

PLAY FOR PERFORMANCE: November 2003

SERIOUSLY FUN ACTIVITIES FOR TRAINERS, FACILITATORS, PERFORMANCE CONSULTANTS, AND MANAGERS.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Masthead

Our mission statement, copyright notice, and cast of characters.

Editorial

Open Questions

Do you think open questions are effective? Yes No

Opener

WORKING THE ROOM

Let's get acquainted.

Guest Gamer

An Interview with Tatiana Kolovou

A chat with a Greek gamer.

Production Simulation

THE PLAYFUL PRODUCER by Tatiana A. Kolovou

Training goes to Tinsel Town.

Workshop Announcement

High-Performance Teamwork

The Teampay approach to teamwork.

Online Strategy

An Open Question on Open Questions

This month's OQ.

Pithy Saying

Of Mice and Minds.

Put your mouth where your mouse is.

Contest

Variations

Win a \$50 gift certificate!

Masthead

**PLAY FOR PERFORMANCE:
SERIOUSLY FUN ACTIVITIES FOR TRAINERS, FACILITATORS, PERFORMANCE
CONSULTANTS, AND MANAGERS.**

Mission

To increase and improve the use of interactive, experiential strategies to improve human performance in an effective, efficient, and enjoyable way.

Editorial Roster

Editor: Sivasailam (Thiagi) Thiagarajan

Assistant Editor: Raja Thiagarajan

Associate Editor: Matt Richter

Editorial Advisory Board: David Gouthro, Julie England, Kat Koppett, Les Lauber, Steve Sugar, and <type your name here>

Copyright Info

The materials in this newsletter are copyright 2003 by Workshops by Thiagi, Inc. However, they may be freely reproduced for educational/training activities. There is no need to obtain special permission for such use *as long as you do not reproduce more than 100 copies per year*. Please include the following statement on all reproductions:

Reprinted from PLAY FOR PERFORMANCE. Copyright © 2003 by Workshops by Thiago, Inc.

For any other use of the content, please contact us (thiagi@thiagi.com) for permission.

Subscription Info

All registered subscribers receive PLAY FOR PERFORMANCE free of charge.

However, to prevent us from becoming bankrupt, we have decided to adopt a Busker Protocol. If you like what you read, if you find it useful, and if you'd like us to continue publishing the newsletter, please feel free to chip in with any financial contribution. Our estimated annual cost for this newsletter is \$30,000. So we suggest an annual contribution of \$30 (which is less than one-third the subscription cost of Thiago's earlier paper-based newsletter). We would appreciate any amount that you send us, but make sure it is less than \$30,000 (since we don't want to make a profit). You can mail your check to Thiago, 4423 East Trailridge Road, Bloomington, IN 47408 or call us at (812) 332-1478 to charge the amount to a credit card. Or you can [charge your credit card online](#), through Workshops by Thiago, Inc. Please let us know if you need an invoice for financial record keeping.

Feedback Request

Thiago believes in practicing what he preaches. This is an interactive newsletter, so interact already! Send us your feedback, sarcastic remarks, and gratuitous advice through email to thiagi@thiagi.com . Thanks!

[\[Table of Contents\]](#)

Editorial

Open Questions

While reviewing a training game on team formation, I came across this question:

What are the four stages of team development?

You probably know the answer: *forming, storming, norming, and performing*.

If you answered the question correctly, what does it prove? Sure, you can recall the four stages of team development. But does this mean that you understand the principles and can apply them to real-world teams?

Compare the original question with these questions:

- What is an example of effective facilitation behavior during the norming stage?
- What is an example of effective team-member behavior during the storming stage?
- Which team-development stage is the most critical one? Why do you think so?
- What additional stages would you add to the four team-development stages?

These questions require (and reward) higher-order thinking. They challenge participants. They require a deeper understanding of the principles. They are intellectually stimulating.

Unfortunately, however, the questions that are most frequently used in training games resemble the original question. They are closed, convergent that questions fall in the *one-correct-answer* category. They are recall questions that require the lowest levels of thinking. They are meaningless, impersonal, mechanical questions that patronize the learner by asking her to determine if a statement is true or to select the best answer among four insipid alternatives.

Why is this type of closed question so frequently used in training activities? Because it is easy to determine whether the answer is correct or not, because the answers can be evaluated by any player, and because you can program a computer to check the answer.

The use of closed questions conveys a strong impression that players are incapable of producing or recognizing creative responses to open-ended questions.

Don't get me wrong. I believe recall questions are very important. Beginning learners should master the fundamental facts, figures, terminology, and definitions. They should practice these items until they acquire the required level of fluency.

But I am bothered by the perception that games and interactive exercises are effective

only for drill practice. Most trainers and participants and managers believe that games are limited to the basic knowledge and comprehension. These perceptions are reinforced by the trivial questions that are incorporated in most instructional games. For example, people look at this question

By what percent did the Asian population in the U.S. grow in the decade 1980 to 1990?

and wonder what that has to do with the skills of getting along with a coworker from a different culture.

For the past 30 years, I have designed and used games with open-ended, divergent questions that require application, analysis, evaluation, problem solving, and synthesis. My secret? A fundamental belief that the players are capable of comparing different responses and deciding which one is the best. Also, a belief that by comparatively judging other players' responses, you master the criteria for effective responses and learn to apply them to your own responses. Recently, I have been using open question in my online learning course. Even in the absence of feedback from an expert facilitator, participants are more engaged in their learning activities.

Here's a closed question for you: *Is it time for you to start using open-ended questions in your training activities?* Give yourself 1 point if you answered "Yes". Here's an open-ended question: *What strategies can we use for encouraging players to produce and recognize creative responses?* Decide for yourself how many points you deserve.

[\[Table of Contents\]](#)

Opener

WORKING THE ROOM

A major purpose of an opening activity is to help participants get acquainted with each other. Here's an opener that identifies and rewards participants who would make good politicians.

Purpose

To energize participants and to encourage interaction among them.

Time

15 - 20 minutes

Participants

10 to 30

Preparation

Prepare copies of an instruction sheet presenting the following content with suitable modifications:

Working-the-Room Contest!

We want you to meet and interact with as many other participants as possible.

This is a do-it-yourself icebreaker. You have approximately 7 minutes between now and 8:37 AM to mingle and chat with the other participants. Collect information from different people and share information about yourself. Use this contest as an excuse to behave like an intrusive extrovert.

Until 8:37, you are on your own. No other instructions will be given.

Exactly at 8:37, we will conduct a contest that will reward your ability to work the room. You will have two chances to win!

Flow

Briefing. As participants come in, greet them at the door and give them a copy of the instruction sheet. If anyone asks you questions about the contest, repeat the information from the instruction sheet.

Keeping time. Blow a whistle and announce the beginning of the 7-minute period. Keep an eye on the clock. One minute before the ending time of the contest, give an appropriate warning.

Start the contest. At the exact time, blow the whistle. Tell participants to stop talking

with each other. Ask participants to hide their nametags and any other personal identification.

Conduct the popularity contest. Explain that the first phase of the contest involves visibility. Ask participants to stand up if they believe that their name will be remembered by the most people in the room. Bring this group to the front of the room. Point to the first contestant and ask the other participants to write her full name on a piece of paper. Announce the name of th