

# TRAINING FOR CHANGE

[www.TrainingForChange.org](http://www.TrainingForChange.org)

## Stepping Stones

Stepping stones can provide the group with a challenge, strengthen team work, and develop leadership skills. It works with a group from 7 to 50 participants (best to have two facilitators if the group is over 12 people), taking about 45 to 90 minutes. You will need squares of rug or cardboard approximately 12 in. by 12 in. (regular or construction paper can also work) and masking tape or ropes that can outline the two shores of a "river."

**RULES** *(Best to have summary on newsprint.)*

1. The goal is to get your entire team across the river safely and together.
2. The only resource you can use is the limited number of "stepping stones" which will float away if nobody is touching them. No external props can be used.
3. The stepping stones/pieces of rug must AT ALL TIMES be in the physical touch of a team member. In other words, you can't toss the stone into the river and then step on it; you must place your foot while still holding it lest it be swept away. [Facilitator: take it away.]
4. As many team members can be on a stone at one time as you choose.
5. If anyone falls into the river, the entire team immediately goes back to heal the person.
6. All team members must be in physical touch of each other when crossing the river.
7. If the naval patrol boat comes within sight, the team must hasten back to the shore and try again after it's passed. [Facilitator: you may declare that it's gotten too dark to try again and that the game is over. Failing to meet this challenge can be a big learning opportunity.]

*Scenario: Two people's movements in Mexico are growing rapidly in adjoining regions separated by a shallow river. The movements need to learn from each other how to deal with the repression from the armed forces. They agree to exchange teams of experienced people for a month so this mutual education can take place. Actually making the exchange, however, is highly dangerous because it means crossing the narrow river which has turned poisonous from polluting factories upstream. And the crossing must be made in the 20 minutes between regular navy patrols. Can your entire team cross the river safely before the patrol comes?*

### **FACILITATOR ADJUSTMENTS TO NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS**

For a group 7-14, you can modify the scenario so that one movement is sending its team across the river to go visit the other movement – working with one team, not two.

For a group 12-28, you can use the scenario as is, with two equal groups on opposite riverbanks.

For a group 28-48, use a large room and divide the total group into four teams, two on each bank of the river with plenty of room between them. Modify the scenario, with the naval patrol boats coming every 30 minutes rather than 20 minutes.

### **FACILITATOR ADJUSTMENTS TO WIDTH OF RIVER**

The larger the team, the larger the width of the river. 7 people can usually cross a river that's 25 feet wide, and be debriefed, within 45-60 minutes, assuming they will mess up at least twice and be forced to return to start over.

Teams that have 12-14 members need a river that's 35-40 feet wide. However, note that the wider the river, the more chances of error with the team needing to return to start over, so the entire challenge can take substantially longer. Plan accordingly. If you have limited time, you can shorten the width of the river to make it easier.

## **DEBRIEF**

*(These are only suggestions. Debrief with the goals of the group and its next steps.)*

## **REFLECTION**

The more people are involved, the more important that the first step in reflecting is in pairs to maximize participation in venting feelings and first thoughts. Ask: "How was that for you?" "Were there differences in how you reacted in the beginning and the middle and toward the end?" (If the group is open to sharing feelings: "What were some of the feelings you experienced during that challenge?")

In the whole group: One facilitator is writing on newsprint any reflections that in some way or other answers the question "What worked?"

Sample questions: How did you arrive at a strategy? Did you all agree before you started? What process did you use? Where did the leadership come from? Did you experiment before you started? Did you change your strategy? Why/why not? How did the initiative to change strategy emerge? How did you decide on a new strategy? Did you change the order in the line-up? Why/why not?

What worked to keep you on track? How did you communicate? Who had to pay attention to what? What was most stressful? What happened when you made a mistake? How did the group react? What did you do with your feelings? What was the role of support? Did the pattern of communication change? Where did your stamina come from? What was it like to have to touch each other so closely? How did you handle it to maintain appropriate personal boundaries? (If there were two teams crossing the river): "Who thought of cooperating with the other team? How was the decision made to do so/not to do so? How did the cooperation work out?"

## **GENERALIZATION**

If it's a large group, try the next question or two in pairs or small buzz groups. What are some things that worked for this group that you think works in other groups facing a challenge?

Harvest learnings – and it's OK not to be formal and to add spontaneously-arising generalizations. Possible questions to ask: "Which of you have done one or more of these things in groups you're part of?" (Hands.) "Would the group you work with at home benefit from any of these practices? Which ones? Which practices could strengthen our group?"

(In buddy pairs): "This group could sometimes feel like a stressful journey across a river. What are some practical lessons you can take from this exercise to apply *personally* to your participation in this group? Think about your growth goals. Think about ways you do and don't give leadership here in this group so far. Remember, leadership is any initiative you take that assists the group to move forward. Talk with your buddy about how this simulation challenges you personally to give more to the group."