PLAY FOR PERFORMANCE: January 2006

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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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.

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Feedback Request

Thiagi 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]

Guest Gamers

Advice to Facilitators

For the past several years, we asked experienced gamers for their advice to newcomers who are planning to use training games. Here are responses excerpted from 23 interviews.

Alain Rostain

Start slowly. Pick one or two games that you are most comfortable with, and lead with these. Share your strategies and insights with participants. Take the risk of trying out games that you've just heard about or read about. Conducting a new game without excessive preparation and rehearsal keeps you in the moment, which is an important mindset for a facilitator.

Alan Richter

Facilitators need to be clear communicators, proactive planners, and capable of listening like crazy. By proactive, I mean they need to anticipate the questions that will be asked, the difficulties players may have, and the resistance they may encounter. Good facilitators

also know good timing: when to move from one phase to the next and when to conclude the game.

Bill Matthews

Less is more. I don't like using a lot of games, but I choose games that have an impact. And I prefer ones with simple instructions and steps.

Chris Saeger

I don't use games. I use highly engaging learning experiences. Or Action Based Learning Experiences (ABLEs).

I ask this question, "Would you take a flight with a pilot who had only done classroom learning? Would you like her to have had some practice in a flight simulator?"

Chuck Wade

A facilitator should be able to ask another question when answering a question. An effective training activity should help participants get "aha's" in the debriefing. A receptive participant should be capable of doing a 180 degree turn.

Clark Aldrich

Don't ever use the phrase, "using games." Sponsors don't like it.

If you are testing an educational simulation, don't engage the student by saying, "We are testing this new program. What do you think?" Say instead, "This is something that is critical to your development. We will be recording and tracking how you do. Let me know how I can help." You will get much better feedback. Otherwise, people evaluate new technology by the standards of the old technology.

David Blum (Dr. Clue)

Resist the urge to guide people towards "success". Struggling with the game, often with strong positive or negative emotions, results in the most impactful learning. So stay out of the way, be a fly on the wall, and trust that your well-designed game will run itself.

Deb Calderon

Perhaps not everyone agrees with me, but I think a lot of it comes down to personality and

style when conducting a game. Enthusiasm for the game and confidence that the group will accept it are important. Finding or creating the right game is important. Using your own stuff helps you really know your game and understand inside and out how it can be used.

Seamlessly integrate games with other activities. Don't abruptly insert a game with the announcement, "We are now going to play an exciting game." Combine your passive presentations and hectic activities in such a fashion that participants cannot figure out when the game began or when it ended.

Always do your homework and establish your credibility as a subject-matter expert or a skilled facilitator. Participants should realize that you are using the game because it is the most appropriate strategy and not because you are incompetent or lazy.

Dennis Meadows

I like Dick Duke's "Rule of 10." One has to use a game at least 10 times before you really understand it. That is profoundly true, but note that I am still learning from and adapting games that I have run over 100 times.

Ellen Kaye Gehrke

Seek mentors, follow them, observe, observe, and observe! Get training that is useful—not just some certificate that says you completed something (but still don't have the necessary skills). Ask for advice. Be sincere and go ahead and experiment. But tell the truth to people about how much you really know. Don't fake it. People know fakes and it cheapens the field of training, game design, and learning from the heart. People respond to genuine care and passion when they see someone work from the heart and with skill.

Be present and fully engaged. Be aware of what is happening at all levels mentally, physically, socially, and emotionally within the group and between you and the group. Pay attention to your heart sense more than your head sense. Create a safe environment for learning to occur.

John Sleigh

Introduce them casually, as an integral part of the training. Don't advertise them in advance. Never say, later this afternoon we will see how this all comes together when we

participate in an activity.

Never lose sight of the learning outcome. You don't have to tell the participants what that outcome is supposed to be. In fact, it is usually better if you don't, but never lose sight of it yourself.

Always debrief. This is the opportunity to tie the experience to the concepts and principles. Don't assume that participants will get it automatically. Lead it out of them, don't pull it out.

Joshua Reid

Don't overdo it. If you are introducing games in a training program, start with a brief 5-minute activity. If this goes down well, try something a bit longer the next time. Learn to crawl before you can walk.

Larry Lipman

Be proficient, familiar, and an expert—in a select few. Know a few games really well, so that you can tweak them quickly and confidently to adjust to your group's changing needs. And the less props, the better (when the airline loses your luggage, and they will).

Leeva Chung

My first advice is to make sure you actually play the game. See what kind of reaction you get from the game, and then think about what you want your participants to learn. Does the game highlight the particular concept? Can you make the game longer or shorter? What are your constraints and how can you adjust the game to meet these constraints?

Next, be excited about playing games. There is nothing more deadly than a stone face and lack of interest in the game facilitator. What you project will come back tenfold. So if you appear to be enthusiastic, then your participants will pick up on the enthusiasm.

Les Lauber

Play-test the game before using it. If possible, play-test it with people who are like members of the target audience. Think about the accessibility of the game—is it accessible to individuals with sight, hearing, speech, or other impairments? Adapt the instructions to meet learning styles: provide written instructions for players who need to read something

for it to make sense, explain the directions for other players who process best when they listen, and demonstrate the game for players who learn best by mimicking others. Let the game take on a life of its own. Trust participants to get from the game what they need, not necessarily what you think they need. At the same time, don't let the game go too far. When people get too wrapped up in winning the game they may destroy relationships.

Lorraine Ukens

They should keep in mind that no matter how well they plan, things can and do go differently in each session because a lot depends on the particular group you have. If you recognize this fact up front, it helps take away some of the anxiety that can occur when the trainer lets participants take charge of their own learning.

Matthew Richter

Here are the keys for effective facilitation: Flexibility, a willingness to let go of the game for the sake of learning, trusting the participants to get it, the ability to really see what is happening, the ability to effectively debrief.

Patti Shank

Don't call them games because many adults think games are for children (wrong … but perception is important). Call them learning activities and use them in an authentic manner to simulate real-life situations that people might find themselves in. So, for instance, if you're teaching business ethics in an online course, an authentic activity might be building consensus around what should be done in a certain situation.

Roger Greenaway

Have a range of tools and techniques up your sleeve so that you can provide contrast, variety, and stimulation. Vary the pace. Use speed and search techniques to find areas to explore in greater depth and detail. Give participants suitable preparation time if you want something more considered than instant reactions. Be as open as you can about what you are asking people to do and why. And if you feel stuck, try to enlist the help of participants in getting things unstuck. Don't let games get in the way. At its best, free-flowing discussion is a brilliant debriefing technique. At its worst it gives debriefing a bad name.

Sonia Ribaux

When using games, trust that the spirit of play will be ignited in your participants. Deep down, everyone wants to play.

Remember that, as with everything else, to give your clients a solution that meets their needs. Focus on the results and use language that is appropriate to the client. If using "games" doesn't fit in your client's culture, then simply call it an "activity".

Stella Ting-Toomey

Memorize and internalize the objectives, the instructions, and the design of the game. Practice the game in a user-friendly environment first. However, you do not need to always spell out the objectives ahead of time. Sometimes, this approach spoils the fun of the game.

Steve Sugar

Test your game with a friendly group. This is a good reason to teach a credit course at a local university since students will endure almost anything in pursuit of a grade. Try simple versions of a longer game to understand how the game plays and how players react. Don't be afraid to fail: a less-than-successful game can be artfully debriefed into a more-than-meaningful learning experience. If necessary, call the game an "exercise" or "activity" to gain a greater base of support from both players and their managers. Start with simple fail-safe exercises and expand, as necessary.

Tatiana Kolovou

Prepare, prepare, prepare! Conducting the perfect game is a flow type of experience. For you to be one step ahead of your participants while still being fully engaged in the process of their learning, you need to know your objectives, the process, the instructions, the debrief questions, and the key learning points. Preparation is both mental and physical. If you have colleagues or friends to practice with, take advantage of the opportunity. Even if your practice audience is limited to the stuffed animals in your child's room, you still need to go through the process of preparation.

[Table of Contents]

Group Grope

ADULT LEARNING PREFERENCES
by Ida Shessel

ADULT LEARNING PREFERENCES is an application of a flexible small-group activity to enable players to express, explain, and exchange what they need, want, or like in a learning situation.

ADULT LEARNING PREFERENCES has two important outcomes:

- Players express, explain, and exchange a wide range of preferences about adult learning environments.

- Players work cooperatively and creatively in teams.

Time Requirement

About 40 minutes. You can easily expand or contract the game to suit the available time.

Materials
- Twenty or more index cards with different adult learning preferences. Here are some examples:

    o Fun and humor

    o Interaction

    o Hands-on practice

    o Good visual aids

- Four blank index cards for each player.

Flow of the Game

In the following description, the phases of the game are printed in regular type, while sample segments from an imaginary play of the game are printed in *italics*.

Preparing Initial Set of Cards. Before the workshop, prepare a set of response cards. Each card should contain one item that adults prefer in their learning environments. Come

up with a variety of things that adult learners want, need, and like. Prepare at least two response cards for each anticipated player. If you cannot make up that many responses, use duplicates.

Bob is conducting a workshop for a group of corporate trainers. Twenty participants have signed up for the workshop, including a few technical trainers.

The day before the workshop, Bob prepares 40 response cards.

Getting Started. Start the game quickly. When the players are ready, say to them: "I'd like to begin right off with a group activity that will help us get to know each other. It will also allow us to discover what preferences adults have about their learning environments. This activity should set the stage for the rest of the workshop."

Bob catches everyone's attention and gives his introductory presentation.

Players look like they are ready for action.

Card Writing by Players. Hand out four blank index cards to each player. Ask them to write down a different response to the same question on each card. The responses need not reflect the personal views of the writer. They should represent a wide range of views. Ask your question and give some sample responses.

The workshop starts at 8:30 a.m., and Susan arrives 5 minutes late. She sees the others writing busily. Bob gives her four blank cards and asks her to write alternative responses to the question, "What do you need, want, or like in a learning situation in order for it to be effective for you?" Susan thinks for a moment and comes up with the following:

- *Structure*

- *Well-organized materials*

- *Time for reflection*

- *Discussion*

Distributing Cards. After about 3 minutes, collect response cards from players. Secretly add your prepared cards to this pile. Mix the cards well and deal three cards to each

player. Ask the players to study the responses and arrange them according to their personal preference: from the most to the least preferred response.

Bob collects the cards from the players and adds his own collection. He mixes the cards and gives three to each player.

Susan studies the three cards she receives and arranges them in the following order:

- *Challenges*

- *Knowledgeable instructor*

- *Relevance*

Exchanging Cards. Arrange the remaining response cards on a large table at one side of the room. Tell the players that they may discard cards from their hands and pick up better replacements. Players must work silently; they should not to talk to each other during this phase of the game. At the end of this exchange, each player should have three cards that may or may not include cards from their original set.

Susan takes her cards to the table and rummages there. She discards two of her cards and picks up the following:

- *Practical*

- *Increases self-confidence*

Susan is surprised to see another player eagerly picking up her discards!

Swapping Cards. Instruct players to exchange cards with each other to make their hands better reflect their personal opinions. In this phase, any player may swap cards with any other player; every player must exchange at least one card.

When Bob announces the beginning of the exchange, Susan wanders around until Arthur stops her. Comparing cards, Susan sees one that says, "Intellectually stimulating". She bargains with Arthur until he exchanges this card for her card with "Challenges". Before Susan can find someone else to swap with, Bob calls time to end this phase of the game.

Forming Teams. Ask players to compare their cards with each other and to form teams

with people holding similar responses. There is no limit to the number of players who may team up together, but a team may keep no more than three cards. It must discard all other cards, and the three cards it keeps must that meet with everyone's approval.

Susan goes around the room checking with others. She runs across Betty, who has excellent cards, and they decide to team up. The two set out to find other kindred souls. Tony wants to join them, and they agree, provided that he drops the card that says, "Fun". In a few more minutes, their team recruits two other players, including Arthur. They study the combined collection and reduce it to these three:

- *Well-organized materials*

- *Credible instructor*

- *Intellectual stimulation*

Preparing a Poster. Ask each team to prepare a graphic poster that reflects its three final cards. This poster should not include any text. After 5 minutes, ask each team to read its three cards, display its poster, and explain the symbolism.

After some discussion and debate, the team decides that Susan should be the artist and the others give her ideas. The final collage shows a neat packet of handouts tied with a ribbon and a bow. Another panel shows the instructor standing tall with a halo around her head. The same panel shows a group of faces with frowns and smiles indicating intellectual stimulation

Present Awards. Identify winning teams in each of these categories:

- Internal consistency among the three final cards.

- Clarity of the message in the poster.

- Appropriateness of the illustrations.

Susan's poster did not receive an award, but Bob judged the team's three cards to be the runners-up for most consistent!

[Table of Contents]

Co-Design

Where's Your GROUP GROPE Game?

Ida Shessel's game, ADULT LEARNING PREFERENCES, was built on the GROUP GROPE framegame.

In the December 2005 issue of *PFP*, we presented a template for creating GROUP GROPE games. We also included GAMEGAME, a game about training games, that was built on this template.

In the November 2005 issue of *PFP*, we provided instructions for creating your own GROUP GROPE game. We also included a game on customer service (called TCF) built on the GROUP GROPE frame.

If you have a suitable topic, you can create a training game using the GROUP GROPE frame in about 10 minutes. Use the template, the instructions, and the samples listed above to do this.

When your game is ready, please share it with us. We will publish it in a future issue of *PFP* and make you famous.

[Table of Contents]

Cash Game

THE GREAT $10 GIVEAWAY

This cash game may cost as much as $20.27 each time you play. But the insights it provides are priceless.

Purpose

To explore how the lack of trust reduces payoffs for the team.

To identify factors that reduce trust among team members.

Participants

Minimum: 9
Maximum: 30
Best: 20

Only nine participants take an active role in the game. Other participants act as advisors or observers.

Time

10 - 15 minutes for play
15 - 30 minutes for debriefing

Supplies

9 envelopes
9 $10 bills
Coins and $1 and $5 bills for making change

Flow

Brief the participants. Announce that participants can make cash profits of up to $10 in the game you are going to conduct. Only 9 participants (called "investors") will play an active role in the game. Other participants may merely watch what is happening or act as advisors to the investors.

Distribute envelopes. Give one envelope to each of nine randomly-chosen participants located in different parts of the room. Explain that these participants with envelopes are investors.

Give instructions. Present these rules of the game (in your own words):

- Investors may not talk to each other either directly or indirectly (through other participants).

- Each investor should secretly place some money inside the envelope. The exact amount may vary from zero to one hundred dollars.

- Warning: The investment money will **not** be returned.

- The envelopes collected from the investors will be mixed up before being opened. So, nobody will know how much money each individual investor placed in her envelope.

- You will count the money and announce the total amount of investment.

- You will give $10 to each investor irrespective of the individual amount she invested—provided an important condition is met.

Explain the condition for receiving $10. Tell participants that each investor will receive $10 only if the total amount adds up to $69.73 or more. If the total is less than $69.73, the investment money will not be returned and nobody will receive $10. Continue your explanation by pointing out that you are not interested in individual amounts. Even if an investor returns an empty envelope, so long as the total amount is $69.73 or more, each investor will receive $10.

Pause for 3 minutes. Explain that you will be happy to make change for large denominations. Encourage investors to ask other participants for suggestions and advice. Announce a 3 minute time limit for giving you the envelopes with the investment money.

Collect the envelopes. After 3 minutes, collect the investment envelopes, give them to a couple of participants ("auditors") and ask them to take out the money from each envelope, note the amount on the face of the envelope, and calculate the total amount.

Begin debriefing. Explain that this activity involved trust among 11 investors. To emphasize the importance of trust and to reflect the reality that people don't exactly know what others are thinking, the game prohibited investors from talking to each other. Point out that the team as a whole could make a profit because the total payoff of $90 is greater than the total investment requirement of $69.73.

Ask a debriefing question. Encourage participants to discuss this question:

If you were an investor, what would you have done?

The ideal strategy would be to divide the total investment of $69.73 among the 9 investors. This comes to $7.75 (rounded off to the nearest cent) each.

Continue with more debriefing discussion. Ask these questions and encourage participants to provide alternative responses:

What do you think will be the total investment amount? Do you think it will exceed $69.73? What is the reason for your prediction?

Do you think someone will invest less than her fair share of $7.75? If so, what would be the reason behind it?

Do you think someone will invest more than her required share of $7.75? If so, what would be the reason behind it?

Announce the result. Ask the auditors for the total investment amount. If this is more than $69.73, give each investor a $10 bill. If the total investment amount is less than $69.73, keep the investment money. Explain that you will not return the money because the investors did not meet the minimum requirement.

Provide additional details. Ask the auditor to read the individual investment amounts (written earlier on the face of the envelopes). Ask participants for new insights related to the range of investments among the 11 participants.

Explore factors that contribute to increased trust. Point out that if there was a high level of trust among team members, the team as a whole would have made a profit. Ask and discuss these questions:

What do the different investment amounts indicate about the level of trust among the investors?

How does the possibility of personal gain influence trust among team members?

How does the investors' mathematical competency contribute to the level of trust?

Elicit key principles about trust. Follow up with probing questions to lead participants to "discover" these factors that may reduce the level of trust among team members:

- **Doubts about other people's motivation.** Some participants are not sure that others would want to chip in their fair share of investment money for the benefit of all team members. These participants think that personal greed will overcome

altruistic feelings.

- **Doubts about other people's competency.** Some participants are not sure about other participants' ability to compute their correct share of the investment amount.

- **Doubts about personal competency.** Some participants are not sure about their ability to compute the correct share.

- **Doubts about the system being able to deliver what it promised.** Some participants don't believe that the facilitator would really hand over 10 dollars.

- **Distrusting things that are "too good to be true."** Some participants don't believe that they can receive $10 without any effort on their part.

- **Distrust due to other people's distrust.** Some participants think that other participants will not trust them, so they decide to reciprocate this feeling.

Adjustments

Not enough participants? You can play this game with as few as two players by reducing the required minimum amount. For example, the minimum could be $15.73 for two players, $19.73 for three players, $29.73 for four players, and so on.

Don't want to keep the money? If the total investment does not meet the minimum requirement, use the money for mutual benefit (such as buying doughnuts for the group) or make a contribution to some charitable cause.

[Table of Contents]

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Pithy Saying

Just An Excuse

A game is just an excuse for the debriefing discussion.

Real learning occurs through the integration of an experiential activity and a debriefing discussion. This pithy saying focuses on the importance of debriefing to complete the

learning process.

You can facilitate a debriefing session after conducting any type of game. For example, I recently asked participants to play tic-tac-toe and conducted a debriefing discussion to reflect on the experience and to explore such topics as strategic planning and flexible implementation.

Not all games benefit from a debriefing session. If the training game focuses on factual information or mechanical procedures, conducting a debriefing discussion is a waste of time. On the other hand, if you are using a simulation game or a roleplay exercise to explore such elements as feelings, emotions, values, beliefs, and interpersonal interactions, then most of the real learning comes from the debriefing.

Here are three key situations in which debriefing helps us capture, consolidate, and reinforce learning insights from a game or an experiential activity.

When the connection between the game and its real-world analogue is not obvious. For example, in the simulation game BARNGA, participants learn to play a card game at different tables. Unknown to the players, the rules at each table are slightly different from the rules at the other tables. Later during the game, chaos and confusion result when players switch tables and continue to play. The card game inside BARNGA reflects routine human interactions. The rule differences reflect cultural differences. They ensure unanticipated culture shocks. These abstract connections are not obvious to the players until they are brought out during debriefing.

When the game is likely to arouse intense feelings and emotions. For example, in the game ME AND MY TEAM, participants feel paranoid during the last round when a hefty cash prize is secretly available to the team member who is willing to betray her team. The debriefing discussion helps participants to become aware of their feelings and relate them to similar situations in the workplace.

When the activity requires a total system view of multiple factors. For example, in the game QUALITY, quick decisions made by team members affect their scores on 18 different variables. The debriefing discussion after the game enables participants to discover relationships among different decisions and different results.

In these three situations, the game truly becomes an excuse for a reflective debriefing

discussion.