

Balloon Debates



Purpose



The purpose of this activity is to help delegates reach a group consensus regarding who should be allowed to survive a fictitious balloon crash. It also helps with communication skills as those delegates who play the part of the balloon occupants need to think about the best way to get their message across.

This activity can be used on numerous different events, courses or meetings and helps specifically with the development of decision making, influencing, collaboration, questioning and listening, assertiveness, and communication skills.

Timings

30 minutes (although this can be increased in necessary).

Instructions

- Ask four delegates (who are not shy) to play the part of the balloon occupants.
- The rest of the delegates will play the part of the jury and will be judging the case.
- The jury after listening to the scenario will invite each balloonist to enter the room and present their case why they should be the person to survive whilst the other three will die.
- Whilst listening to each balloonist present their case the jury are allowed to make notes in terms of how well each occupant communicated their right to survive.
- Once all four balloonists have presented their case, the jury will have 10 minutes to discuss what they heard and aim to reach a consensus decision about which of the four should survive.
- The jury are not allowed to vote and must reach a consensus decision by positive discussion and debate.
- When the jury have made their decision, bring all four balloonists back into the room to hear the verdict. This should be specifically related to communication and how well the balloonists sold themselves and the benefits they could bring.
- Brief the balloonists as a group outside of the main room explaining that this is a fight for survival and they will only have three minutes in which to present their case. They should focus on the benefits they can bring to the 'world' or their work if they were to survive.
- Go back into the main room and brief the jury by reading out the scenario to them.
- A variation of the above (if you have enough delegates on the event to do this) is to have one delegate responsible for observing the jury whilst they are watching the balloonists present their case and during the judging phase of the activity.



The scenario

- Four people are travelling in a hot air balloon
- The balloon is losing height rapidly over a particularly hazardous range of mountains
- The balloon can only carry one passenger safely across the mountains.
- The four balloonists will have 5 minutes preparation time and then one by one they will have up to three minutes to present their case why they should be chosen as the sole survivor.
- After the jury have made a decision and communicated this to the balloonists, facilitate a discussion on what worked well and what needed to be improved.
- If there was an observer (for the jury) ask this person to relay what they witnessed to the whole group.
- Use the discussion points below to help you.

Discussion points

- How well did the balloon occupants present their case?
- Were they logical in their flow of communication and follow a set structure?
- Did they prepare what they wanted to say or try to communicate off the cuff?
- Did the message come across as disjointed and not very clear?
- Were they clear in their speech? Or did they rush their words or mumble what they were saying?
- Did they focus on what they could actually do – the benefits?
- Did the communicator speak in a language the listener could understand?
- Did the communicator use all possible methods for getting the message across or did they simply rely on verbal communication? (The instructions do not say they can't use other methods as well)
- Did the jury work well together?
- Did the jury waste time on needless arguments that did not help the group achieve its objective?
- Were all members of the jury involved or did some people have their thoughts and ideas dismissed out of hand?
- How often does this type of example happen in your normal working environment?
- What lessons can be learned from this activity?