Essential skills - Group Dynamics – Pulling together over pulling apart

Working in teams can be fantastic – if team members work well together. However, if people are pulling in different directions, the experience can be awful. Sometimes, without sufficient direction, teams can focus on the wrong objectives and/or fail to use important resources. Worse, they can be torn apart by avoidable infighting, and can ultimately fail. Throughout the modern high school curriculum, group work is becoming more and more important to your individual grade. You might not like it, but you know it is a significant part of most of your courses. This activity has nothing to do with science directly – but your science courses will more often than not be doing group work – so it’s worth the time to get better at being a productive group member.

In Chemistry class, a good framework for thinking about how groups should go about their task is –

A) Define the objective – it’s understandable if you’re thinking “get the __________ done as quickly as possible” is your objective, but I hope you can see that most of the time that leads to a paper with writing on it that will get credit, but little understanding. Remember “slow down to go faster”? A more effective objective would be “make this __________ as effective a learning/study tool as possible”. It may take 10% more time. But you can learn 80% more . . .

B) Decide on a rough plan – half the time in Chem you and your group’ll just have a task to do. “Do these worksheet problems” will happen. I really can not force you to work in a group on a worksheet, but I can promise you that you will get more out of it if you do. Labs are almost all group efforts. You know what a plan is.

C) Divide the workload in such a way that everyone gets to do the task you are striving to master. Help each other. I promise you the “smart kid” will not always be the best kid at all the tasks. Nor will the most self confident and bossy kid always be the best leader just because they spoke up first. Sports analogies are great for this – it’s going to take all the players contributing differently to create the best team.

D) Agree that the ultimate goal is for everyone to get a good grade in the course. The easiest way to do that is to make sure everyone in your group can do everything.

Now to the challenge you will undertake to practice communicating. It’s impossible to do it by yourself. You will need to move an object from one orientation to another without touching it. The product is silly. The process is important. Your only written portion of this assignment is to list what your group agreed on for A, B, and C here at the bottom of the page.

A-

B-

C-