

BUILDING AND USING A STICKY WALL

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A fabric sticky wall is a great tool for use in group facilitation sessions and many other planning processes. This tool is simply a fabric wall that can be mounted on a vertical surface and used to display ideas and concepts generated through the process so the working group can easily see them. The fabric is coated on one side with a special adhesive that allows light objects such as sheets of paper or flip chart sheets to be placed and held on the fabric. However, the adhesive allows for objects placed on the sticky wall to be taken off and repositioned at another place on the fabric without tearing the object. Being able to re-position and reorganize ideas and concepts during a group discussion or planning session makes the sticky wall a tremendously useful visual tool that helps groups to maximize creativity and effectiveness. The following is a description of how a sticky wall can easily be created and used.

MATERIALS

Fabric - Sport Nylon material, available at most fabric stores. (Don't use the rip-stop nylon material that is also available. It is a lighter weight material and will be more difficult to handle as a sticky wall.) Any color will work, but avoid colors that are too light (e.g., grays, white) as they will show dirt and residue more so than darker colors.

Size of Wall – The size of the sticky wall is pretty much a personal decision of the user. The sport nylon fabric comes in bolts that are 60" wide, so the height of the wall is pretty much limited to 60". The useable length of the wall is often limited by the availability of a flat vertical surface on which to mount the sticky wall at the locale where it will be used. I have made walls using 3 yards of the nylon fabric, giving me a finished wall size of 5 ft. high by 9 ft. long. This size seems to work in most cases. I have been in situations where a smaller wall would have been a better fit, especially when working with smaller groups, so, if you are going to be using a sticky wall in locations with limited surface space to hang the wall, you may want to reduce the length of the sticky wall to 7 feet. Any length smaller than 7 feet will limit the amount of space available to display information.

If you find yourself in situations where you need more area on your sticky wall than is available on a 5 ft. by 9 ft. sticky wall (e.g., large groups, multiple questions that build on responses from the earlier questions), I would recommend making additional sticky walls for use in these situations

rather than trying to make a sticky wall longer than 9 ft. Anything longer than a 9 ft. wall is very difficult to handle (especially if you are doing it yourself)!

Finishing the Edges – The sport nylon fabric used to make a sticky wall has a great tendency to fray at the edges. Therefore, it is highly recommended that you do something to the outside edges of your sticky wall to keep the edges from fraying. Options include sewing a lock stitch around the edge of the wall material or turning about ¼”- ½” of the edge over onto itself and stitching it down. I have used both of these methods and they work well, if you can find someone who has the ability, and is willing, to do the sewing. I’m sure there are products available that are made to keep fabric edges from fraying, but I have not used them, so I cannot say how well they might work. Another option for keeping nylon material from fraying would be to heat seal the fabric edges using some source of heat hot enough to melt the fabric’s fibers together around the edge, but not hot enough to catch the fabric, which is flammable, on fire. I am a little nervous about using heat to seal the edges of the nylon fabric, so I stick with the sewn edge method.

Whichever method you use to keep the fabric edges from fraying, DO IT BEFORE YOU SPRAY YOUR WALL WITH THE ADHESIVE!

Once the wall has been sprayed, you are very limited as to what you can do with the, now very tacky, fabric. And, as the adhesive itself is very flammable, I wouldn’t recommend getting the material too close to a source of high heat.

Spray

Adhesive - The adhesive used to make one side of the sticky wall sticky is a spray artist’s adhesive that allows for repositioning of objects when they are placed on the fabric. The key word here is “repositioning.” Some artist’s adhesive are made to not allow repositioning of work after it comes in contact with the adhesive’s surface. This would defeat the purpose of the sticky wall. Make sure the adhesive you use says that it allows for repositioning. One product I have used is 3M’s Spray Mount™ Artist’s Adhesive. This product comes in a white can with a black cap. Spray Mount™ allows for repositioning.

PREPARING AND USING THE STICKY WALL

Spraying the Wall for the

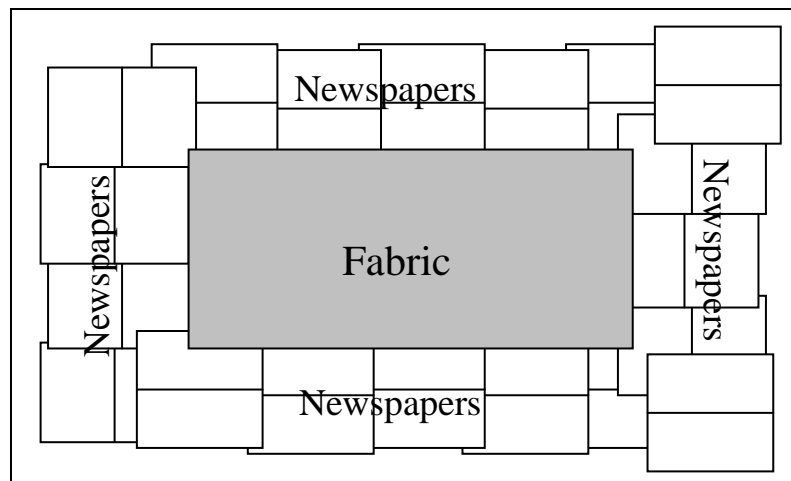
First Time - When you have the fabric selected for your sticky wall and have used some method to keep the edges from fraying, you are ready to coat one side of the fabric with the spray adhesive. The following steps describe the method I have used to complete this process.

- 1) Find a flat, dry and clean surface upon which to lay the nylon fabric unfolded and flat. An open floor area would be okay for this. There should be no wind or breezes in this area. The area should have some access to ventilation to allow fresh air to enter the area. There should also not be any open flames in the area, as the adhesive spray is highly flammable.

You should not do this in your house or on a floor that you wouldn't want to be sprayed with the adhesive. A garage floor, a workshop floor or any solid surface floor would work. Do not do this inside the main living area of your home. Besides the chance that the spray might drift onto unwanted surfaces, when sprayed, it also has a slight chemical smell that you might not want in your living room or kitchen.

- 2) Spread the nylon fabric out flat on the surface. Make sure you spray the side of the material that you want facing your group when you use it. If you turned under and sewed the edges of the fabric, you will probably want to spray the side opposite the side with the turned under fabric so the usable surface will be totally smooth.
- 3) Use newspapers or other disposable materials to create a border under the outside edges of your nylon fabric to catch the adhesive spray's drift and prevent it from getting on the surface area outside the edges of the fabric. If you are using newspapers, open a section of newspaper so you are looking at the two middle pages of the section. Put either the right or left hand edge of the newspaper under the edge of the fabric so that 3-4 inches of the newspaper edge is under the fabric. Repeat this all the way around the edge of the fabric, overlapping the newspapers a few inches on each other as you go, until the newspapers have formed a completely covered newspaper "frame" around the fabric. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1. Spraying repositionable adhesive on sticky wall fabric



- 4) Make sure there is no debris (e.g., threads, dirt, leaves, etc.) on the fabric before starting to spray. Read and follow instructions for using the adhesive spray. Starting at the center of the fabric, spray a light, even coat of adhesive spray over the entire piece of fabric. Do not put a heavy coat of adhesive on the fabric. All you need is enough adhesive to hold light sheets of paper on the wall, while still being able to pull them off and move them around. It is better to error on the side of too little spray than to put too much spray on. Once the spray is on the fabric, there is no way to get it off. If more spray is needed on the fabric, you can apply a second light coat to those areas.

The goal of putting on the spray is to make the surface of the fabric tacky enough to hold paper and other light materials on the surface of the fabric, but not sticky enough to impede removing the objects from the fabric surface without damaging them or leaving residue on the surface of the fabric. Getting the right amount of spray without getting too much is an art, not a science. A ballpark figure is that it will take about one and a half cans, or a little bit less, of spray adhesive to initially coat a 5 ft. by 9 ft. fabric wall. Again, it is better to error on the light side.

- 5) When you have finished spraying, allow the spray to dry for 5-10 minutes before moving the fabric. At this point, one of your main goals is to never let the sticky side of the wall come into contact with any surface (e.g., a floor, the ground, a fuzzy blanket, etc.) that would leave dirt or other debris on the sticky fabric.
- 6) When you are finished spraying and are ready to fold the sticky wall for transporting, remember that the goal for each time you put the sticky wall away is to get a very neat first fold by folding the wall exactly in half with the sticky side against itself. By folding the wall neatly in half with the sticky side inside against itself, you have reduced greatly the chance that the sticky side will come into contact with a dirty surface. Continue to fold the sticky wall until you have it the size you need for storage.

Using the Sticky Wall -

To use the sticky wall for a group facilitation process or other meeting, you must be able to find a flat (or relatively flat) vertical surface upon which to mount the wall with the sticky side facing toward the group. It is always a good idea to make sure you know what the location is like where you will be using the sticky wall to make sure it will be possible to use it. Don't make plans to use the sticky wall and then find out when you get to your meeting that the physical location won't make it possible to use it.

There are several methods that can be used to mount the sticky wall for use. If there is a suitable flat vertical surface upon which to mount the sticky wall (e.g., a wall with no windows or other obstructions), you need to determine what the surface material is. This will help determine how you mount your wall.

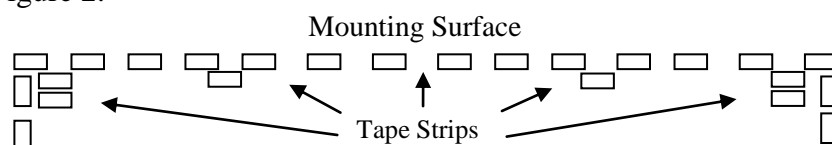
- 1) **What type of surface?** - If the surface is a soft porous surface, such as a corkboard surface, and the location management will allow it, you can mount your wall with push pins around the edges of the fabric. Some locations even have a cork strip mounted on the walls around the perimeter of rooms for use in putting up materials using push pins. If this option is available, using push pins is one of the easiest ways to mount a sticky wall.

- 2) **Preparing the surface** - If the surface is a hard surface, you can use tape to mount the sticky wall. If the surface is a smoother surface, masking tape will work. If it is a rougher, uneven surface, you may need to use duct tape to get the grip you need to hold the wall up. Again, whatever method you use, check with the folks who run the locale where the meeting is taking place to make sure it is okay to use tape.

To use masking tape to mount your sticky wall, first decide where you want to place the wall. Determine how high on the wall you need to place the top edge of your wall and put a piece of tape on the wall just below that height. Then determine where one of the top corners of the sticky wall will be located. Tear off a piece of masking tape and roll it back onto itself to make a circle of tape with the sticky side out. When pressed flat, this piece should make a strip of two-sided tape from 2"-3" long. Place this first strip at the location on the wall where you want the upper corner of the sticky wall to go.

At this corner, place two tape strips, one vertically and one horizontally, to delineate where the sticky wall corner will be placed. Then, using the first strip of tape you placed on the wall as a guide to mark the upper edge of the sticky wall, continue to roll strips of masking tape into circles and place them horizontally on the wall until you have on the wall a line of self-sticking tape strips that outline the upper edge and corners of your sticky wall. (See Figure 2.) This outline of self-sticking tape strips will be the mounting frame for your sticky wall. You can place additional tape strips at the upper corners of the wall, as needed, to provide additional strength there.

Figure 2.



- 3) **Unfolding the sticky wall** – Whichever way you have chosen to mount the sticky wall, you now have to unfold the sticky wall to mount it. This is always a good time to find one or two individuals to help you make the job easier. It is possible to unfold and mount a sticky wall by yourself (with a little practice), but it is a much more enjoyable task with some assistance.

With the help of one or two others, gently unfold the sticky wall and peel the sticky sides apart until you have the wall unfolded and all of the creases completely open.

- 4) **Putting the sticky wall in place** - Take one of the upper corners of the sticky wall and raise it up to the location where you want it placed. If you are using tape, this will be one of the corners outlined with self-sticking tape strips.

As you raise the corner, have those helping you raise the other corner up also, so the upper edge of the sticky wall stays fairly level. Place the corner in your hands against the wall over the tape strips, if you are using tape, so that the tape strips are right behind the outer edges of that corner. Then use your hands to move along the top edge of the sticky wall, placing the top edge just over the tape strips that outline the top edge. When you get to the opposite top corner of the sticky wall, place it over the tape at that corner. (Unless, your estimates are really good, you will probably have to readjust the tape strips at the second corner to match the length of the sticky wall.) If needed, add additional tape strips behind the top edge of the sticky wall to hold it securely in place.

When you have completely placed the upper edge and the top corners of the sticky wall onto the tape strips, make some more tape strips and place them behind the edge down each side of the sticky wall. You don't need to use as many tape strips down the sides as you used on the top edge. Just enough strips to keep the sticky wall from pulling away from the wall when you are repositioning items on the sticky wall. You can also put a few strips behind the bottom edge if needed.

If you are using push pins to hold the sticky wall in place, follow the same procedure as with tape, putting the push pins in place as you put the sticky wall in place.

- 5) **What if there's no place to mount the sticky wall?** - If there are no available surfaces in the room upon which to mount your sticky wall, you still have another option. I have created a system that is somewhat portable that I use when I want to use my sticky wall at a location that doesn't have a suitable place to mount the sticky wall on a wall. I

have a 4 ft. by 8 ft. white foam board panel with a taped hinge in the middle so that it can be folded in half (4 ft. by 4 ft.) for easier transport. I place this lightweight panel on two or three flip chart stands or easels and have a suitable base upon which I can drape my sticky wall for use in a meeting. While the usable wall area available to me is less than when the sticky wall is mounted on a wall, I can still make use of the sticky wall as a tool in locations where I never before could.

- 6) **Taking down the sticky wall** – When you have finished using the sticky wall, you need to take it down and refold it. You do this in the same manner you did when you gave the sticky wall its first spray adhesive coat. Just take the sticky wall off of the surface where it is mounted (make sure you remove any tape strips or push pins that may have stuck to the sticky wall). Then, with the assistance of someone else, if possible, fold the sticky wall in half with the sticky sides facing each other and continue to fold until you have the size you want. Also make sure you remove all of the tape or push pins from the surface on which you had the sticky wall mounted.

Sticky Wall

Care -

A sticky wall will give you years of use if you take good care of it. The main care you can give a sticky wall is to take every possible precaution to avoid letting the sticky surface of the wall come into contact with something that will put dirt or other debris on the sticky surface.

Avoid using the sticky wall in locations with dirty or dusty surfaces. In addition to providing more opportunities to get debris on the sticky side of the wall, these environments can also result in the non-sticky side getting dirty. **NEVER USE CONSTRUCTION PAPER, NEWSPRINT OR OTHER LIGHTWEIGHT PAPERS ON THE STICKY WALL.** It is almost impossible to remove construction paper, newsprint or other flimsy types of materials from the wall without leaving lots of paper debris on the sticky wall. Regular 20 pound weight or higher copier/printer papers work well in most cases. If you are going to use the same words or phrases multiple times with the sticky wall (e.g., titles, column headers, graphics, etc.) you can have these items laminated in clear plastic to make them last longer. Using laminated items requires that the wall is sticky enough to hold the added weight of the lamination material. Also avoid getting the sticky wall wet or damp.

If you need to write on the paper sheets or flip chart sheets after they have been placed on the sticky wall, avoid writing outside the edges of the sheets and marking the sticky wall. If you use liquid markers, make sure you use the non-bleed-through types of markers and avoid writing over the same

place on a sheet of paper too many times, which could allow the ink to bleed through onto the sticky wall.

After using the sticky wall a few times, inspect the surface of the sticky wall for any residue left from paper objects that were placed on the wall. Over a period of time, some small amounts of paper residue will remain on the sticky surface. This is especially common if lighter weight types of papers are used on the wall or if too much spray adhesive was applied to the fabric. If you find some paper residue, you can often scrape it off with a fingernail without damaging the surface of the fabric.

After much use, if the sticky wall seems to be losing its tackiness, you may want to reapply some spray adhesive to the surface of the fabric. You do this in the same manner as you used when applying the initial coating of spray adhesive with one difference. Since the fabric will have quite a bit of spray adhesive still in its woven fibers, you won't need to apply nearly the amount of adhesive spray that you used in the initial coating. Be very prudent in how much you spray on the fabric to rejuvenate it!

A sticky wall can be left up for a period of time for use in planning activities that need to take place over multiple days or weeks. However, experience has shown that, when a sticky wall is left up on a surface for more than a few weeks, the volatile components of the spray adhesive begins to evaporate, leaving the wall unsticky after a time. For this reason, it is not advisable to leave a sticky wall up for long periods of time, unless you are willing to re-spray the fabric when needed.

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