

Diversity Activities

The Squeeze

Objectives

1. To understand the effect of words and language and the power of the way they are used.

Time

10 minutes

Materials

- Two tubes of toothpaste
- Two paper plates

Instructions

1. Divide the group into two teams.
2. Ask for 4 volunteers, 2 from each team.

Contest 1

1. One volunteer from each team will participate in the first contest.
2. Place 2 paper plates and 2 tubes of toothpaste on a table or desk at the front of the room.
3. Contestants should use **one** hand to squeeze as much toothpaste as they can onto a paper plate in 15 seconds.

Contest 2

1. Explain to the class that the second contest is the most important contest that will determine the real winner of the event.
2. The second volunteer from each team will participate in this contest.
3. Announce: “You will have 45 seconds for this contest. On your mark, get set, put the toothpaste back in the tube!”
4. The winner is the group with the most toothpaste in the tube at the end. They will be the ones who squeezed the least toothpaste out in the first contest.

For Discussion

1. Was it more difficult to get the toothpaste out of the tube or back into the tube?
2. What does this toothpaste contest illustrate about words?
3. Can the same words have different effects if the intent behind them changes? Give examples.
4. Can words hurt even if the intent behind them is positive or neutral? Give examples.

Facts & Trends

In spite of corporate trends toward creating a tolerant work environment, workplace insults have not decreased. Some results from the 2006 Novations Group survey, which has been conducted every year since 1977:

- Incidence of ethnic and racial slurs has remained consistent in recent years. Ethnic remarks are overheard by about 30% of employees each year.
- Ethnic slurs are most likely to be heard in the south: 37% of employees.
- Men are much more likely to hear slurs of all kinds.
- Sexual slurs are the most common form of workplace ridicule. 37% of employees nationwide heard their coworkers make sexually inappropriate comments in 2006.
- Whites were 50% more likely to hear sexual slurs than were blacks.
- Ridicule based on sexual orientation was heard by 21% of employees.
- Age-related ridicule was noted by 24% of employees. Younger employees were 3 times more likely to overhear these comments than were employees over 55.