THIAGI GAMELETTER: June 2008

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

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Masthead

THIAGI GAMELETTER:

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

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Subscription Info

All registered subscribers receive *Thiagi GameLetter* 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 Thiagi'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 Thiagi, 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 The Thiagi Group, Inc. Please let us know if you need an invoice for financial record keeping.

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!

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Faster, Cheaper, Better

How We Designed a Training Program for Handling Angry Customers

A job aid provides just-in-time information to improve performance during the time someone is performing. Job aids reduce the need for memorizing and recalling information. A recipe in a cookbook and the telephone directory are examples of job aids. Other job aids include checklists, decision-tables, flowcharts, and worksheets.

Here's one of the strategies that we use for designing faster, cheaper, and better training:

> *Prepare a job aid that incorporates relevant principles and procedures related to performing a task. Then, train the people to use this job aid (instead of training them to perform the task).*

We recently had an opportunity to apply this strategy in designing a training program for call center operators. This program dealt with how to handle upset and angry customers.

Background Information

Our client was an insurance company. The employees (who worked in different departments including claims, accident reports, billing, and underwriting) had already received basic training on customer service. The new training program was designed to provide them with knowledge and skills related to working with angry and upset customers.

Preparing the Job Aid

We began our design by creating a checklist on how to empathetically deal with angry and upset customers. Instead of interviewing subject-matter experts to design the job aid, we used a rapid prototyping approach. We created a crude draft of the job aid using what we already knew. Then we invited a few SMEs to review the prototype and improve it by adding more items, deleting unnecessary items, and modifying any item to make it clearer.

The current version of the checklist (which is called *Empathy Engagement Checklist*) is divided into four steps, each containing several guidelines:

- **Step 1. Get Ready.** Get into the right attitude, mindset, and plan of action. Enjoy serving others. Acknowledge the customer's feelings. Keep an open mind. Feel confident. Choose your mood. Don't take customer's anger personally. Stand by the customer's side. Make use of positive self-talk.

- **Step 2. Handle Emotional Aspects.** Begin with a friendly greeting. Listen patiently. Don't become defensive. Reassure the customer. Appreciate the customer. Check for understanding. Acknowledge customer's feelings. Apologize for mistakes. Use "We" statements. Use "Yes, and…" statements. Refocus on business aspects.
- **Step 3. Handle Business Aspects.** Act in an accountable and empowered fashion. Work in a collaborative problem-solving mode. Specify customer's problem. Get information. Give information. Suggest alternatives. Agree on a course of action. Conclude the conversation on a reassuring note. Follow up quickly.
- **Step 4. Reflect and Learn.** Learn from the experience. Process your feelings. Incorporate positive behaviors. Avoid negative behaviors. Identify your hot buttons. Accept complaints as gifts. Identify one change to be implemented.

Playing with the Job Aid

Working with a group of typical participants, we created learning activities that required and rewarded people for interacting with the steps in the checklist and becoming more familiar with the guidelines.

Here's a brief overview of these activities:

Steps	Activities
Step 1	SUPERLATIVES. Participants review the guidelines related to the first step and compare and contrast them from different points of view.
Steps 2 and 3	AUDIO ANALYSIS. Participants listen to an authentic audiotape recording of a conversation between an employee and an angry customer. They identify the guidelines that are being implemented (or violated) at various pauses during the replay. RAPID ROLEPLAY. Participants increase their fluency in applying the guidelines from Steps 2 and 3 by participating in a series of fast-paced roleplay conversations.
Step 4	SUPERLATIVES. Participants repeat the earlier activity to review the guidelines from the final step.
All four steps	REFLECTIVE ROLEPLAY. Working in groups of three, participants analyze different scenarios of encounters with angry customers. Later they conduct roleplays and provide constructive feedback to each other.

Here are additional details of the four activities:

SUPERLATIVES

The first step and the last step in the *Empathy Engagement Checklist* are non-interactive in nature. In these steps, the employee works alone, planning before an encounter with an angry customer and reflecting after the encounter. Our learning activity requires participants to review the guidelines associated with each step and respond to these types of open-ended questions:

- Which guideline do you think is the most important one in this step?
- Which is the most unexpected guideline in this step?
- Which of the guidelines are you most comfortable with?
- Which of the guidelines are you most uncomfortable about?
- Which guideline is the most difficult one?
- Which guideline is likely to require the most time?

The facilitator asks these questions, one at a time, and participants work independently, think through the question, review the guidelines, and make their choices. After a suitable pause, the facilitator invites participants to discuss their choices with others at the table and come up with a consensus response. In this process, participants gain a deeper understanding of the guidelines related to the step.

AUDIO ANALYSIS

This activity explores the two interactive steps (*Step 2. Handle emotional aspects* and *Step 3. Handle business aspects*). It uses an inexpensive audiotape recording of a telephone conversation between an employee and an angry customer. During the activity, the facilitator plays this recording, pauses it from time to time, and asked these types of questions:

- What guideline is the employee engaged in?
- What is the effect of the employee's action on the customer?
- What do you think is going to happen next?
- What would be the natural inclination for the employee to do at this time?
- What do you think would be the effect of doing this?

As before, participants work independently to come up with their response to each question. Later, they discuss their choices with other participants at their table.

RAPID ROLEPLAYS

This activity increases the fluency with which participants apply the second and the third steps in the *Empathy Engagement Checklist*. As a result of a series of fast-paced roleplay interactions, participants master the mindset and skills associated with reacting to abusive statements with rapid, authentic, empathetic, and detached responses.

This activity involves two teams and takes place in three rounds. Each round consists of two parts:

- **Within teams.** Discussions and brainstorming among members of the same team
- **Across teams.** One-on-one roleplay conversations between members of different teams

Here are additional details of what happens during each round:

Round 1. Participants are divided into two teams. Members of each team conduct a different brainstorming activity.

- **Within teams.** One team generates a list of angry remarks, demands, and questions from upset customers. The other team comes up with guidelines for calmly and empathetically responding to abusive outbursts from angry customers.
- **Across teams.** Each participant pairs up with a member of the other team. The two people stand back-to-back (to simulate the lack of visual feedback during telephone conversations) and hold a fast-paced conversation, using the angry outbursts and calming responses they had brainstormed earlier. Once every minute, participants switch and pair up with a new member of the other team.

Round 2. Teams change their roles and repeat the earlier procedure.

- **Within teams.** Members of the team that previously worked on generating calm responses share the various abusive statements thrown at them during the earlier rounds of rapid roleplay. They build upon this experience and come up with an expanded set of abusive statements from angry customers. Members of the other team (that generated angry responses during the previous round) share the calm responses they had encountered earlier and build their own list.
- **Across teams.** As before, each participant pairs up with a member of the other team and holds fast-paced conversations, changing “partners” once every minute.

Round 3. Teams conduct a debriefing discussion and share their insights with members of the other team.

- **Within teams.** Members of each team share their experiences during the previous rounds of one-on-one roleplays and identify strategies for defusing angry customers.
- **Across teams.** Each participant pairs up with a member of the other team and collaboratively shares and discusses the empathetic strategies. Once every minute, participants change partners and discuss new ideas with new people.

REFLECTIVE ROLEPLAY

The previous activity provides participants with several opportunities for practicing the two interactive steps of the *Empathetic Engagement Checklist* and rapidly and appropriately reacting to abusive behaviors from angry customers. In contrast, this activity requires more integrated and mindful application of all four steps of the checklist.

The key component of REFLECTIVE ROLEPLAY is a collection of realistic scenarios that describe the situation in which a confrontation between an angry customer and an employee takes place. Based on interviews with experienced call center employees and supervisors, this collection includes a wide variety of incidents from different departments. During a training session, the facilitator selects three scenarios from this collection to suit the background and the needs of the specific group of participants.

Here are the details of how these scenarios (and the checklist) are incorporated in the roleplay activity.

Role Assignment. The facilitator organizes participants into groups of three and randomly distributes the roles of an angry customer, an employee, and an observer to each team member.

Preparation. The customer and the observer receive copies of a scenario; this scenario is not given to the employee to simulate being caught off guard. During the 3-minute preparation period,

- the customer reviews the scenario and decides how she want to play out her role.
- the employee reviews the guidelines for the first step in the checklist and gets ready to respond to unpredictable telephone calls from customers.
- the observer skims through the scenario to get a feel for what is going to happen. She also reviews the job aid.

Roleplay. The customer and the employee sit in their chairs back-to-back so that they cannot see the other person's facial expressions and body language. The customer initiates the roleplay which lasts for 3 minutes. The observer listens carefully to the conversation and takes notes about the employee's ability to respond to the emotional and business aspects, using the guidelines from the checklist to structure these notes.

Reflection. The facilitator stops the roleplay after 3 minutes, even if it is in the middle of the conversation. She then asks the employee to work through each of the guidelines in Step 4 (*Reflect and Learn*) of the checklist and reflect aloud on her performance and reactions—and what she learned. After 2 minutes of this talk-aloud reflection, the observer and the customer take turns to provide one positive comment and one constructive suggestion related to the employee's empathetic behavior.

Continuation. The facilitator conducts the same activity with two other scenarios so each member of the group gets an opportunity to play the role of the employee and practice all four steps of the job aid. As a final activity, the facilitator conducts an overall debriefing discussion inviting comments from all participants.

Recap

The foundation for this training design is the four-part Empathy Engagement Checklist with guidelines for getting ready to work with angry customers, having a telephone conversation to take care of their emotional needs, steering the conversation to handle the business needs, and reflecting and learning from the encounter. A series of activities are used to reward participants for interacting and mastering the checklist.

You can apply this design strategy to other interpersonal procedures that you want to teach.

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Checklist

Principles of Faster, Cheaper, and Better Training Design

We constantly keep playing with a set of empirical principles that enable us to produce effective training within tight deadlines and budgets. From time to time, we pause briefly to update our list. Here's our latest version:

1. **Align everything.** While designing a training package, repeatedly align content, activities, and assessment. Align all of these elements with real-world results.

2. **Be a grasshopper.** Avoid working in a linear fashion. Feel free to jump among modules, and

among content pieces, activities, and assessment pieces, in any order.

3. **Be authentic.** Use authentic assessment for your final test, authentic activities for practice exercises, and authentic examples for illustrating content.
4. **Be creative.** Treat the training design process as a creative problem-solving exercise. Use creative training approaches; require participants to come up with creative responses.
5. **Blend everything.** Blend content and activities; online and face-to-face; learning and performance; training and testing; motivation and instruction; and active and passive.
6. **Build the airplane while flying it.** Design training while delivering it.
7. **Change the role of participants.** Ask them to play the roles of trainers, coaches, and testers.
8. **Conduct just-in-time analyses.** Let analysis and design proceed simultaneously.
9. **Conduct on-the-spot revisions.** Include representative participants in the design team. Use the extreme design technique to test and modify your prototype materials while designing them.
10. **Create follow-up activities.** Plan, design, and implement follow-up coaching to ensure workplace applications. Establish communities of practice to encourage continuous learning.
11. **Don't reinvent the wheel.** Use suitable organizing structures and templates for presenting different types of content.
12. **Empower your trainers.** Specify the results you require, suggest suitable activities, and provide total freedom about how the results are achieved.
13. **Encourage contextualized learning.** Increase the effectiveness of learning and efficiency of transfer by creating a training environment that reflects the work situation as closely as possible.
14. **Encourage participants to create training content.** Use structured approaches to help them share their best practices and their collective wisdom.
15. **Encourage participants to generate questions.** Incorporate closed and open questions from participants in training activities.
16. **Improve the total performance system.** Use different types of human performance technology interventions to improve participants' learning performance and application of the

learned skills.

17. **Integrate content into activities.** Select suitable types of activities based on the types of content resources.

18. **Integrate job aids in your training.** Prepare a job aid that incorporates relevant principles and procedures related to performing a task. Then, train the people to use this job aid (instead of training them to perform the task).

19. **Less is more.** The solution to lack of mastery and application is not more content, but more practice. So don't fall into the trap of adding more and more content.

20. **Let the inmates run the asylum.** Empower participants to co-design the training package, generate training content, and conduct training activities.

21. **Make participants interact** with the content, with each other, with the facilitator, with subject-matter experts, and with the real world.

22. **Modularize design activities.** Use units of content, activities, or assessment to divide the training package into modules. During the design, feel free to jump from one module to another.

23. **Motivate the participants.** Treat the training design process as an exercise in designing an intrinsic motivational system. Use motivational principles to attract and maintain participants' attention and interest in mastering and applying new knowledge and skills.

24. **Move from live to recorded.** Translate spontaneous presentations into recorded materials. Gradually replace live presenters with recorded content.

25. **Open minds with open questions.** Require and reward higher-order thinking. Use alternative approaches for providing feedback for open-ended responses.

26. **Prevent the fat lady from singing.** Use the content generated (and the feedback received) from every session to continuously improve the training package.

27. **Record everything.** Use audio and video recording devices during design and delivery. Videotape expert demonstrations of complex skills. Use audio recordings of authentic customer calls.

28. **Reduce resistance.** Use change management principles to reduce or remove resistance toward activities-based learning on the part of clients, trainers, and participants.

29. **Respect differences in learning styles.** Use a variety of content sources and learning

activities that accommodates different learning styles and types of intelligence.

30. **Save activities, change content.** Use frames, shells, patterns, or templates to rapidly design learning activities.
31. **Shift the "Start" and "Finish" lines.** Make maximum use of pre-training activities. Cater for life-long learning through follow-up activities and networking.
32. **Take a playful approach.** Use playful and participatory approaches for analysis, design, and evaluation. Use playful and participatory learning activities during delivery.
33. **Telling ain't training.** Training activities contribute more to learning and application than to transmission of content.
34. **Train for real-world results.** Begin your training design with a focus on business outcomes and personal accomplishments.
35. **Transform trainers into designers.** Encourage them to apply local finish to the training package and to enhance the suggested activities. Use feedback from all trainers to improve the training package.
36. **Transform trainers into facilitators.** Encourage them to become agile and flexible learning guides.
37. **Treat training as a change initiative.** Incorporate change management principles and procedures.
38. **Use different content sources.** Make the maximum use of all existing content and available expertise.
39. **Use dynamic content.** Update the content with participant-generated material. To save on editing time, exchange freshly-generated participant content with materials from filtered archives.
40. **Use state-of-the-art computer technology.** Use word processors, spreadsheets, outliners, graphics packages, and presentation software. Use specialized software and online tools for test construction, flowcharting, and data collection. Incorporate blogs and podcasts in your training package.

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Brain-Pick Activity

Career Guidance

An essential skill for managers and supervisors is the ability to give realistic and effective career guidance for their people. Recently, we designed a learning activity to help new managers to coach employees on career planning. The activity used a brain-pick approach in which experienced managers (with a reputation for helping their employees plan their careers) share their wisdom with new managers.

Key Idea

Each team is armed with a different question related to effective career guidance. The team interviews four different experienced managers and collects practical guidelines. Later, teams share these guidelines with each other.

Purpose

To collect and implement practical guidelines for conducting effective career-planning conversations with employees.

Participants

Minimum: 4
Maximum: 40
Best: 16 to 24

Human Resources

Ask around the organization to identify experienced managers who have a reputation for providing effective career advice to their employees. Assemble a panel of four of these managers. Strive for as much diversity (in such areas as age, gender, educational qualification, and business area) among these experts as possible.

Time Requirement

Minimum: 45 minutes
Best: 90 minutes

Handouts

Instructions for Teams
Short biographies of the four expert managers

Supplies

- Sticky note pads
- Pens
- Flip chart pad
- Felt markers

Equipment

- Countdown timer
- Whistle

Room Setup

Set up a table for each team. Arrange enough chairs around the table for each team member, plus an additional chair for the expert-manager.

Flow

Collect questions. Come up with five key questions related to becoming a manager who gives effective career advice. You may choose suitable questions from the sample handout below. Alternatively, you can come up with these questions from reading books on career guidance, talking to participants, and talking to your expert-managers. List these questions as part of the instruction sheet for teams.

Organize teams. Divide the participants into four teams of two to seven members each. Make the teams equal in size, although it does not matter if some teams have one more member than others. Ask the teams to sit around their tables.

Distribute questions. Ask teams to review the list of questions and circle two of them. Identify the questions selected by teams and assign a different question for each team, preferably selecting the question from two that they selected.

Conduct the first round. Ask teams to read the instruction sheet and clarify any item if necessary. Emphasize the 5-minute time limit and the importance of focusing the interview on the specific question assigned to the team. Also distribute the biographies of the expert-managers. Announce the start of the first round. Send out an expert-manager to each team. Ask team members to begin interviewing the expert using the assigned question. Encourage them to take notes, focusing on the goal of coming up with five practical guidelines related to the question. Set the countdown timer for 5 minutes and start it.

Conduct additional rounds. At the end of 5 minutes, blow the whistle, announce the end of the round, and ask the expert-managers to move to the next team. Ask team members to begin interviewing the new experts about the same question. (The experts will field a new question from each new team.) Repeat the process until each team has interviewed all four experts.

Ask teams to prepare practical guidelines. At the end of the fourth round, ask team members to spend another 5 minutes to review their notes and come up with five practical guidelines related to the question assigned to them. Distribute pads of sticky notepaper and ask the teams to write each of the five guidelines legibly on a sticky notepaper.

Post the guidelines by topics. While the teams are writing their practical guidelines, tape four sheets of flip chart paper on different areas of the wall, each with a topical heading related to the four questions. At the end of 5 minutes, ask participants to stick their guidelines on the appropriate flipchart paper.

Conduct a gallery walk. Ask all participants to review the guidelines on all five flip chart sheets, noting down any items for immediate implementation. Invite the expert- managers to also participate in this review. Announce an appropriate time limit.

Conclude the session. Thank the expert-managers and the participants.

Follow up. Collect all the practical guidelines and type them up. Send them as an attachment to an email note to the participants (and the expert-managers). Also upload them to a web site where you can accumulate guidelines from future activities.

Adjustments

Depending on the number of participants and expert-managers, you can increase or decrease the number of teams.

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Handout1

Instructions to Teams

1. Your task is to interview a group of expert-managers (one at a time) and come up with a set of practical guidelines.

2. Your team will begin by circling any two questions from this list:

- How do I begin the career planning conversation with the employee?
- What are some practical suggestions that I should give the employee?
- How do I handle employees who have unclear or unrealistic ideas about their career?
- What resources are available for the employees to receive additional career information?
- How do I prevent employees from leaving their current job or leaving the company?
- How do I combine career planning with performance reviews?

3. Your facilitator will assign a specific question to your team (based on the selections from different teams). Focus on this question throughout the activity.
4. You will interview four different expert-managers (who have a reputation for providing excellent career-planning guidance), one at a time. Ask them the question assigned to your team. Follow up with probing questions and clarifying questions related to the same topic. You will have 5 minutes to interview each of these experts.
5. Take notes during the interviews. Remember that you are looking for practical guidelines related to the question assigned to your team.
6. After interviewing all four expert-managers, select five practical guidelines related to your question.
7. Write these guidelines on sticky notepaper, each guideline on a separate piece of paper.
8. Stick your guidelines on the flip chart paper with the appropriate heading.

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Jolt

FREE!

You will have to spend $35 to conduct this jolt. But the insight your participants gain from it is priceless.

Buy two gift certificates: One for $10 and another for $25. Make sure that these certificates will appeal to everyone in the audience. One approach is to buy gift certificates from a credit card company.

At the beginning of the session give everyone a card with this information:

> **Win a Fabulous Prize!**
>
> At the end of this session, I will randomly pick one of these cards. The person who filled out the card will win a prize of his or her own choice.
>
> Please write your name here: ____ .
>
> Please select one of these two gift certificates as your prize. (Note one prize is FREE! while the other prize costs some money.)

Item	Your cost
$10 Gift Certificate	FREE!
$25 Gift Certificate	$10

> Circle your choice.

Pause for a minute or so. Collect the cards and set them aside.

Here's a suggested script for what to say next. Of course, use your own words to convey these points.

> In his book, *Predictably Irrational*, Dan Ariely reports on experiments in which a significant majority of participants opted for the free gift certificate—even though they would make a bigger profit by choosing the other option. Ariely's point is that FREE! is a powerful concept that frequently makes people behave in an irrational (and predictable) fashion. As he explains in his book, the difference between two cents and one cent is small. But the difference between one cent and zero cents is huge.

Tell the group that you will not waste their time by analyzing the data from the cards. Instead, ask participants to raise their hand if they opted for the FREE! alternative. (Point out that this quick check of the data may be unreliable because some participants may be too embarrassed to confess their irrational choice.)

Proceed by randomly picking a card. Give the person the appropriate gift certificate (and collecting the $10, if appropriate).

Learning Point: Think before you rush to grab FREE! offers. Calculate the real cost and real benefits. Think carefully about alternative choices.

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Closer

Certificates and Advice

Here's a closing activity that combines awarding certificates and giving advice.

Key Idea

Each participant picks up someone else's certificate. She hands over the certificate—along with a piece of personal advice.

Index Tags

Closer. Advice. Ceremony. Certificates.

Purpose

To celebrate the completion of the training session and to provide a suitable piece of advice to a fellow participant

Participants

Minimum: 3
Maximum: Any number
Best: 10 - 30

Time

15 to 20 minutes

Handouts

A printed certificate for each participant

Supplies

Sticky note paper or index cards

Room Setup

Arrange a couple of tables in the front of the room. Place printed copies of certificates with the names of recipients clearly visible.

Flow

Explain the activity. Announce that you are replacing the traditional (and boring) certificate awards ceremony with a faster-paced and personalized activity. Explain that the certificates for all participants are placed on the front tables.

Pick a certificate. Ask each participant to quickly pick a certificate from the front table, making sure that it is for someone she knows (and not her own).

Prepare a piece of advice. Ask participants to return to their seats with the printed side of the certificate facing down. Distribute an index card or a sticky notepaper to each participant. Ask participants to think of the person whose certificate they have, recall her behavior before and during the training session, and come up with a suitable piece of advice that is related to the training topic. Invite participants to write this piece of advice on the index card or the piece of sticky notepaper.

Distribute the certificates and advice. When you blow the whistle, each participant should give the certificate to the appropriate person along with the personal piece of advice. At the beginning of this activity, some participants will have two certificates (their own and the one they have to give to someone else) while others will have no certificate (because they have given the certificate they picked up but not yet received their certificate). This situation will correct itself automatically. When participants have received their own certificate and given away the other one, ask them to move to the front of the room, holding their certificate aloft.

Give your final piece of advice. When all participants have moved to the front, give your final piece of advice that is related to a key principle explored during the training session. Also, thank all participants for collaboration and wish them well in their application activities.

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Presentation Skills

A Risky Presentation

Earlier in my life, I auditioned for the job of a contract trainer. The people who were interviewing me wanted me to do a 10-minute presentation on any topic of my choice.

I wanted to live dangerously. This is what I told the interviewers during my presentation:

> Folks, my topic is "Give away the control." Let me cut to the chase. Instead of my telling you what I want you to hear or what I think you want to hear, I am going to put you in the driver's seat. Just fire your questions at me. I will respond to them.
>
> You don't have to be polite. You can ask me rude questions, sarcastic questions, negative questions. Of course, you can also ask me nice questions and appreciative questions.
>
> You don't have to take turns. Several of you can shout out your questions at the same time. You can give me a third degree.
>
> I'm ready. Bring them on.

I responded to the questions nimbly, briefly, and to the point. I was not afraid because I was having too much fun.

After about 6 minutes, I took back the control:

> I know you have several more questions, but I am going to ignore them. Instead of answering them, I am going to answer the question that most of you are wondering about—but not asking: Why is he doing this?
>
> Because I believe that the most important topics are those in the listeners' mind.
>
> Because I think the most important skills for a presenter are agility, authenticity, and being in the moment.
>
> Because if I begin thinking and planning my presentation ahead of time, I stop feeling and being spontaneous.
>
> Because I believe in taking risks.
>
> Because people see the true me only when I trust my instincts.
>
> Because being resourceful is more important than having resources and electronic gadgets.
>
> Because it is all about you, not me.

I rattled off more reasons for my unplanned behavior.

They did not hire me, but I had a lot of fun.

Recently, one of my friends asked me for advice about a similar interview situation. I shared this experience with him. But I did not tell him about not getting the job.

I hope my friend gets the job.

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NASAGA 2008

NASAGA 2008 Conference Program Evolving Nicely

Don't miss the NASAGA 2008 conference in Indianapolis (October 15 - 18). Visit the conference website for more information.

Preconference Workshops

On October 15, 2008 you will have a choice of three preconference workshops:

- **Designing** Games, Activities, and Simulations
- **Facilitating** Games, Activities, and Simulations
- **E-Learning** Games, Activities, and Simulations

Keynotes

Each day of the regular conference (October 16 - 18) will begin with an important, inspiring, and intriguing keynote presentation from a thought leader in our field:

- **Scott Rigby**: Motivational Roadmap of Players
- **Pierre Corbeil**: Play Pride
- **Rosalyn Chan**: Art, Simulation, and the Work Environment

Conference Sessions

The conference will feature more than 30 concurrent sessions conducted by knowledgeable practitioners. You can read the descriptions of these sessions on the "Program Preview" section of NASAGA 2008 website. In the meantime, here's a peek at a few selected sessions:

Judee Blohm and Chuck Needlman: Readers' Theater: Bringing Unheard Voices to Courageous Conversations

Debi Bridle: Brilliant Ideas to Fuel the Imagination

Michelle Cummings: A Teachable Moment: Processing the Experience

Matt DeMarco: The Gift of Teamwork

Tim Gustafson: Why Won't They Let Me Use Techniques That Work?

Greg Koeser: Twist and Bond - Using twisting balloons for various games and modeling

Chuck Needlman and Judee Blohm: Nested Boxes Simulation

David Piltz: TOOLS: Tactile, Overt, Operational Learning Strategies

David Piltz: Facilitating Meaningful Insights

David Piltz: Controversy: Facilitating with EASE

Brian Remer: Briefly Stated: 99 Words that Teach

Brian Remer: The Board Game Body Shop

Nick Smith: Money for Old Rope?

John Steiner: Quick and It'll-Stick: Instructional Design (On The Fly)!

Tracy Tagliati: Facilitating Large Groups

Sivasailam Thiagarajan: Integrating Training Activities with Content

Stella Ting-Toomey and Leeva Chung: Culture Shock: How Much Shock Can You Take?

Marian H. Williams: Physical Webbing - Building Knowledge and Creating Understanding Through Mindmapping Structures

One More Time

Don't miss the NASAGA 2008 conference in Indianapolis (October 15 - 18). Visit the conference website for more information.

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Upcoming Workshops

Thiagi's Workshop in Switzerland

On the last day of this month—and continuing through the first two days of July—Thiagi will conduct his 3-day workshop, *How To Design and Use Games, Activities, and Simulations for Training Adults*. The workshop will be held near Zurich in Winterthur, Switzerland.

It's not too late to register (yet).

Interactive Training Strategies*: How To Design and Use Games, Activities, and Simulations for Training Adults*
Three days, June 30 - July 2, 2008

Workshop Description

Register online

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Learning Activities

Learning Activities Revisited - 4

Content and *activity* are the yin and yang of training. You need both of them to produce effective and engaging learning. Content without activity produces sterile knowledge. Activity without content results in futile effort. It is not enough if you have both content and activity. These two elements have to be carefully aligned and integrated.

These days, content is available in great abundance. Therefore, we have figured out that we can design effective training in a faster, cheaper, and better fashion by incorporating existing content in effective learning activities. In the February issue of *TGL*, I introduced this principle and provided an overview of different types of learning activities that can be used with different sources of existing content. Since then, I have created a new and improved version of this classification scheme in the form of a mind map that provides you a visual overview in a single page.

I discussed two or three learning activities in greater detail during each of the past three months. This month, I explore learning activities associated with three more "live" sources of content: informants, fellow learners, and participants who share a common experience.

8. Brain-Pick Activities

(Content Source: Informants)

This activity involves one or more "informants" who share a common background. Participants interact with these informants (and with each other) to learn specific knowledge and skills.

Sample Brain-Pick Activity: Picking Six Brains

The training objective for this brain-pick activity is to improve the participant's presentation skills.

1. Recruit a panel of six experienced presenters.
2. Organize participants into six teams. Assign a topic related to presentation skills (such as *the use of slides*, *storytelling*, or *appealing to emotions*) to each team.
3. Send a panel member to each team. Ask team members to interview this expert, limiting their questions to the assigned topic.
4. After a suitable pause rotate the panel members to the next team. Repeat the process so each team interviews six different panel members on the same topic. (Each panel member is interviewed on six different topics by six different teams.)
5. Ask each team to prepare a list of practical guidelines based on the interviews.
6. Ask each team to present their guidelines to the entire group.

9. Structured Sharing

(Content Source: Fellow Participants)

This activity facilitates mutual learning and teaching among participants. Typical structured sharing activities create a context for a dialogue among participants about their experiences, knowledge, and opinions. Structured sharing is particularly effective for sharing best practices.

Sample Structured Sharing Activity: Both Sides of Teamwork

The training objective for this structured sharing activity is to use teamwork in an appropriate and effective fashion.

1. Divide participants into three teams and assign these positions:
    - Highly *positive* attitude toward teamwork
    - Highly *negative* attitude toward teamwork
    - *Neutral* attitude toward teamwork
2. Ask the positive and negative teams to prepare lists of arguments in support of their positions while the neutral team prepares a two-column list of arguments on both sides.
3. Conduct a debate between the two opposing teams and ask the neutral team to decide which team presented the most persuasive arguments.
4. Correct any misconceptions revealed during the debate and provide objective information.

10. Debriefing Activities

(Content Source: Participants who share a common experience.)

Debriefing activities are used for encouraging reflection and dialogue about an earlier activity (such as *a roleplay*, *a simulation game*, or *a workplace crisis*). These games involve processing of the common experience to extract key learning points from it. They encourage participants to identify and express their emotions, recall events and decisions, share the lessons they learned, relate insights to other real-world events, speculate on how things could have been different, and plan for future action.

Sample Debriefing Activity: REACTION CHECK

The training objective for this debriefing activity is to explore different reactions to the sudden announcement of a merger between two corporations:

1. Assemble a group with equal number of employees from the two corporations.
2. Distribute a list of relevant reactions (such as *happy*, *tired*, or *depressed*). Include positive, negative, and neutral reactions.
3. Ask participants to think back on the announcement of the merger and circle three words that best describe their reaction.
4. Collect the lists of reactions (without looking at the circled items) from each participant and replace it with an unmarked copy.
5. Ask participants to make a prediction of the top three reactions selected by all the

participants in the room.

6. Identify and announce the top three reactions.

7. Conduct a discussion about the intensity, cause, and consequence of each of the top three types of reactions.

Coming Next Month

In the next issue of *TGL*, we will explore two other types of learning activities that incorporate graphic content and job aids.

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Brian's Words

Newsflash: *Brian Remer will be conducting the session* **Briefly Stated: 99 Words That Teach** *at the NASAGA 2008 conference. Don't miss it!*

Brian Remer is Creative Learning Director at The Firefly Group (brian@thefirefly.org). In addition to being a master of the 99-words format, Brian invents games and interactive strategies to expand learning and deepen insights. To find out more about him, read his Guest Gamer interview.

Dead or Alive
by Brian Remer

Dead or Alive

On a springtime walk in the woods I came upon an unusual sight. Where a grove of sugar maples had stood last summer, now there were only stumps. Though disappointed, I was curious to see that each stump was soaking wet and surrounded by a puddle of water even though it had not been raining.

Looking closer, I realized that this wasn't water. It was sap, the raw material of maple syrup! Loggers thought the tree was dead but the roots thought it was alive.

We are quick to make assumptions about what we cannot see.

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99 Words Tip

We continue exploring the broad concept of blended learning with some how-to suggestions presented in exactly 99 words.

Blend Both Ways

Blended learning refers to following up online learning with a classroom session to combine the advantages of two different approaches. Example: an elearning lesson deals with basic terminology, concepts, and steps of giving feedback. A follow-up classroom session reviews the content, answers questions, and includes roleplays to integrate the content, supply missing elements, and provide practice and feedback. We can also have blending combinations working in the other direction: Begin with classroom activities and follow up with online review, coaching, and discussion sessions. Another idea: Run an online simulation game with teams in a classroom setting.

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Check It Out

Thiagi on Faster, Cheaper, and Better Training Design

Gregg Williams is the Director of the Instructional System Design program at the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC). I am very impressed by the Masters Program because it uses an applied approach with many of the courses taught by practitioners. The students carry out real-world projects and built up an impressive portfolio as they learn.

Recently, Greg undertook a dangerous mission: He invited me to speak to the past, present, and future participants of the ISD program. Not only that, he video-recorded the entire interactive presentation.

In this video, I began by distributing a handout with a list of principles for producing faster, cheaper, and better training. (An updated version of this handout appears elsewhere in this issue.) After a brief pause, I “concluded” the presentation and launched into the question-and-answer session. By letting the inmates run the asylum, I managed to get my key points across—and also respond to some unanticipated questions from the participants.

You can watch the video at

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYqm8ao1i2c
(opens in a new window)

Alternatively you can go to youtube.com and type “UMBCtube +Thiagi” into the search box.

Warning: You may want to watch the video in more than one session. It lasts for 104 minutes!

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More Check It Out

All About Feedback (http://www.willatworklearning.com/2008/05/free-research-r.html)

Every time I read one of Will Thalheimer's reports, I feel that all my writing is fit only for the tabloids. Will does such a wonderful job of reviewing research from the world's preeminent scientific journals and synthesizing the findings into practical prescriptions that you and I can use.

Will's latest contribution to the training and performance consulting professions is a powerful analysis of research reports about how training designers should give feedback to learners. (The prescriptions can also be used by managers to give feedback to employees.) As Will puts it, “Recipes are for short-order cooks. Research-based wisdom for learning professionals is much more useful in the gritty day-to-day of our learning shops.”

Will used to sell his research reports and I think I have bought all of them. But now, instead of selling his two-part report (*Providing Learners with Feedback*), he is giving it away for free.

Before he changes his mind, go to the research summary on Will's blog,
http://www.willatworklearning.com/2008/05/free-research-r.html
(opens in a new window), read the condensed list of insights about feedback, and download the full 88-page report. Read the report and, as Will suggests, “send the link to everyone you know in your organization, in every learning-development organization you know, to your mom, your kids, your elected officials…”

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Single Item Survey

An Essential Tool

Nick Smith (a *TGL* reader from Dunoon, Argylle, Scotland) always travels with a piece of old rope because it is a versatile tool for group activities and debriefing sessions. (Nick will be presenting a NASAGA 2008 session to extol the virtues of a piece of rope as a facilitation device.)

I never leave home for a facilitation assignment without my countdown timer.

What is one essential part of your facilitator's toolkit?

Please let us know about your favorite facilitation device (along with an explanation of why it is your favorite).

To contribute your response, visit this survey page (opens in a new window). You may include your name along with your suggestion or keep it anonymous. You may send more than one response.

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