MELTON FOUNDATION TRUST BUILDING EXERCISE
[thanks to Jana Leidenfrost, a Melton Fellow who leads corporate training for DaimlerChrysler]

Summary:
- The group has to navigate a parkour blindfolded and in the process build trust and work on team dynamics.
- Chance to practice leadership and team performance.

Features:
- Good exercise for reflection
- Easy to do in any landscape
- Good for groups from 6-20 people (maximum) of a wide range of abilities.
- Assumptions: need some level of trust in the group and interpersonal contacts among the group; don't start with this exercise without some smaller exercises before and talking about leadership and team performance key issues, such as:
  • Communication and information;
  • Clarified roles and tasks;
  • Transparent, agreed-upon processes;
  • Understood targets;
  • The importance of inter-personal relationships and a constructive atmosphere; and
  • Learning and improving.
[Group can also brainstorm whether they think there are other key dimensions.]

Setup for trainer:
- Select a location for the parkour that has varied landscape: e.g., trees, playgrounds, sports field, gardens, parks, benches, etc.
. The trainer should map out a parkour that has:
  - A starting point
  - Three to four milestones:
    The milestones can be reaching a tree; crossing a bench; touching a fountain; obtaining some candies on the course; crossing under a line or obstacle; etc.
  - About 50 - 200 yards safe walking between the milestones
  - A finish line.

Variations of difficulties and tasks are good - for instance a long 200 yard walk on a sportsground without specific orientation points is
actually harder than one would think blindfolded; and this challenge may be quite different than developing a fixed approach to cross a difficult bench while ensuring safety; or developing a process to make sure that everyone gets a piece of candy on the route; etc.

**Instructions of trainer to team:**

This is a new project for you as a team to manage.

The project is finished if everyone on your team together has successfully traversed this parkour:

We will now walk through the parkour [*Walk from the start through the different milestones to the finish...explain at each milestone how the milestone is successfully navigated (whole group touches a tree, or whole group crosses over the bench, whole group has one piece of candy each, etc.)*] [*Group thinks task is simple at this point, because they haven’t been told that they will do blindfolded!*]

You have now seen the course you need to navigate. For the project, your group has 45 minutes. This time will be divided into "training/preparation time" and "competition time" (when the group is doing the parkour). The group has to decide how to allocate the 45 minutes between training and competition.

Oh, one important thing for you to know that I haven’t mentioned is that during the “competition time”, your whole group will be blindfolded!

You will be able to use one additional piece of material for the “competition” period, a rope about 3.5 yards long.¹

The first priority throughout this competition is safety.

Now, your group has to decide how to allocate the time between planning and competition and then we’ll begin.

[Start timer once group agrees how to divide the time.]

*Note to trainer: in some groups, you may want to emphasize the importance of interpersonal relations, ability to improvise, and*

¹ Whether group uses the rope and how is up to them (some hold on to it with their hands, others use it to measure, etc.). Some find that it’s more difficult or irritating with the rope and instead could do better holding hands or shoulders or coming up with another system.
managing risk. In such cases, you may want to slightly change the parkour after the group has “toured” it and while they are preparing (but without their knowledge), for example, by making a bench slightly taller or longer, putting two benches together, putting a bit of water in a depression on the course, having someone sit on a bench, etc. During the debriefing you could then discuss the issue about how the environment and circumstances change in real life and whether the group was prepared for this, how they prepared for this in advance, or conversely how they coped with this during the “competition.”

**Tasks:**
- Group makes decision about how to allocate the time\(^2\) (The group can only be discussing the allocation of time at this point)
- Timer begins! (The trainer is merely an observer, not a facilitator of the group planning process).
- They prepare (The trainer tells them when preparation time is up)
- They “compete” [they are blindfolded, working as a team to see if they can finish the course in the remaining amount of time. They can talk to others on the team as they are going through the course]
- Reflection and evaluation along chosen categories\(^3\):
  - Communication and information (both during preparation and competition);
  - Roles and tasks – how clarified were they?
  - Transparent and agreed-upon processes;
  - Understood targets;
  - Inter-personal relationships and atmosphere; and
  - Learning and Improving.

**Pluses of this exercise:**
- Can be done almost everywhere
- Reflects leadership and team behavior in a deep way

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\(^2\) The group’s goal is both use the reflection time to successfully plan and execute the goal of getting the group through the parkour in 45 minutes, but also to see how they can minimize the time it takes to do the parkour. Many groups find that they more time they spend planning and the better they plan, the faster they execute the parkour.

\(^3\) Trainer should make up questions for these topics, for example for communication: “How satisfied were you with the communication and information on the team (on a 0-10 scale)?” “What supported good communication?” “What could have been better?” Etc. Make up questions for the other topics and feel free to be creative. Explore disagreements among the group of what worked and didn’t, and why people have differing opinions about these.
- Tests “group smarts”. If group get lost in the competition, it's highly valuable to let them manage their way out of this crisis! It's a good reflection on how they use their resources once lost. The exercise can be reflected upon and then retried, often with much improved performance.

4 So if group wanders off the courses, as long as they are unsafe, let them figure out they are lost and figure out how to resolve it. It’s often the most interesting parts, seeing how a group solves crises and deals with disorientation: how do leaders act in such situations? How are others integrated? Etc.