

Paper Tearing Exercise

Time Allocation: 5 minutes

Materials: Blank 8 ½-by-11-inch sheets of paper for each participant

Instructions:

1. Tell the participants the following: “We are going to play a game that will show us some important things about communication. Pick up your sheet of paper and hold it in front of you. Now, close your eyes and follow the directions I will give you—and no peeking! Participants cannot ask questions.

2. Give the following directions, carrying them out yourself with your own sheet of paper and pausing after each instruction to give the group time to comply:

“The first thing I want you to do is to fold your sheet of paper in half. Now tear off the upper right-hand corner.

Fold it in half again and tear off the upper left hand corner of the sheet.

Fold it in half again. Now tear off the lower right-hand corner of the sheet.”

3. After the tearing is complete, say something like “Now open your eyes, and let’s see what you have. If I did a good job of communicating and you did a good job of listening, all of our sheets should look the same!” Hold your sheet up for them to see. It is highly unlikely any sheet will match yours exactly.

4. Observe the differences. There will probably be much laughter.

5. Ask the group why no one’s paper matched yours. (You will Probably get responses like “You didn’t let us ask questions!” or “Your directions could be interpreted in different ways.”)

Then, lead into a presentation on the need for two-way communication in the workplace.