

# What We Learned From The Marshmallow Challenge

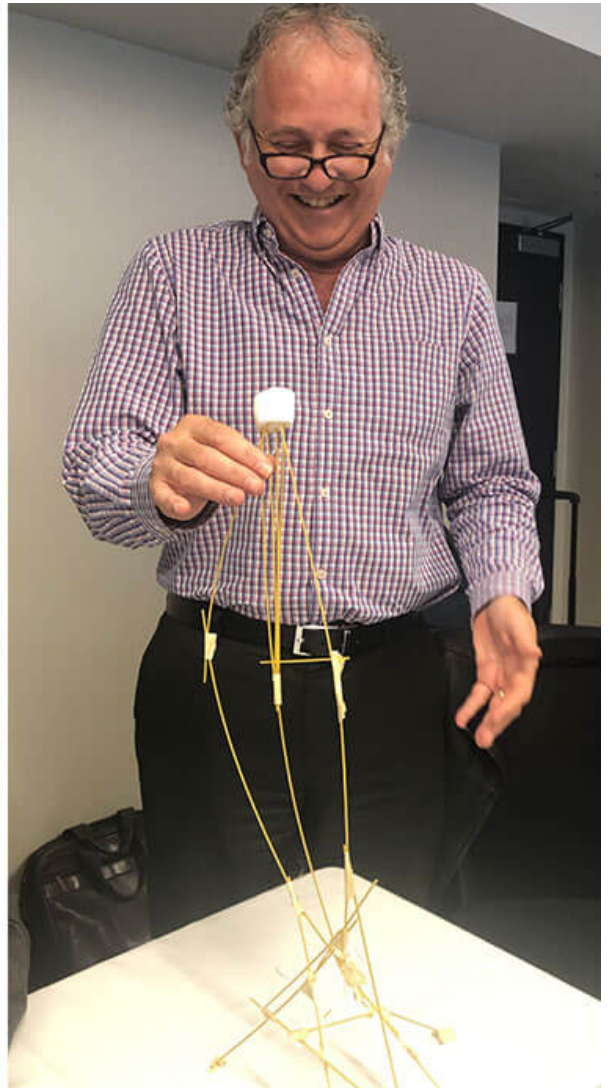
How does twenty sticks of spaghetti, one yard of tape, a yard of string, and a single marshmallow build a stronger team?

That's what we asked our management team to figure out during our last quarterly meeting.

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## What is the Marshmallow Challenge?

Every three months, the ECHOtape leadership team gathers to review our strategic objectives and initiatives. The goal, outside of accountability, is to keep the company moving forward, discuss challenges, and encourage communication. While our company is not huge, many of us work remotely so these quarterly meetings are a great way to reconnect with the

people who make ECHOtape tick every single day.

It is also a great opportunity for team building. Recently, we ended our day with a fun exercise called The Marshmallow Challenge. It ended the day on a high note – just what we all needed!

If you haven't heard, [The Marshmallow Challenge](#) has become a popular exercise in which small groups are asked to build the "tallest free-standing structure" from 20 sticks of spaghetti, 1 yard of tape, 1 yard of string, and 1 marshmallow. Each team has 18 minutes to complete the challenge, including the entire marshmallow on top. It's a fun and instructive exercise that allows teams to experience simple lessons in collaboration, innovation and creativity.

[In his TED talk "Build a tower, build a team"](#), Tom Wujec shares his findings from performing this challenge with a variety of different groups – recent business school graduates, lawyers, engineers, CEOs, and even kindergarten students. As you'll see, his observations about how the various groups approached the challenge gave rise to some surprising, and at times humorous, results:

Surprisingly, recent business school graduates are among the worst performers and kindergarteners often excel at this challenge. The children don't spend time fighting to be the leader of the group. Instead, they just start playing and in the process begin prototyping. Business school grads spend most of the time talking, planning and building, which means they don't have much time to change the design when it finally comes time to put the marshmallow on top which is usually too heavy for the structure that was built.

So... how do you think we fared??

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## What We Learned From The Marshmallow Challenge

**Always test theories through prototyping.** You think that marshmallows are light and will be easily supported, but when teams start building the structure, it suddenly tips it over. Prototyping and iterative process make for constant

improvement and eventual success. We know that after years of working with our own tape products, but putting it into practice is another thing – especially in 18 minutes. It was a great reminder!

**Working on a team is hard.** Everyone brings something to the table but it takes a while to figure what that is and how to leverage it all.

**There's no such thing as perfect.** You do not always get it right the first time, or even the second. The key is to keep trying!

**Use what is available.** In business and in this challenge, there is never unlimited resources or the perfect environment to grow.

**Playing with spaghetti and marshmallows is fun.**

As Wujec says, every project has its own marshmallow. I have been on many projects where you get to the end and all of a sudden there is that oh-no moment. It's a great reminder not to assume outcomes, and not to put all your eggs in one basket.

If you're looking for a fun way to kick start a meeting or get a team into a creative frame of mind, try running a marshmallow challenge of your own. Is your team up to it?