling through the minefield may not use their vision (they must keep their eyes closed). Vision may only be used again when you return to the starting area.
5. A sightless person may not be guided through the use of anything that touches them (i.e. no holding hands, etc.).
6. If anyone touches a landmine or the rope perimeter, they must return to the starting area and switch roles with their partner. If you had an object (goal) in your hand and touched a landmine or the perimeter rope, the goal must be returned.
7. Only a sightless person who has successfully traveled through the minefield may handle/retrieve an object (goal).
8. Goals must be carried. They can't be thrown.
9. Only one object (goal) can be carried per trip through the minefield.
10. Objects (goals) cannot be handed off.
11. The participants may not alter the playing area.
12. The playing area may be changed or altered by the facilitator.
13. Violation of a rule may result in a penalty.

### **Safety Warning**

The playing area must be safe because people will be walking around with their eyes closed.

If you use the variation with the mousetraps, be extra careful. Mousetraps are capable of hurting people.

### **Comments**

1. I've led this activity effectively with groups as small as 10 people and as large as 80. The great thing about this activity is people work in pairs and are somewhat independent of the other people.
2. When the activity is in full motion, there is lots of talking and things can get loud (larger groups get louder). With large groups it can feel somewhat chaotic (mostly because of the noise).
3. This is a wonderful activity to practice coaching (coaching others and being coached). Every moment of this activity provides ample opportunity to practice clear and precise communication.
4. Landmines are metaphoric problems the group faces either personally or as a team. They are everywhere in life (personal & public). Some landmines are big and some are small - - they all do damage when we hit them.
5. In this exercise, there are lots of landmines separating the participants from their desired outcomes (goals).

### **Debriefing Suggestions**

1. Life is full of obstacles. Some people allow obstacles to prevent them from succeeding. Others keep running into the obstacles. What are the obstacles in your life that you must avoid?

2. We can go through life trying to avoid the obstacles but it's easier when we have help. Where do you get help in real life? Are you effective at asking for help? Are you good at accepting help? How do you know? Are you good at giving help? How do you know?

### **Variations**

1. In the "normal" minefield activity, I use foam disks (cut from foam noodles used at swimming pools) to designate the landmines (obstacles). For a variation, provide the group other types of landmines such as a chair, balloons filled with helium tied to weights, hoola hoops, etc.. If you add and subtract stuff at different times during the activity, it will force the group to adapt to the new environment (great discussions can be generated around this topic)
2. At the beginning of the activity before the group actually starts (but after they've read the instructions), warn them that a "communication breakdown" may occur during the activity. If this happens, people will not be allowed to communicate verbally. Don't tell them how long it will last (make it last a couple of minutes at the most). This will allow people to plan (or not) for this possibility.
3. Want to try a REALLY radical variation? Purchase 100 "traditional" wooden mousetraps and use them as the landmines (obstacles). Take it a step further and have people do this activity barefoot! Yes – if someone steps on a mousetrap it will hurt a lot but it probably won't break a bone (probably). Take it a step further and have people pick up puzzle pieces that are laid next to a set mousetrap - - the objective being to collect all the puzzle pieces so you can make the puzzle on the other end. Don't do any

of the mousetrap variations with the wrong group or if you have poor insurance coverage.

#### True Story

I have a friend who teaches drama and theatre at a high school. In his ‘introduction to drama’ class, he uses the mousetrap minefield to teach the magic of great acting skills. At the front of the classroom he creates a mini minefield using masking tape for a boundary and about 10 set mousetraps inside the boundary. He then asks for two volunteers - - one to walk through the mousetrap minefield (shoes are on) with eyes closed and one to act as the coach. The rest of the class watches and are always highly engaged and entertained by what they are observing. THEN the teacher removes the mousetraps and has NOTHING inside the masking tape playing area - - he then asks the same two people to ACT as if the mousetraps are there and go through again. Good actors can make the audience feel AS IF the mousetraps are there. The beginning drama students always have great difficulty acting as if the mousetraps are there. The teacher then takes them on a journey to learn how this can be done. Very cool and very effective.

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Additional photos of the Minefield activity:



And for those groups (and leaders) ready to really push the limits, require everyone to walk barefoot and use mousetraps.

## Activity # 4

### Helium Stick



**Group Size:** 8 – 20

**Age Range:** high school – adult

**Intensity:** Mental=3+, Physical=1

**Time:** 20 - 60 minutes (longer is more realistic)

**Space:** Minimal – Medium -- Lots

**Set Up Time:** 60 seconds

**Props:** Helium Stick (tent pole)

#### **Objective**

Lower the aluminum tent pole to the ground.

### **Set Up / Preparation**

1. Divide your group in half and then have them create two parallel lines where the lines are facing each other. The lines are close to each other (approximately 12 – 18 inches apart). The members of each line stand shoulder to shoulder.
2. Once the two lines are formed, everyone holds out their index fingers at waist level.
3. You (the facilitator) then announce to the group that you will be placing an aluminum tent pole on top of their fingers. THIS PART IS IMPORTANT - - when you place the tent pole on their fingers, do so from behind and in the middle of one of the lines ALWAYS KEEPING YOUR HAND ON TOP OF THE POLE to prevent the group from raising the pole in the air. Apply enough pressure on top of the pole to prevent the group from lifting it up. It seems every group I've worked with wants to raise the tent pole with their fingers even before they even understand or know the directions (it's kind of weird actually!).
4. Finally, with your hand on top of the tent pole (the helium stick), you will give them the following directions: "Your directions are as follows...as a group, you must lower this tent pole to the ground without even a single person on the team losing contact with the pole. Should someone lose contact with the pole you must start again." Then, release your hand from the tent pole. '
5. Make sure you read the "Comments" section below.

### Rules

1. No one may lose contact with the pole. If anyone loses contact with the pole the entire group must start again. The starting position is with the pole at waist level.
2. Both index fingers must be used and *only* the index fingers may be used. The index fingers must be placed below the tent pole. Nothing else is allowed to touch the tent pole (other than the ground at the end of the activity).

### Safety Warning

The ends of the tent pole can be dangerous if the pole starts moving quickly and hits someone in the face. Take precautions to prevent injury.

### Comments

1. This is a VERY CHALLENGING activity (or as a friend of mine says “it’s a high torque activity”). Do not do this with groups in serious conflict.
2. Here’s what typically happens in this activity: When you (the facilitator) give the directions and then release the pole, the group will often times RAISE the pole (not lower it)! The group will usually laugh and find this somewhat strange. Its likely to take several attempts to just keep the tent pole steady (not lowering or raising).
3. This is a communication intensive activity where each person must be absolutely committed to doing his or her part. People will likely get frustrated and it’s common for some blaming to occur.
4. The group will likely throw out many ideas on how to solve this challenge. What it usually comes down to is the entire group focusing, doing their job

with the direction of one leader. Groups that have the most difficulty are usually all talking at once.

5. You may have to stop this activity several times mid-stream to help the group process how they are approaching this activity.

### **Debriefing Suggestions**

I've successfully used this activity to help the leadership of an organization realize that having a company mission is one thing and making it a reality is another. I did this by leading the group in a four-hour company vision statement workshop. After everyone was in agreement about the vision statement and understood it I had the group do the Helium Stick activity. Here is the metaphor I shared with the group: The tent pole was the company vision and by successfully lowering it to the ground they achieved their vision. What happened next was eye opening! The tent pole immediately went in the OPPOSITE direction from where they were trying to go – UP! After 50 minutes of trying to lower the tent pole to the ground they succeeded. In the debrief I asked the group if they experienced any parallels to real life while doing this activity. YES they said...everyone had to be committed to the process, blaming and excuses didn't make things better, staying calm and focused was critical, and so on.

### **Variations**

Have people pair up and supply each pair with a very short tent pole (18 inches). Have each pair lower their own pole to the ground so they can experience success. Then have people form groups of 4 and then provide them with a tent pole just long enough for 4 people. Have the groups of 4

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work together to lower the pole. Continue making bigger groups until you have everyone working together on one tent pole.

## Activity # 5

### Air Lock



**Group Size:** 10 – 20

**Age Range:** high school – adult

**Intensity:** Mental=2, Physical=2

**Time:** 20 – 40 minutes (without debrief)

**Space:** Minimal – Medium -- Lots

**Set Up Time:** 5 minutes

**Props:** Two boundary ropes, one bandana per person (to tie ankles), six hoops.

#### Objective

Travel from your ailing spacecraft to the rescue spacecraft.

### **Set Up / Preparation**

1. Position two boundary ropes on the ground about 20 feet apart as shown in the photo. Place the six hoops on the ground in a zig zag pattern - - placing the hoops about 6 inches from each other.
2. Here's the story to share with the group: "The spacecraft you're currently on has lost all power and will soon begin descending into Earth's atmosphere (this is bad). Another spacecraft has been sent to rescue your team. Get your team to the rescue ship before time runs out."
3. Ask the group to stand behind one of the boundary lines (this places them in the "ailing spaceship") and then line up shoulder to shoulder. Provide each person with a piece of cloth (I use a bandana) and ask them to loosely tie their ankles together.
4. Ask the group to travel to the rescue ship following the rules below.

### **Rules**

1. The boundary ropes and hoops may not be moved.
2. The group must remain in a line with ankles tied throughout the activity.
3. Stepping outside of the hoops while traveling to the rescue ship is not permitted.
4. No other equipment may be used.
5. Violation of a rule may result in a penalty. (Example: touches outside of the hoops will require the team to start over)

### **Safety Warning**

1. People with knee, ankle or back injuries should not participate.
2. Use soft cloth to tie ankles together and tie loosely to prevent injuries.

3. It's important for the group to move slow so no one gets hurt.

### **Comments**

1. This activity is best left for groups that are patient. Do not attempt this activity with a rambunctious hyperactive group.
2. The group movement will remind you of a centipede.
3. This activity emphasizes communication, careful steady movement and team coordination.
4. Just for fun, play the sound track of the movie "2001 A Space Odyssey" while the group travels from one spaceship to the other.

### **Debriefing Suggestions**

Prior to starting the activity, have the group identify the "spaceship" they are leaving behind - - metaphorically this ship represents all that they no longer need and/or those things that no longer serve them. Also identify the "rescue ship" and it's qualities. What do the hoops represent? What do the bandanas represent?

### **Variations**

1. Supply the group with a limited amount of time to complete the task (example: 20 minutes).
2. Give two or three people a bandana to blindfold themselves for part or all of the activity.
3. Divide the team in half. One group starts on one side and one group starts on the other. The groups must switch places before time runs out. (Will they work together or against each other?)

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4. Do this activity in a room that you can turn the lights off so as to make it completely dark. Warn the group that you might turn the lights off during the activity. If you do turn the lights off, keep them off for a short time (5 to 10 seconds).

