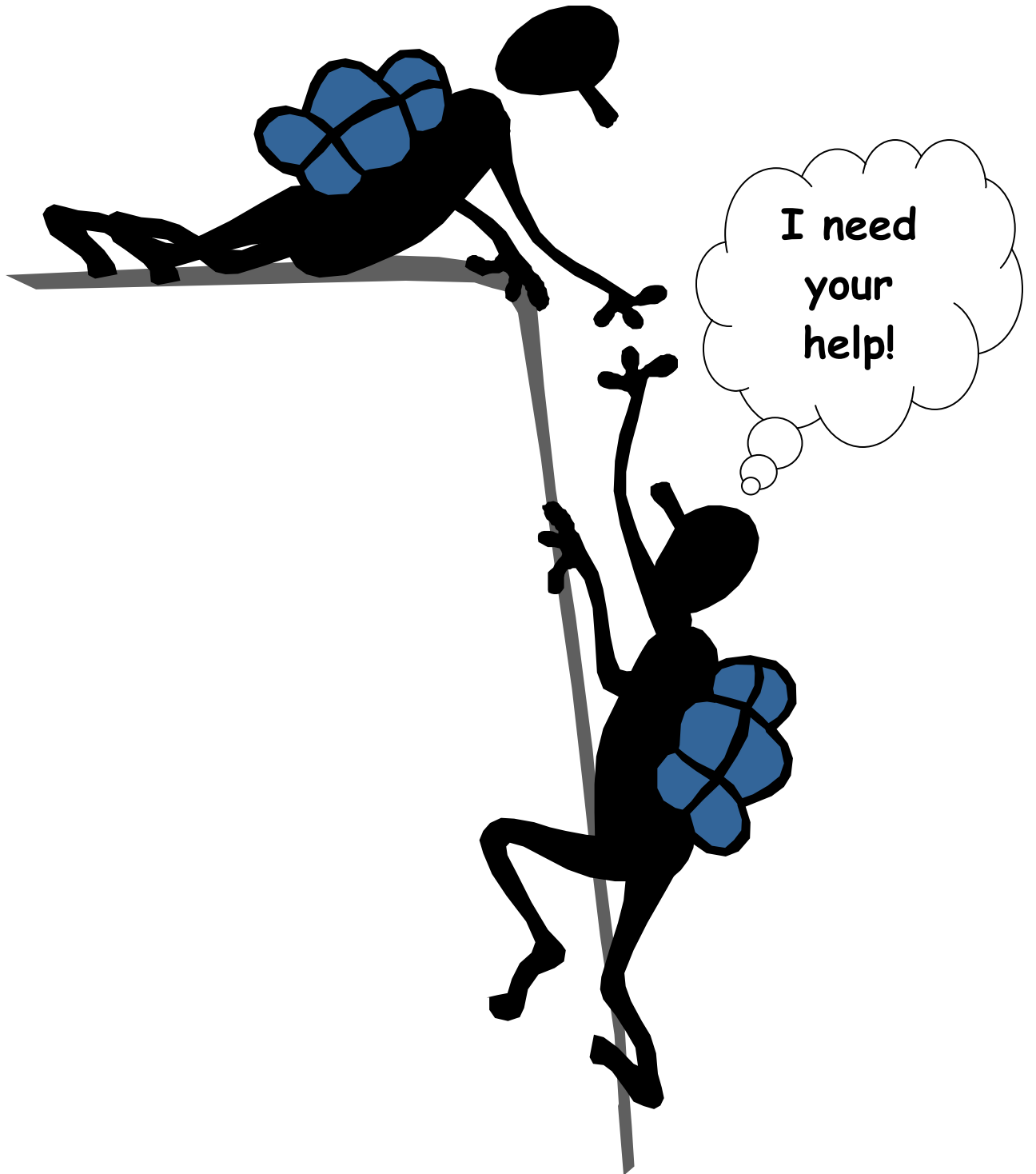


Helium Stick



Helium Stick

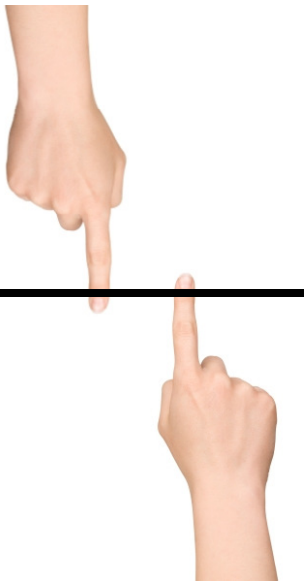
Identify Problem:

Often times in life we come across problems that are too large for us to solve on our own. The help of family and friends becomes necessary. It's not always easy to work as a team or to have others help you accomplish your goal and sometimes it can be very stressful. However, everyone needs help at some point in their life and it's important to be able to function as a group (family, friends, co workers) without causing stress or reacting harshly to stressful situations.

Materials:

Long skinny wooden dowel. (about 6-10 feet. It can be taped together if needed)

Activity:



Line up in two rows facing each other.

Introduce the **Helium Stick** - a long, thin, lightweight rod. Ask participants to point their index fingers and hold their arms out.

Lay the Helium Stick down on their fingers. Get the group to adjust their finger heights until the Helium Stick is horizontal and everyone's index fingers are touching the stick.

Explain that the challenge is to lower the Helium Stick to the ground.

The catch: Each person's fingers must be in contact with the Helium Stick **at all times**. *Pinching or grabbing the pole is not allowed - it must rest on top of fingers.*

Reiterate to the group that if anyone's finger is caught not touching the Helium Stick, the task will be restarted. Let the task begin....

Warning: *Particularly in the early stages, the Helium Stick has a habit of mysteriously 'floating' up rather than coming down, causing much laughter. A bit of clever humoring can help - e.g., act surprised and ask what are they doing raising the Helium Stick instead of lowering it! For added drama, jump up and pull it down!*

Participants may be confused initially about the paradoxical behavior of the Helium Stick.

Some groups or individuals (most often larger size groups) after 5 to 10 minutes of trying may be inclined to give up, believing it not to be possible or that it is too hard.

The facilitator can offer direct suggestions or suggest the group stops the task, discusses their strategy, and then has another go.

Less often, a group may appear to be succeeding too fast. In response, be particularly vigilant about fingers not touching the pole. Also make sure participants lower the pole all the way onto the ground. I like to add further difficulty by adding a large washer to each end of the stick and explain that the washers should not fall off during the exercise, otherwise the task must be restarted

Eventually the group needs to calm down, concentrate, and very slowly and patiently lower the Helium Stick - easier said than done.

- What was the first reaction of the group?
- How well did the group cope with this challenge?
- What did you feel was stressful about the task?
- What did it take to be successful as a group?
- What creative solutions were suggested and how were they received?
- What would an outside observer have seen as the strengths and weaknesses of the group?
- What roles did people play?
- What did each group member learn about him/herself as an individual?
- What other situations (e.g., at school, home or work) are like the Helium Stick?

Identify Skills:

Team building
Problem solving
Asking for help
Dealing with a stressful situation as a group

