

Boston Trainer's Roundtable Meeting May 14th

Presenter: Jennifer Stanchfield

jen@experientialtools.com



www.experientialtools.com

802-348-7297

Notes and Activity Descriptions:

Button (and then quote) Intros:

To start our workshop, as participant's entered the room they were asked to choose a button that represent their mood or attitude coming into the workshop.

Then everyone partnered up and shared with their partner about why they chose the button/quote and their goal for the day.

I also use my postcard collection, quotes or treasure chest objects in a similar way. With some groups you might ask group members to introduce their partners to the group, with other groups (especially large ones) you might want to move right into a concentric circles or other active partner sharing activity to get participants interacting with just one or two others at a time before sharing with the large group. (We talked about how important it is to carefully assess your group, and with some groups be aware about putting individual group members "in the spotlight" too early before some trust and rapport has been built). In our group's case we did go around the circle, since this is a networking group participants wanted to know who else was in the room. Then later using the quotes we demonstrated the alternative active discussion sharing with the concentric circles.

- Activities like these can be great for the first day of a program; or after certain milestones, like the New Year, or as reflection at the end of a workshop, retreat, or course.
- With groups that know each other I often use postcards and objects and have group members answer reflective questions such as choose a card that represents what you love about your job, a goal for the workplace etc.
- For introductions you can give participants the opportunity to introduce their partners and their conversation about the cards to the group. Using objects or images gives participants a focal point/conversation starter during what can sometimes be a socially awkward situation- building comfort within the group and helping to establish connections.
- Recent research on the brain and learning suggests that when learners can attach thoughts/key concepts to a metaphoric image they may retain it longer.
- Our group discussed some benefits of this type of activity:
 - *Often people find it easier to share when they can attach their thoughts to an object or image*

- *The reflection can become more metaphorically rich than with conversation alone*
- *This method is “participant centered” as it puts more control on the student/learner for interpreting their experience/feelings/goals rather than the teacher/leader directing and possibly inserting their own interpretation or agenda. This opens up a spontaneity of experience- and possibly a deeper connection*

About Using Quotes:

We talked about how this activity could be used for sparking individual or group reflection. Quotes make great journal prompts. Quotes around a theme or famous person could be a way to introduce or tie together a lesson or themed program.

Reference: Stanchfield, Tips & Tools for the Art of Experiential Group Facilitation, 2007 Wood 'N' Barnes Publishing or contact jen@experientialtools.com for postcards and miniature metaphors treasure chest.

Concentric Circles: This kinesthetic introductory activity also can be used as a great reflective activity or as a way to review material in a course. It works well as an opening warm up, as it is fairly non-intimidating since each person is only asked to converse with one other person at a time. Concentric Circles can be adapted to pretty much any age or size group. It works especially well with large groups.

Directions:

- In this activity the group is divided in half, and two circles are formed, with the participants facing each other in an inner circle and an outer circle.
- The participants are asked to greet each other by name and then are asked to converse about a topic and/or participate in an engaging cooperative activity together, such as “finger fencing” or “gotcha” or “one handed partner shoe tying.
- After completing the partner activity, participants are asked to share their answers to a “get to know you”, “reflection” or “academic review” question- depending on the goals for the group. “Get to know you questions might be: “What is the most unusual food you have ever eaten?” “What was the best vacation you ever took?” “Who is a person you admire and why?” Reflection questions might be: “What is a key learning you will take away from the experience?” Review questions could be around reactions to a book being read in class. This activity would be a great way to engage in a “kinesthetic” academic review for any subject.
- After a few moments, or when the conversational energy diminishes, the facilitator invites the inner circle to rotate and form new partnerships by having the inner group move three spaces to the left, saying hello to those two they pass by. These new partners greet each other; the facilitator provides another cooperative activity and question to discuss.
- The activity continues with alternating movement between the inside and outside circle, followed by activities and questions.
- In our workshop I decided to pair “themed” questions with some of our activities. During the “one-handed shoe tying”(a partnered task) I asked you to share your experiences with co-teaching. After gotcha- I asked you to share a moment you have laughed in your practice as an educator.

Notes from this activity:

We talked about whether or not it is okay for partner dialogue to go on without you directly hearing it as a facilitator. Group members shared that it can be a mental shift to let go of that immediate feedback as a facilitator, but that we could be helping our participants engage in learning and dialogue more readily when they are not being put on the spot in front of the group. In the long run it could allow your group to become more open and willing to share later on the group process because they are becoming comfortable sharing at the start with one person at a time. Since our conversation I have been reflecting on this topic. I notice that if something was shared during this partner dialogue that is important for the group or facilitator to hear, it will come up again later in the group process.

Reference: I first learned this activity from Paul Hutchinson during our time as grad students at MSU Mankato. It is also written up in: A Teachable Moment, Cain, Cummings, and Stanchfield, 2005. Kendall Hunt Publishing.

I also shared a less structured and more playful partner activity that could fit your some of your groups. I have used this with groups ranging from middle school students to software engineers.

Handshake Mingle: This activity is great for introductions, reviewing names, and helping a group become comfortable with each other, and it makes a great active processing/debriefing activity.

Handshakes could be: High 5 partner, Low 5 Partner, Ankle Shake partner, Fishing partner etc. Revisit each partner through the sequence. A variation is to combine the handshakes with “get to know you” questions, or later in a group’s experience use this activity with reflection or review questions.

Directions:

- First, have everyone find a partner;
- Ask the group members to give each other a high 5. Then have participants recognize this person now as their high 5 partner.
- Next ask them to find another new partner; this is their low 5 partner (demonstrate).
- Have them go and find their High 5 partner, then their low 5 partners, moving around each other amongst the group to find those original partners.
- Then ask them to find a new partner; this is their ankle shake partner. Start the sequence again- find high 5, then low 5, then ankle shake partner.
- Next have students find a brand new partner who becomes their “fishing partner” (one is the reel and one the fish- demonstrate).
- We used “dance” partners as well as “pop a wheelie” and demonstrated “lumber jack” and “Sumo” partners
- Have student’s help you come up with new handshakes, or present their own. I have used “rock on” partner, “butterfly” partner and “pop a wheelie” partners.
- Continue this sequence- adding on with new partner activities as appropriate. You will witness laughter, positive interaction and fun. Participants really will remember each other.

- Later on you can use the partners to form groups, or as a closing at the end of a class activity have them run through this sequence to reflect on their thoughts regarding a class lesson with their partners.

Our group's notes from this activity:

- *Use handshakes that are appropriate for your group- taking into consideration, age, space, social atmosphere, setting, (but don't be afraid to experiment!). Have participants make up their own.*
- *Even more introverted or "too cool for school" group members "buy in" to this activity- probably because it starts with familiar and simple greetings like High 5 and Low 5, it moves quickly, and everyone is doing the activity at the same time- no one person or pair is in the "spotlight". Also participants can participate at their own pace or comfort level- if they want to opt out of a handshake or adjust it, they can.*
- *This can be used as an active academic review method or reflection activity. The first time you introduce it, it can be community building/ice breaker- later are in a group's time together you could use it again to reflect on specific questions/ academic content.*

Reference: Stanchfield, *Tips & Tools for the Art of Experiential Group Facilitation*, 2007 Wood 'N' Barnes Publishing.

Discussion on "Setting the Tone" and Using Kinesthetic Dialogue Activities: *Our group discussed how these activities provide opportunities for Active Review- reaching our more kinesthetic learners, that they help "sequence" learning by helping groups get comfortable with dialogue step by step, Starting in Partners first. We discussed the value of a silly activity- that people learn through play. That these activities help people redirect their attention to what is happening in the room rather than the office or home. Brain based research is showing that associating movement with learning helps forming mental connections with material learned.*

Tin Can Pass: In this activity participants are challenged to pass a tin can around a circle using only their feet.

- **Variations include:** adding a tennis ball to the can, and for advanced challenge having group members close their eyes and pass the can (they can open them when they have passed off the can which allows them to verbally guide others in their group).
- **Notes:** We used this activity to discuss knowing when to "send it back"- the fine balance between challenging participants to complete a task to their potential and creating potentially frustrating experience. We discussed that this "line" is different for every group; so it is important to always evaluate and reevaluate with your groups- and make sure the challenge fits their agenda/goals.

Reference: *I first learned this activity many years ago from the author of many games books: Karl Rohnke in a challenge course training. My students at Stevens Point WI School District's Experiential Education program created the variations.*

Postcards or Chiji Cards as processing/reflecting activity: This way of reflecting uses metaphoric images as way to initiate group conversations or to help

students/participants process or reflect on thoughts or experiences. Using images in place of a more didactic question and answer session allows for more spontaneous interpretation of the experience and student control and ownership in learning experiences. Often people will share more deeply when they have a visual symbol to represent their thoughts and feelings.

Ideas for using postcards/Chiji cards or objects in reflection:

- Ask the group to come to consensus on one card that represents the group's achievement.
- As a closing activity have the group pick three to tell a story of where they started, where they went and where they hope to go next
- Have individuals chose a card that represents a personal strength, unique perspective
- Create a kit of postcards from cards found at novelty stores; flea markets or a kit of cards is available through Jen Stanchfield at experientialtools.com

Reference: Tips & Tools for the Art of Experiential Group Facilitation. Jennifer Stanchfield, Wood 'N' Barnes Publishing 2007. A Teachable Moment. Cain, Cummings, Stanchfield 2005. Kendall Hunt Publishing.

Communication Break Down: This is a great activity for inspiring a discussion around communication, communication styles, giving and receiving directions, learning styles, chains of command in the workplace etc.

The simple set up is to have four people who at one end of the room giving non verbal directions. A person facing them who receives the directions by looking at them but who can't see the person he/she is giving verbal directions to (the doer) who is placed somewhere behind them. The "doer" has their eyes closed and is listening to those directions that are being relayed by the middle person. The rest of the group acts as "spotters" "observers" and creators of the simple task that the doer undertakes- something like moving an object into a basket, or picking it up and placing it upon a chair.

You will find this activity instigates a great deal of discussion!

Reference: I learned this from my colleague Johanna Liskowsky-Doak

As a closing participants were invited to keep their postcard as a reminder of the strength you bring to your work. You are welcome to share this back to our email list if you like. We discussed that sometimes bringing a group back to one of the introductory activities with closing questions can be a nice way to bring the group to close.

After my presentation the group had a great discussion on how to handle cell phones and laptops use during Meetings/Trainings. We talked about how some people use them as a tool "guard themselves" against socially awkward situations- like some of our groups, so that finding a way to help them meet and greet and put them aside might help group members "become fully present". Bill mentioned using Oprah's "Cell Free Zone" signs when people enter the room. Someone mentioned placing a basket at the front of the room to hold the phones for the duration. We also

discussed the possibility of integrating them somehow into some of the program activities in your session.... Please add any notes thoughts I missed!

Thanks for participating everyone! Please email the group to add any additional notes you think would be helpful about the activities or discussions that came up during our session. It would be great to keep the discussion going.

Also check out my blog at: www.experientialtools.com/blog for articles on group facilitation, teaching and some activity ideas. Email me with any questions: jen@experientialtools.com