

EXERCISE Invisible Gorilla

Purpose Help students appreciate how challenging it can be to make accurate and complete observations, how easy it can be to miss the seemingly obvious, and how making good observations is a disciplined and imaginative process.

Recommended for Trail 10 Reality Phase Path

Estimated time required 10-15 minutes

Key Points

What we focus our attention on determines what we do and do not see.

The seemingly obvious isn't, when we allow ourselves to be distracted.

Making good observations requires knowing what you are looking for.

We can't see everything, so we have to find ways to determine what's important

Reference Chabris, Christopher and Simons, Daniel, *The Invisible Gorilla, and other ways our intuitions deceive us*, [Book]- New York : Crown Publishers, 2010

Note: The video required for this exercise was once strongly copyrighted and required that you purchase it. But it is now available on YouTube. It has been incorporated into a PowerPoint slide your convenience.

Instructions

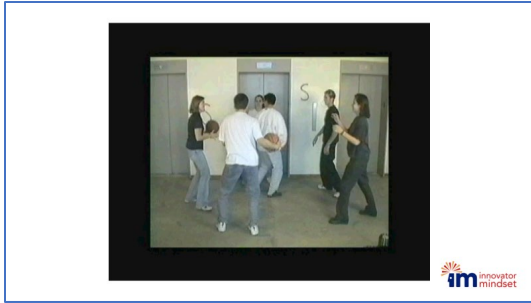
This exercise works best without any setup or context as to what it's about. Just explain what you want students to do. The rest will become apparent. This is a fun and eye-opening exercise.

Model Script

I want to do an exercise with you, that some of you may have seen before. In fact, it's so famous that it was once featured on NBC Dateline. But I suspect it will be new to many of you. If you've seen it before, don't say anything just yet.

I'm going to show you a short video of two teams of students passing around a basketball. One team is wearing black T-shirts and the other is wearing white T-shirts. I want you to carefully count the number of passes made by the white team. I want you to really concentrate and do your best to get an exact count.

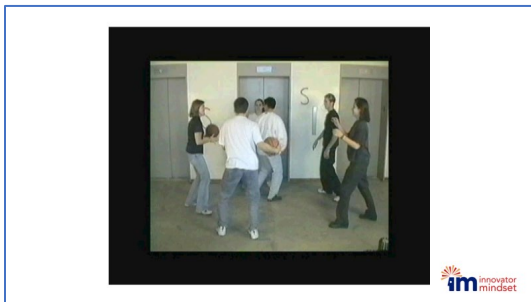
Play Video



If you have never seen this exercise, the results will amaze you.

When the video finishes, ask students to give you their count of the number of passes. Let a few of them respond, and then ask, “Did anyone notice anything else?” Results vary widely with every group, but at least a few students will have noticed that someone in a gorilla suit walked right through the middle of the game and even paused to beat on his/her chest. What’s fascinating is that anywhere from 30% to 90% of students (who have not already seen this video) will *not* have seen the gorilla—not noticed it at all. They will have no idea what you are referring to, so just replay the video for them (without having them count passes).

Replay the Video



The students who didn’t notice the gorilla will be stunned. Some may insist that it must be a different video. So be prepared to have the students who did see it back you up. (I once did this for a room of 20 adults and only one saw the gorilla the first time—*thankfully* so the rest of the room could be persuaded that I wasn’t misleading them.)

This a popular exercise that has been widely used by professional trainers for more than a decade. So don’t be surprised if some students have seen it before. Still in my experience, a majority of your students will not have seen it. Among those who have, many will recall that they didn’t see the gorilla when they first watched it.

Some things you may want to point out

We view the world very selectively, only actually “seeing” slivers of all the data coming at us. Our minds fill in the rest.

It's much easier to miss things than we assume, because when we do, there's usually nothing that notifies us that we missed something. We not only miss something, we're unaware that we missed it. So, we tend to strongly underestimate how often this happens.

There is extensive research demonstrating how easily we can develop "false memories." How we recall events is often corrupted over time.

What we pay attention to, to a great degree determines what we "see" and also what we fail to notice. (The invisible gorilla effect is enhanced by having students focus on the white team, whereas the gorilla is black.)

For all of these reasons, making accurate observations requires discipline and an awareness of our limitations.

If you place the Invisible Gorilla video in a folder labeled *IM Videos* on your desktop, it should play through the PowerPoint slides. If this doesn't work, you will need to reload/reconnect the videos to play them within PowerPoint.