

# Operator

**Use:** Pre-meeting or Pre-activity.

**Purpose:** This is an exercise to spark interest in an upcoming meeting or activity. This exercise can be used in different ways. For team that have been working well together for a period of time, it can be used as a fun challenge before a meeting or a conference. For teams that are newly developed or struggling, this exercise can highlight the challenge areas they face in communication and trust. As a result, it can give the leader a strong sense of what skills they need to assist the team in building or strengthening.

**Materials:** This exercise requires no specific materials. The materials will be based on the context of the “requirement” set forth by the operator on the game instructions below.

**Setup:** Important! This exercise is called Operator because the instructions from the person playing the role of “Operator” should be verbal. Do Not provide any directives or instructions in writing that can be passed on from one participant to another. The integrity of this activity lies within the participants trusting the information that is passed on to them. Prior to a meeting, activity or conference, decide on a directive you would like to give your chosen “Lead Participant” See some examples below. Keep the requests separate from work tasks

- Everyone should wear the color red to the next meeting, please pass this information along to the other participants
- Everyone should wear tennis shoes to the next meeting, please pass this information along to the other participants
- Everyone should bring an object from home for a show and tell, please pass this information along to the other participants
- Everyone should bring a list of their favorite Ice Cream flavors to the next meeting, please pass this along to the other participants
- Everyone should bring an Orange to the next meeting, please pass this along to the other participants
- Everyone should bring 5 canned goods to the next meeting, please pass this along to the other participants

## Roles:

Operator – this is the meeting or activity leader. They create the Directive and start the activity

Lead Participant – the first and only person the operator speaks to about the Directive. This person is responsible for ensuring everyone who is participating in the upcoming meeting receives the directive. The statement, “please pass this among to the other participants” is the only additional information the Lead Participant should receive. It will be up to them to decide what that means. Some participants will



absolutely take ownership and contact everyone individually. Some will delegate and some will possibly tell only a person or two and drop the ball.

Participants – all people who will attend the meeting, activity or conference within the 3-5-day time frame

### Activity:

- Decide on your directive for the team
- Select a participant as your “Lead Participant” This is the person you will provide the directive to. Remember this is verbal instructions only. If you send an email, it can easily be forwarded or shown to others and it will discredit the purpose of the exercise.
- Allow at least 3-5 days for the activity to play out. When you are ready, provide your directive to the Lead Participant.
- Be prepared for a question or two from the Lead Participant. Keep your answers vague. If they ask why, you can respond by saying, “I will explain at the meeting”
- Sit back and watch this play out. Do not give anyone a timeline to follow. You may get questions from other participants directly. Simply refer them back to your “Lead Participant” It is important that you maintain a distance from the conversation if you can. If you find that you can’t, that is the first sign that your team has strong trust issues.
- Day of the meeting: At the start of the meeting observe the room and make note of which participants followed the directive. There may be some confusion if not everyone got the message or if they heard a different interpretation of the directive. Start the meeting by acknowledging the directive and ask a few of these questions
  1. How did you hear about (insert your directive) wearing something Red, Yellow or purple to the meeting?
  2. When you heard about the request, did you have questions? Did you ask someone else on the team to verify the information? Did you take the request at face value and just say, “ok”? What was your first impression?
  3. Is there anyone here who either a) Heard the request and ignored it? Why? Or b) Never heard of the request or was not told by another team member about it?
  4. If we did this exercise again, what would you do differently and why?
- At this point – you may have spent some time in discussion, which is great! This discussion should bring to light some areas where the team needs to work on their communication and their trust. Some of the issues that may arise are;
  - Not everyone heard about the directive – this can make people feel left out. As a leader you want to trace the conversations to figure out why the communication stopped. Where is the sense of responsibility for the team?



- Some people may have heard the directive but ignored it because it did not come straight from you. This is a trust factor. As a leader this is an indicator that you need to work with your team on building better relationships to help increase trust when information is transferred. Leaders cant always be in the room and teams need to be able to rely on each other when the leader is not there.
- Some participants may have started gossiping or asking others about the directive after they heard or were told about it. This is another trust issue with the team. Which team member felt the need to double check the information and why? Why did they not trust the person who imparted the information? Is it a trust concern with that one person or with the entire team or perhaps with receiving new information that did not seem to fit the norm.
- Was their any negative information or feedback? What was it and how do you address it?
- Did everyone get involved in passing the information along to different participants or did only one person control the flow of information? Note: If someone asks, “why you chose a particular person as the Lead participant or the first person to give the directive to” be prepared to answer that question honestly.
- Finally – If you had the participants wear something or bring something as part of a game or icebreaker activity. Before you move on, inform the participants that they will be completing the activity during the events of the day. I recommend making that activity the next thing you do. Here are a few activity ideas for my directive prompts above
  - Show and tell of the color you chose to wear and why? Separate them into groups via color and ask them to find 3 things they all have in common
  - Tennis Shoes – Take a quick walk as a group. Get outside and enjoy a 15 minute break
  - Show and Tell – Ask everyone to show their object, describe why they brought it, it is important to them?
  - Ice Cream – Have everyone organize themselves into groups with matching #1, #2 and #3 flavors. Play in 3 rounds and see what they learn about each other! OR...ask them to bring their favorite flavor of ice cream to the meeting and enjoy!
  - Orange – play the game Hot Potato with the oranges
  - Canned Goods -Split the participants into groups and give them 5-10 minutes to create the best, highest, most interested etc... canned good sculpture

## Conclusion

Share your appreciation for everyone and thank them for their participation. Share with them some of your positive observations from the exercise and share some of the areas you as a leader, would like to help them strengthen. Welcome their feedback over the next few weeks as you look for strategies to work with your team.

