

Customer Chain Balls Exercise

Objective

- Demonstrate the need to focus on your customer and supplier
- Demonstrate how easily you can lose sight of the things you do well in an environment of change
- Prove that, when a firm, clear, internal process is established - productivity can be improved even when curved balls get thrown in!

What you need

- 3 juggling balls per team
- 1 koosh (or similar) per team

Process

- Ask the group to form teams in circles of 10 - 15 people

Round 1

- Give each team a juggling ball
- Ask them to establish a pattern by throwing the ball across the circle so that:
 - each person catches and throws the ball on once
 - it ends with the person it started with
- Mention that speed does not matter, but that they should remember the order of play as they will be asked to repeat it
- Let them establish the pattern and when they have, ask them to repeat the process continuously

Round 2

- When they have settled into a good system, add in the second ball (making a relevant point about increased workloads or raising the bar)
- When the pattern is re-established ask (and add your own observations)
 - how they felt
 - what worked
 - what didn't

Round 3 (optional – can be taken out if you have less time)

- Let them settle in their pattern with the 2 balls again and then add in the third ball
- After a short delay, stop them and repeat the questions above

Round 4

- Let them establish their pattern with the 3 balls and then add in the squiggly ball (I use a Koosh ball for this)
- Mention that there is to be a re-organisation/new product/new IT system/ budget cuts which mean they need to take on more (or something similar)

- Explain that the new squiggly ball is to be passed round in the same way but in the OPPOSITE direction
- Allow them to 'succeed' before completing the exercise and exploring the learning points

Questions & learning points to draw out in your review

What helped you to succeed?

What got in the way?

What happened when new balls were introduced?

What about when the squiggly ball was introduced? How easy was it to manage that?

How is that relevant to our team/ group (e.g. it could be in terms of focussing on customers/ handovers between teams/ trusting others to do their bit)

- Concentrate on supplier and customer avoiding all other distractions
- People understood the criticality of their role in the process (you only need to focus on who you are receiving from and giving to)
- Helpful and hindering behaviour of the rest of the team
 - embarrassment/laughter when dropped ball
 - adapting throwing/catching to suit others' skill level
 - bottle necks
 - people giving up
 - frustration with others in the team
 - selfishness in getting rid of the ball without checking that customer was ready
 - checking that customer was ready before throwing the ball
- Balls left lying on the floor (or 'hidden')
- What would be the maximum number of balls before the system ground to a halt?

alyse@eye2eyedev.com

07760 176777

uk.linkedin.com/in/alyseashtoneye2eye

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