

**TIP #59 – DECEMBER**  
**CHALLENGING THE PROCESS WITH THE MARSHMALLOW CHALLENGE**  
**CONTRIBUTED BY JODY ROGERS, PH.D., FACHE**

**Purpose**

An extremely fun and educational way to reinforce key concepts of the practice, Challenge the Process. This is an easy activity that requires minimal space and very few supplies to perform.

**Group Size**

No more than 5 people per team. If the total group size is just 5 or 6 people, divide the group into teams of 3, if at all possible. Team size is more important than total number of participants involved in the activity.

**Time Required**

45 minutes or less

5 minute introduction; 18 minute activity; 5 minute video. Additional time for discussion. The 18 minute exercise is fixed. Other times can be adjusted as needed.

**Materials**

Each team needs 1 yard of tape, 1 yard of string, 20 pieces of spaghetti (uncooked, of course), and one marshmallow. I also recommend making available one or two small scissors for all teams in the group to access during the activity.

**Process**

1. Divide attendees into teams of 3–5 members.
2. Give each team the tape, string, spaghetti, and marshmallow. Provide each team access to scissors (it isn't necessary for each team to have its own).
3. Read the following instructions to all teams at the same time.  
*Each team has 18 minutes to build the tallest, free-standing structure using the materials supplied to each group. The marshmallow must be attached to the top of the structure you build. After 18 minutes, I will measure the height of each structure that remains standing with the marshmallow on top. The winner is the team whose free-standing structure is the tallest.*
4. Answer any questions the teams may have and give the groups a 30 second warning. After 30 seconds, start the activity and stand back. Keep watch on the teams to ensure they are following the rules of the game. Remind them that the marshmallow **must** be on the top of the structure, and that the structure itself must be free-standing when the activity concludes. Let them know how much time has passed until 18 minutes is up.
5. At the end of 18 minutes, measure those structures created within the rules and that are still standing.
6. After declaring the winner (assuming there is a structure that remains standing after the marshmallow has been attached), show the participants the YouTube video clip of The Marshmallow Challenge  
([http://www.ted.com/talks/tom\\_wujec\\_build\\_a\\_tower.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/tom_wujec_build_a_tower.html))

**Follow-up questions to ask of the group to facilitate discussion and further learning:**

1. Was there a leader on your team? Who was it and who decided who the leader would be?
2. If you had no leader, do you think having designated someone a leader would have helped?
3. If you had a leader, how did he/she do? Of the leadership practices we have learned so far, which did your leader use?
4. How helpful was everyone on your team in challenging the process of building the tallest structure? Did anyone appear to be an expert?
5. Did any team members tune out of the activity—out of frustration with other members or for some other reason? What could you have done to keep all members of the group fully engaged?
6. Did you feel everyone's ideas were well received during the activity?
7. How did you feel as the time limit was approaching? Did pressure increase? If yes, was that helpful or not?
8. In retrospect, what could you have done better to enhance your ability to Challenge the Process?
9. Did you practice oversight? Where might new ideas have come from given your time constraint?
10. Did you celebrate small wins? If yes, how did you do this?

Encourage the Heart of all participants by giving everyone the marshmallows remaining in the bag. Everyone loves marshmallows!

**Jody Rogers**, PhD, FACHE, is a Certified Master of The Leadership Challenge® Workshop within the Army Medical Department and a Visiting Professor at Trinity University in San Antonio, TX. He can be reached at [jrogers@trinity.edu](mailto:jrogers@trinity.edu) or [jody.rogers@amedd.army.mil](mailto:jody.rogers@amedd.army.mil).