



DON'T TOUCH MY SQUARE

It was a simple assignment. Each person was given an envelope containing paper cut into shapes, and each table had to construct three squares from the contents. Easy. Until the rules are explained — there is to be no communication of any kind: no talking, no gesturing, no looking longingly at someone else's pieces. You could freely give one or all of your pieces to anyone, but you couldn't ask for or take pieces from others.

This was one of the tasks in Lee Innocenti's "Proven Successful Team Building Activities" at The Center for Association Leadership's Great Ideas Conference in March.

Most of the tables eventually made the squares, but not without difficulty. One common roadblock was when someone used the shapes to construct a square, but it was not the proper configuration of the pieces, so that one square kept the other two squares from being built. Each time this occurred, the rest of the table realized what had to be done long before the person who had constructed the square. Nope, this person happily let the others struggle along, unwilling to break apart the square he or she had made.

"That's just like how we act in associations," noted Jill McCrory, ringleader with Leadership Outfitters. "If one department has done what it sees as its job, then it's not going to help another department do its job. Why should it? The mentality is, 'We've done our job, you go do yours.' The reality is that the job isn't to succeed as a department but to succeed as an organization, and they're not doing that."

In addition to demonstrating an inclination toward a silo mentality, the exercise demonstrated the need of communication in teamwork and the difficulty of bringing a disparate group together to work on a single task.

