






Houston, we have a problem...

An out-of-this-world activity focusing on the need for team cooperation and how to cope with change.

-  75 mins + debrief
-  12-24 (in 4 teams of 3-6 per team)
-  For staff at any level
-  No computer required
-  450 exVAT



Learning objectives

- to cooperate for the good of the "big picture"
- to clarify problems and set clear team objectives
- to develop problem-solving strategies
- to keep everyone informed, listen carefully and communicate clearly
- coping with change
- to give information freely in a spirit of enlightened group-interest
- to keep calm under pressure

About the activity

Houston, we have a problem... is a great exercise to develop competent teams and engender an environment of cooperation.

As teams of lunar astronauts, participants face the logistics of collecting rock samples, erecting a laser beacon, planting a flag and gathering other materials.

With limited amounts of oxygen and water, inter-team cooperation is the only viable solution to getting the tasks done in time. The sooner all teams accept this the better!

Just when it looks like teams are on top of it all they need to re-group to deal with an emergency communication from Mission Control. A malfunction in the essential carbon dioxide filter needs a quick fix. With the materials available, can teams make the repair? Will it work? Will they get back to Earth? How well do they cope with the sudden change to their task? Is it an objective approach - or blind panic?

Each team makes one quarter of the filter using card and tape. To test it a small ball is inserted at one end and must travel the length of the filter. Only if all four teams work together can they succeed and blast off from the moon before oxygen runs out.

Based on the film Apollo 13, it's all about resilience under pressure.

Pack contents

- Trainer's Notes
- Team Briefs
- Message from Houston
- Messaging pads
- Construction card
- Scissors, rulers, & sticky tape
- Ball
- Key Points Handout
- Action Plan Forms
- Teamwork Self Assessment Handout

Ideally suited to

All teams who need to see the benefits of sharing information freely and working together to achieve a successful outcome.



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Customer reviews

“ We used the pack very successfully at a conference. I wanted an activity that *entertained* as well as highlighted communication issues. It was enjoyed thoroughly and led to some *great discussions* afterwards, primarily around *trust* and *collaboration* - job, very effectively, done.

Keith Clarke, VP Operations, ARM Holdings Plc

“ We have now used Houston, we have a problem... in 4 different countries and the messages delivered translate well and are *relevant to different cultures*. Wherever we have delivered this module it has been received well and the feedback has always been that it was *fun* and *interesting*.

Jonathan Aylwin, C2C Program Manager (Global Industrial), TE Connectivity



Trainer's role (full guidance supplied in Trainer's Notes)

- Introduce the activity, explaining that it focuses on teamwork and, if you wish, teams cooperating with each other.
- Divide the group into four teams (as equally as possible).
- Issue the Team Briefs, then take a back seat and observe teams in action.
- Make notes on the points you think will be relevant for the debrief.
- After 30 minutes issue the 'MESSAGE FROM HOUSTON' and observe the effect on team performance. How do they react?
- After 70 minutes (from start of session) ask teams to bring the filter parts together for assembly. Each team is responsible for a different part of the filter.
- Test the filter with the ball which should run freely through the full length of filter. Does it work? Will teams get back to Earth?
- Lead a Debrief to discuss the learning outcomes and key lessons, relating the lessons to the workplace.
- Finally issue the Key Points handout and Action Plans.

Northgate says...

Houston is an exciting challenge. It has been successfully used for all levels of staff development, from junior managers to senior leadership teams, with consistently excellent feedback from Trainers and delegates alike.

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Northgate customers

