

THIAGI GAMELETTER: March 2009

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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Masthead

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

Board And Card Game

90 DAYS

You are a new manager.

Closer

KINESTHETIC EVALUATION

A whole body evaluation.

Guest Gamer

Interview with Michael Cardus

From high school to multi-generational teams.

Construction Game

BOTTLE TOWER by Michael Cardus

Build a tall tower.

Invitation

Thiagi's Summer Workshops in Switzerland

Five days near Zurich.

Feedback from Readers

Newsletter in Action

Report from a study group.

Announcement

Firefly News Flash

Introducing a new section.

Say It Quick

Better Decisions by Brian Remer

Our physical spaces influence our decisions.

Discoveries

A Matrix of Possibilities by Brian Remer

Serendipity, inspiration, and motivation.

Ideas

Fuel for Continuous Learning by Brian Remer

The law of empty spaces.

Activities

Space-Time Boundaries by Brian Remer

Think of time as space.

Single Item Survey

The First 90 Days by Tracy Tagliati

What situations impact a new manager?

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.

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However, to prevent us from becoming bankrupt, we have decided to adopt a Busker

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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!

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

Board And Card Game

90 DAYS

You have been promoted to a management position. How would you cope—and thrive—during your first 90 days on the new job?

Purpose

To generate a list of potential situations faced by a new manager and to examine their positive or negative impact.

Participants

Minimum: 3

Maximum: 6

Time

20 to 30 minutes

Supplies

- [Game Board](#) (15K PDF)
- Pearlized Pins with different colored heads (You can get these from arts and crafts shops or shops that sell quilting and sewing supplies. They are used as players' pieces that are moved along the game board. Make sure the pins have different colored heads so each player can see which pin is hers. You can use push pins instead of pearlized pins.)
- Sample Situation Cards (See the Preparation section below.)
- Blank Situation Cards
- Prepared Deck of Situation Cards

Preparation

Prepare sample cards. Prior to conducting the game, prepare four sample cards that specify types of situations that a new manager may face. Two of these situations should have a potential *positive* impact and the other two, *negative* impact.

Here are the samples that we used recently:

Your team has finished a project ahead of schedule and 10 percent under budget.

Your company is planning to outsource its data processing operations to India. One of your employees is from India.

Your Manager asks you to let two people go from your team. Everyone on your team is a good performer.

An executive stops you in the hall and drills into you for a project update.

Flow

Distribute sample cards. Give the four sample situation cards to the play group. Have the players read the items on the cards and discuss the potential positive or negative impact of the situation specified on each card.

Ask participants to write situation cards. Give several blank cards to each participant. Ask participants to write a situation on each card that may impact a new manager during her first 90 days on the new job. Encourage participants to write as many cards as possible, balancing between positive and negative situations. Announce a suitable time limit. Collect the cards from the participants at the end of this time.

Distribute play materials. Give a game board and a prepared deck of 40 situation cards to each play group. Give a pin (player's piece) with a different colored head to each participant. Explain that the situation cards are similar to the ones they wrote earlier. You are using a prepared deck to make sure that there are no duplicates and the situations are balanced between positive and negative items. (Explain that you will be reviewing and editing their cards, and using them in future games.)

Set up the game materials. Ask participants to set up the game board in the middle of the table and the players' pins in the middle of the board. Also ask them to shuffle the deck of situation cards and place them near the game board, with the printed side down.

Start the play of the game. Identify the player with the earliest date of birth (not the year). Ask this player to start the game. She will pick up the top card from the deck and read aloud the situation on the card. The player will then place the card on the middle of the table so everyone can read the item.

Ask players to discuss the card. All players talk about the situation on the card and decide whether it has a positive or a negative implication to the new manager. At the end of the discussion, players decide on a point value of 1 to 5 to represent the impact of the situation either on a positive or negative direction. The player who picked up the card participates in this discussion, trying to increase the point value (if the card contains a positive element) or to decrease the point value (if it contains a negative element). During this discussion, if the group does not reach consensus, any player may call for a vote. The majority of the players determine the point value.

Ask the player to move her pin on the game board. When players agree on the point value to be assigned to the card, the player who picked up the card moves his or her pin the appropriate number of spaces on the game board. If the card contains a positive situation, the play piece is moved up; for a negative situation, it is moved down.

Continue playing the game. The next player (seated to the left of the first player) uses

the same procedure during her turn. Play continues in this fashion until players have used up all the situation cards or a specified period of time is reached.

Review the current situation. Ask each player to identify the location of his or her pin on the board. This piece represents the progress of the manager. All players discuss the situations on the cards and how they enhanced or impeded the manager's progress. During the discussion, encourage players to brainstorm how they could have handled each situation more effectively.

Adjustments

Limited time? Skip the first phase in which players write situation cards. Proceed directly to play with the prepared set of cards. Also set up a brief period of play time.

Too many players? Conduct several games at different tables. (You will need a game board, a deck of situation cards, and players' pins for each table.) Alternatively, ask players to pair up (or organize themselves into teams of up to 5 players). Each pair (or team) works jointly and behaves like an individual player.

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

Closer

KINESTHETIC EVALUATION

This is my favorite closing activity for training sessions. I like this activity so much that I am probably overusing it. The main advantages of KINESTHETIC EVALUATION is that it can be conducted in less than 3 minutes and gets participants off their chairs. I have used the activity as a jolt to emphasize the learning point that it is not the activity but the meaning you assign to it that makes it important.

Purpose

To conclude a training session on an upbeat and playful note.

To explore how we assign meaning to an activity.

Participants

Any number

Time

2 minutes

Flow

Give the following instructions. Perform each action as you give the appropriate instruction.

Please stand up.

Close your eyes. Keep them closed tightly. Now open your eyes. Make sure your eyes are open for the rest of the activity.

Turn around completely 360 degrees so that you are facing the same direction you started with.

Raise your right hand and make a fist. Bring it down and touch the left side of your chest three times.

Please lower your hand.

Debriefing

Keep a poker face and explain the meaning of the activity in a serious tone:

In a few minutes, you will be filling out the standard smile sheet for evaluation purposes. I thought we should precede it with a whole-body evaluation activity.

Later, if anybody asks you about today's training session, you can truthfully say:

It brought me to my feet.

It opened my eyes.

It turned me around completely.

It touched my heart.

Ask participants if they learned anything else from the activity. Explain what you learned: It is not the activity, but the meaning that we attach to it, that makes it important.

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

Guest Gamer



Michael Cardus is the Founder of Create-Learning-Team Building (<http://create-learning.com/>), an experiential based training and development consulting organization, as well as a blogger for TeamBuildingWNY (<http://teambuildingwny.blogspot.com/>). Mike has a background in entomological science, team development, and leadership development. Mike's philosophy of training is that it ought to be purposeful, engaging, and interactive; making the learner the central resource for the training. This creates teams that have lower turnover rates, as well as increased rates of production and effectiveness.

Interview with Michael Cardus

TGL: *Michael, what would you say is your specialty area?*

Mike: I specialize in developing accountability and collaboration amongst multi-generational teams, as well as leadership development with team members who are new to leadership roles. By focusing of the similarities that generations have, teams begin to view the sameness as opposed to the differences we possess. When teams see sameness and value differences as points of strength, then information starts being shared and team accountability is accomplished. The end results of these processes are lower turnover and higher retention of the team members you wish to keep.

My passion for working with new leaders is that I see many organizations that promote highly skilled technical individuals to positions of leadership. Many of the same skills that the highly skilled team member possessed do not transfer well over to leading a team of people who are asked to be effective. This new position creates a fear cycle in the newly

promoted leader. Leaders that lead out of fear are like an anchor that impedes a team's effectiveness.

TGL: How did you get into designing and using games?

Mike: It began when I was in High School and was working for an environmental education organization called the Clearwater in Poughkeepsie, NY. There we taught educators and children about environmental science. Everything we did was hands-on and experiential. It was not until I was in my early twenties that I began to realize that the experiential initiatives I had been using could be a powerful vehicle to teach professionals and adult teams. Now I am insane about training and development using what I call "closed experiments" to deliver results to organizations. The transfer from experiential training to organizational development is what drives my passion.

TGL: Where do you use games in your work?

Mike: Everywhere! These are vehicles to deliver complex concepts. The ability to break down complex training models into simulations and experiential initiatives gives the team a concrete understanding of the content you are delivering. For example, attempting to explain to a team how to use an 8D problem-solving model can be a confusing and boring 3-hour PowerPoint lecture. Since I hate lectures, I have developed experiential initiatives to deliver the content. This makes all team members learn together at various paces. Following the initiatives the participants are asked to show mastery on the content. Instead of taking a multiple-choice test, the teams are given a problem and asked to apply the 8D Problem-Solving model. I use experiential games in board rooms, classrooms, universities, club houses, fire halls. They are part of my everyday communication.

TGL: How do your clients respond?

Mike: In the beginning, there is some hesitation. Most clients have tried *team building* before. Many companies claim to deliver "team building" when they are really just offering recreation that does not transfer to practical experience. The same clients who report that they were hesitant at first also report that they are extremely satisfied in the end.

TGL: What is the most horrible moment you had in conducting a game?

Mike: I was working with a team of 15 machinists, all men. They were forced to attend

team development sessions. The first workshop they all sat silently and stared at me. The second workshop they stormed at me. I sat on the "hot seat" for 45 minutes and let them unload about how this is a waste of time and that all of these team building games are [bleep] kindergarten [bleep] [bleep]. I went home that night and thought, "Do I really want to go back next week?!" I decided "Yes" because this is what I do in working with teams and facilitating them to find tools and skills to be more effective and productive. It took some time, but most of them came around and as a team we increased their department machine run time utilization by 3.5 percent and increased their pro-social communication between and within shifts.

TGL: What advice do you have to newcomers about interactive training?

Mike: Passion, passion, dedication, and knowledge. Realize that interactive training is an art; within an art you must have the foundation of theoretical knowledge. You must study and master the theory behind team development, experiential learning, games design, facilitation, and brain functions. Following the theory comes the practice of what you must do. Only when you have mastered the theory and the practice will you be an artist of experiential design and training.

TGL: What is your most favorite game?

Mike: FOCUS RING, from which I have developed a variation called [CORONA OF CONVERGENCE](#). This activity can be useful with many topics such as 360 feedback communication, emotional intelligence of teams, collaboration among departments, and completion of tasks.

TGL: Who are your favorite game designers?

Mike: Sam Sikes is my favorite. He is closely followed by Thiago, Tom Heck, Michelle Cummings, and Chris Cavert.

TGL: Do you have any book recommendations?

Mike: The first book that really opened my eyes to corporate facilitation and team building activities is Sam Sikes' book *Raptor*. I have used and adapted variations of much of Sam's work.

The More the Merrier by Sam Sikes, Faith Evans, and Chris Cavert is a must-have book for all team building facilitators. It is an excellent resource for the facilitation and design of large group activities. This book changed my career for the better. Now I can lead a group (and have led groups) of 500+ people with just myself and a microphone.

Until you read *The Leader Who is Hardly Known* by Steve Simpson, your knowledge of facilitation and leadership is not complete.

The Go-Giver by Bob Burg and John David Mann is another book in my list of recommendations. No other book speaks more eloquently about giving value to your clients. When I consult with camps and other facilities that wish to incorporate "corporate team building" into their existing business plan, I have them read this book. It has a profound effect upon how you view any group that you are serving as a facilitator.

TGL: What is your prediction about the future of games?

Mike: They will stop being called games and be recognized as just training. As a new generation enters the workforce, a new style of training will be needed and lusted after. Team members want to learn, want to lead, and want to be a part of the solution. What experiential games do is to show teams immediate and measurable results. When we recognize that teams and team members wish to feel relevant, experiential initiatives will be part of every trainer's tool kit.

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

Construction Game

BOTTLE TOWER by Michael Cardus



Purpose

To explore various aspects of teamwork, planning, and delegation.

Participants

10 to 30, divided into teams of 4 to 5 members

Supplies

- One piece of rope approximately 30 feet long for each team
- 10 or more water bottles for each team (Teams should have an equal number of water bottles.)

Flow

Brief the teams. Give the following instructions:

1. Each team is going to build a tall tower using water bottles and ropes. The team that builds the tallest tower will win the challenge.
2. The tower you build should only use the water bottles and the piece of rope. It must be standing on its own, without anyone touching or holding the bottles or the rope. You may do whatever you want with the rope. However, you may not cut it.
3. You have 5 minutes to plan what you want to do. During this planning period, you may touch the rope, but not the water bottles.

Start the tower building activity. After 5 minutes of planning, say "Go!" and ask the teams to begin their tower building activity. Announce a 10 minute time limit. Start a timer.

Conclude the activity. After 9 minutes have elapsed, give the teams a 1-minute warning. Conclude the activity at the end of 10 minutes.

Determine the winner. Identify the tallest free-standing tower. Lead a round of applause for the winning team.

Debriefing

Conduct a discussion by asking the following questions:

- Did you have a plan? Explain your plan (or the reason for not having a plan).
- How did you spend your planning time?
- What roles did each team member take during the planning period? During the building period?
- What problems did you encounter while planning and building your tower?
- What creative techniques did you try?
- How would you do this activity differently?
- What can we learn from this activity?

Facilitator Notes

The rope makes it possible to build tall towers. The activity does not work well without the rope.

The idea behind the planning time is to encourage the team to develop a system for thinking through and discussing a problem. Walk around while they are planning and pay attention to the conversations, actions, and behaviors.

I have found that the team that spends time actually planning and assigning roles and responsibilities to different team members usually builds the tallest tower.

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

Invitation

Thiagi's Summer Workshops in Switzerland

I would like to invite you to two public workshops that I am conducting in June 2009.

Last summer, I conducted a 3-day workshop on how to design and conduct training activities, games, and simulations in Switzerland. This is what participant Dimis Michaelides (Managing Director of Performa Consulting) said about the workshop:

During my first day in Thiagi's workshop I gathered ideas and material to substantially and immediately enrich two new business proposals I was preparing—and I remember laughing a lot.

The second day was when I really learnt how to drive my clients with content generated by themselves or outside sources that I did not need to master myself—and again I laughed a lot.

On the third day, I understood how I might let myself be driven by participants in my workshops—and there was yet more laughter.

Three months later, I find myself reflecting to further enrich what was my most engaging learning experience ever and, yes, I am still laughing!

Here are my plans for this year:

Workshop 1. Interactive Training Strategies

This three-day workshop practices what it preaches. It helps you design and conduct 24 different types of effective training games, simulations, and activities. Based on 30 years of field research, these design formats enable you to create training faster, cheaper, and better. You will receive a hefty collection of training games during the workshop and have access to hundreds of web pages with additional games, activities, and facilitation tips.

For more information, see [the brochure](#) (500k PDF)

[Register now](#) (opens in a new window). To get the registration form in English, click the

→ ENGLISH

link in the top right corner of the web page.

Or register by phone by calling Brenda at +1 812 332-1478 .

Workshop 2. Evidence-Based Positive Psychology Activities

In this two-day workshop, Thiagi offers an intriguing alternative to stress-reduction. The workshop explores principles and procedures from positive psychology about how to measure, increase, and sustain your happiness. You will also learn how to help other people be happier, improve their health, and enhance their productivity. This is not an inspirational touchy-feely seminar but a workshop that incorporates scientific evidence-based facts, concepts, and techniques.

For more information, see [the brochure](#) (500k PDF)

[Register now](#) (opens in a new window). To get the registration form in English, click the
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Or register by phone by calling Brenda at +1 812 332-1478 .

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

Feedback from Readers

Newsletter in Action

My friend William Hall is a talented improv actor who runs an innovative business theater (<http://fratellibologna.com/>) . He recently sent me an email note about the February issue of TGL. Here's an excerpt:

Last night Rich Cox and I hosted a *Thiagi GameLetter* study group. It was small but powerful. We had a great time.

We all agreed that the Graphics Game ([VALUES COMPASS by Gareth Kingston](#)) sounded, well...how do I put this, not great? Silly? Hard to sell to a room full of business people?

Given that, we had to try it. One hour and 15 minutes later, we all agreed that there was real value in the activity and agreed to give it a try as soon as possible. Wow! We used the values of improv for our values compass. And one of the values was "Try it".

We went on to explore the debrief activity of whispering to your partner. We sat in a circle and tried to take away the competitive aspects. It ignited a flurry of conversation and applications.

Maybe you should get a couple of friends and run a Game Night based on this issue of *TGL*.

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

Announcement

Firefly News Flash

Most *TGL* readers are familiar with Brian Remer's monthly 99-words column. Some readers may also be avid readers of his monthly online newsletter, [Firefly News Flash: Spark Your Passion for Continuous Learning](#).

Brian, Tracy, and I met in Atlanta to figure out how we can better add value to all our newsletter readers. Among other things, we decided to attach an issue of the *Firefly News Flash* to every issue of *TGL*. Each issue of Brian's newsletter contains four brief and crisp columns: *Say It Quick*, *Discoveries*, *Ideas*, and *Activities*. Read, enjoy, and apply the following four articles from Brian.

If you want more, go to Brian's web site (<http://www.thefirefly.org/>) . While you are there, be sure to sign up for his newsletter.

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

Say It Quick



Reprinted from the [December 2008 issue](#) of **Firefly News Flash** by permission of the author.

Better Decisions by Brian Remer

This 99-Word Story for December raises the question of how our physical space influences our decisions. In [Discoveries](#) you'll find a way to apply this concept to important group discussions while the [Activities](#) column offers an experiment for using your free time.

Better Decisions

Coffee cake, cookies, fruit salad, there was everything short of a full breakfast at the all-staff meeting. I'd planned to take only a muffin; I'd just eaten, after all. But the poor thing looked lonely on my clean, white plate so I added more food until it was loaded down.

I wasn't that hungry but it's easy to forget that, whatever space we have, we tend to fill—whether we need to or not. Maybe I should have taken a smaller plate!

Next time I'll surround myself with healthy, wise choices—and a plate I can handle.

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

Discoveries



Reprinted from the [December 2008 issue](#) of **Firefly News Flash** by permission of the author.

A Matrix of Possibilities by Brian Remer

	A	B	C	D	E
a					
b		bB	bC		
c		cB			
d					
e					

Just as every coin has two sides (and an edge!), we know that every issue has at least two ways of being viewed. Sometimes it's a challenge to identify all the nuances of meaning in an issue. To make things more complicated, we are usually holding a handful of coins!

This can make it difficult to sort out and compare all the aspects of all the concepts. That's where a Matrix Activity can be invaluable. Take each concept and make it the heading of a column on a grid. Then take the same headings and run them down the left side of the grid so they become the headings for each row. Point to a cell of the grid and it shows the interaction of a row and a column. Each concept can then be compared to every other concept—and itself. That's your matrix.

Master game inventor Sivasailam "[Thiagi](#)" Thiagarajan has devised dozens of activities using a square matrix game board to...

- Compare and contrast different concepts
- Discover the impact that increasing or decreasing one factor will have on the other factors
- Identify cause-effect connections among different activities
- Compare advantages and disadvantages of alternative solutions
- Explore diverse perceptions or points of view
- [And more...](#)

I often use a simple matrix to help people delve into a topic more deeply. Posting the empty spaces of a giant matrix at the front of the room, I invite people to speculate about how the various concepts are interrelated. As the group fills the cells with a statement or collage to express the relationships, a complete picture of the concepts and their impact emerges.

You can see how a public school invited teachers, students, and the community to participate in an on-going conversation about core values by clicking [here](#). For an interactive example of how a matrix activity can be used to surface critical issues for the orientation of new staff at a social services agency click [here](#).

Visit [Thiagi's site](#) for dozens of matrix games and find out how designing some empty space into your training can result in a more fulfilling learning experience!

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

Ideas



Reprinted from the [December 2008 issue](#) of **Firefly News Flash** by permission of the author.

Fuel for Continuous Learning by Brian Remer

When we built our house, the contractor asked if we planned to use the attic. My wife couldn't imagine what we would store there but for a few extra bucks, a trap door was installed to access the space. Today, that attic is crammed with clothing, luggage, holiday decorations, and childhood keepsakes!

It's almost a scientific law: if we create an empty space it will get filled! This is as true for my attic as it is for the virtual "space" of a meeting, coaching session, or workshop. Left alone, those empty spaces become a magnet for clutter and confusion. But with a bit of focused management, they can also spark creativity.

As mentioned in [Discoveries](#), leaving some open space can inspire important conversations. Another useful way to invite dialogue is the use of silence. When most North American teachers and facilitators ask a question, they wait an average of only three seconds before rephrasing their question or asking a different one. Imagine how the quality of thinking in the room would increase if they waited as few as six seconds before expecting a response! Even if a facilitator waits what feels like an uncomfortably long time, the Law of Empty Space will kick in. Someone will fill that silence with a brilliant insight that keeps the discussion in motion!

So make your own experiments with silence and then let us know ([email Brian](#)) how the

Law of Empty Space has worked for you.

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

Activities



Reprinted from the [December 2008 issue](#) of **Firefly News Flash** by permission of the author.

Space-Time Boundaries by Brian Remer

What if we thought of our time as a “space” to manage for our own creativity? Would it be a way to cut the clutter that culminates in stress? Here are a couple experiments you might try.

The office was closed for the day. Should I use that time to accomplish something just for me that I wouldn't ordinarily do? Or, should I use the time to finish off a half dozen work projects that had been lingering? Here was my solution: I set aside thirty minutes for each of my pending projects. At the end of a thirty minute period, I made a decision about whether to extend the time or move on to another project. By noon, I switched my focus and spent the afternoon doing that special thing for myself. As a result, I got more done on each project than if I had tried to complete just one of them. And, I had time for something enjoyable!

My friend, Anne, also had the day off—and the same dilemma. Her solution, however, was to turn her cell phone off. For the whole morning, she ran personal errands, worked on a sewing project for her new granddaughter, and had her car serviced. After lunch, she turned on her cell phone. With her life now in order, she felt refreshed and ready to reply to the three messages that she'd received.

Both Anne and I set some boundaries around our use of time and, in doing so, actually opened more space for its creative use. Please let us know ([email Brian](#)) how you have

managed your space-time boundaries.

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

Single Item Survey

The First 90 Days by Tracy Tagliati



Did you read the [90 DAYS](#) game featured in this issue of *TGL*?

The first 90 days as a manager can be full of surprises. Anticipating possible situations that may arise on the job allows you the time to prepare and make your best impression during these first critical 90 days.

Considering the set-up of the game, here's this month's single item survey:

Let's pretend that you are a new manager.

*What are some situations you might anticipate during the first 90 days on the job?
Please include both positive and negative examples.*

Here are some situations that our previous players came up with:

- The previous manager was well liked. The staff often comments how much they miss her and they are constantly comparing your management style to hers.
- Your boss has asked you to come up with a new mission statement for your department.
- Your manager has given you a few days to set up your workspace and get used to your new work environment.

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

anonymous. You may check out other people's responses by clicking the "Peer Answers" button before or after you send your response.

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

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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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!

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

Board And Card Game

90 DAYS

You have been promoted to a management position. How would you cope—and thrive—during your first 90 days on the new job?

Purpose

To generate a list of potential situations faced by a new manager and to examine their positive or negative impact.

Participants

Minimum: 3

Maximum: 6

Time

20 to 30 minutes

Supplies

- [Game Board](#) (15K PDF)
- Pearlized Pins with different colored heads (You can get these from arts and crafts shops or shops that sell quilting and sewing supplies. They are used as players' pieces that are moved along the game board. Make sure the pins have different colored heads so each player can see which pin is hers. You can use push pins instead of pearlized pins.)
- Sample Situation Cards (See the Preparation section below.)
- Blank Situation Cards
- Prepared Deck of Situation Cards

Preparation

Prepare sample cards. Prior to conducting the game, prepare four sample cards that specify types of situations that a new manager may face. Two of these situations should have a potential *positive* impact and the other two, *negative* impact.

Here are the samples that we used recently:

Your team has finished a project ahead of schedule and 10 percent under budget.

Your company is planning to outsource its data processing operations to India. One of your employees is from India.

Your Manager asks you to let two people go from your team. Everyone on your team is a good performer.

An executive stops you in the hall and drills into you for a project update.

Flow

Distribute sample cards. Give the four sample situation cards to the play group. Have the players read the items on the cards and discuss the potential positive or negative impact of the situation specified on each card.

Ask participants to write situation cards. Give several blank cards to each participant. Ask participants to write a situation on each card that may impact a new manager during her first 90 days on the new job. Encourage participants to write as many cards as possible, balancing between positive and negative situations. Announce a suitable time limit. Collect the cards from the participants at the end of this time.

Distribute play materials. Give a game board and a prepared deck of 40 situation cards to each play group. Give a pin (player's piece) with a different colored head to each participant. Explain that the situation cards are similar to the ones they wrote earlier. You are using a prepared deck to make sure that there are no duplicates and the situations are balanced between positive and negative items. (Explain that you will be reviewing and editing their cards, and using them in future games.)

Set up the game materials. Ask participants to set up the game board in the middle of the table and the players' pins in the middle of the board. Also ask them to shuffle the deck of situation cards and place them near the game board, with the printed side down.

Start the play of the game. Identify the player with the earliest date of birth (not the year). Ask this player to start the game. She will pick up the top card from the deck and read aloud the situation on the card. The player will then place the card on the middle of the table so everyone can read the item.

Ask players to discuss the card. All players talk about the situation on the card and decide whether it has a positive or a negative implication to the new manager. At the end of the discussion, players decide on a point value of 1 to 5 to represent the impact of the situation either on a positive or negative direction. The player who picked up the card participates in this discussion, trying to increase the point value (if the card contains a positive element) or to decrease the point value (if it contains a negative element). During this discussion, if the group does not reach consensus, any player may call for a vote. The majority of the players determine the point value.

Ask the player to move her pin on the game board. When players agree on the point value to be assigned to the card, the player who picked up the card moves his or her pin the appropriate number of spaces on the game board. If the card contains a positive situation, the play piece is moved up; for a negative situation, it is moved down.

Continue playing the game. The next player (seated to the left of the first player) uses

the same procedure during her turn. Play continues in this fashion until players have used up all the situation cards or a specified period of time is reached.

Review the current situation. Ask each player to identify the location of his or her pin on the board. This piece represents the progress of the manager. All players discuss the situations on the cards and how they enhanced or impeded the manager's progress. During the discussion, encourage players to brainstorm how they could have handled each situation more effectively.

Adjustments

Limited time? Skip the first phase in which players write situation cards. Proceed directly to play with the prepared set of cards. Also set up a brief period of play time.

Too many players? Conduct several games at different tables. (You will need a game board, a deck of situation cards, and players' pins for each table.) Alternatively, ask players to pair up (or organize themselves into teams of up to 5 players). Each pair (or team) works jointly and behaves like an individual player.

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

Closer

KINESTHETIC EVALUATION

This is my favorite closing activity for training sessions. I like this activity so much that I am probably overusing it. The main advantages of KINESTHETIC EVALUATION is that it can be conducted in less than 3 minutes and gets participants off their chairs. I have used the activity as a jolt to emphasize the learning point that it is not the activity but the meaning you assign to it that makes it important.

Purpose

To conclude a training session on an upbeat and playful note.

To explore how we assign meaning to an activity.

Participants

Any number

Time

2 minutes

Flow

Give the following instructions. Perform each action as you give the appropriate instruction.

Please stand up.

Close your eyes. Keep them closed tightly. Now open your eyes. Make sure your eyes are open for the rest of the activity.

Turn around completely 360 degrees so that you are facing the same direction you started with.

Raise your right hand and make a fist. Bring it down and touch the left side of your chest three times.

Please lower your hand.

Debriefing

Keep a poker face and explain the meaning of the activity in a serious tone:

In a few minutes, you will be filling out the standard smile sheet for evaluation purposes. I thought we should precede it with a whole-body evaluation activity.

Later, if anybody asks you about today's training session, you can truthfully say:

It brought me to my feet.

It opened my eyes.

It turned me around completely.

It touched my heart.

Ask participants if they learned anything else from the activity. Explain what you learned: It is not the activity, but the meaning that we attach to it, that makes it important.

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

Guest Gamer



Michael Cardus is the Founder of Create-Learning-Team Building (<http://create-learning.com/>), an experiential based training and development consulting organization, as well as a blogger for TeamBuildingWNY (<http://teambuildingwny.blogspot.com/>). Mike has a background in entomological science, team development, and leadership development. Mike's philosophy of training is that it ought to be purposeful, engaging, and interactive; making the learner the central resource for the training. This creates teams that have lower turnover rates, as well as increased rates of production and effectiveness.

Interview with Michael Cardus

TGL: Michael, what would you say is your specialty area?

Mike: I specialize in developing accountability and collaboration amongst multi-generational teams, as well as leadership development with team members who are new to leadership roles. By focusing on the similarities that generations have, teams begin to view the sameness as opposed to the differences we possess. When teams see sameness and value differences as points of strength, then information starts being shared and team accountability is accomplished. The end results of these processes are lower turnover and higher retention of the team members you wish to keep.

My passion for working with new leaders is that I see many organizations that promote highly skilled technical individuals to positions of leadership. Many of the same skills that the highly skilled team member possessed do not transfer well over to leading a team of people who are asked to be effective. This new position creates a fear cycle in the newly

promoted leader. Leaders that lead out of fear are like an anchor that impedes a team's effectiveness.

TGL: How did you get into designing and using games?

Mike: It began when I was in High School and was working for an environmental education organization called the Clearwater in Poughkeepsie, NY. There we taught educators and children about environmental science. Everything we did was hands-on and experiential. It was not until I was in my early twenties that I began to realize that the experiential initiatives I had been using could be a powerful vehicle to teach professionals and adult teams. Now I am insane about training and development using what I call "closed experiments" to deliver results to organizations. The transfer from experiential training to organizational development is what drives my passion.

TGL: Where do you use games in your work?

Mike: Everywhere! These are vehicles to deliver complex concepts. The ability to break down complex training models into simulations and experiential initiatives gives the team a concrete understanding of the content you are delivering. For example, attempting to explain to a team how to use an 8D problem-solving model can be a confusing and boring 3-hour PowerPoint lecture. Since I hate lectures, I have developed experiential initiatives to deliver the content. This makes all team members learn together at various paces. Following the initiatives the participants are asked to show mastery on the content. Instead of taking a multiple-choice test, the teams are given a problem and asked to apply the 8D Problem-Solving model. I use experiential games in board rooms, classrooms, universities, club houses, fire halls. They are part of my everyday communication.

TGL: How do your clients respond?

Mike: In the beginning, there is some hesitation. Most clients have tried *team building* before. Many companies claim to deliver "team building" when they are really just offering recreation that does not transfer to practical experience. The same clients who report that they were hesitant at first also report that they are extremely satisfied in the end.

TGL: What is the most horrible moment you had in conducting a game?

Mike: I was working with a team of 15 machinists, all men. They were forced to attend

team development sessions. The first workshop they all sat silently and stared at me. The second workshop they stormed at me. I sat on the "hot seat" for 45 minutes and let them unload about how this is a waste of time and that all of these team building games are [bleep] kindergarten [bleep] [bleep]. I went home that night and thought, "Do I really want to go back next week?!" I decided "Yes" because this is what I do in working with teams and facilitating them to find tools and skills to be more effective and productive. It took some time, but most of them came around and as a team we increased their department machine run time utilization by 3.5 percent and increased their pro-social communication between and within shifts.

TGL: What advice do you have to newcomers about interactive training?

Mike: Passion, passion, dedication, and knowledge. Realize that interactive training is an art; within an art you must have the foundation of theoretical knowledge. You must study and master the theory behind team development, experiential learning, games design, facilitation, and brain functions. Following the theory comes the practice of what you must do. Only when you have mastered the theory and the practice will you be an artist of experiential design and training.

TGL: What is your most favorite game?

Mike: FOCUS RING, from which I have developed a variation called CORONA OF CONVERGENCE. This activity can be useful with many topics such as 360 feedback communication, emotional intelligence of teams, collaboration among departments, and completion of tasks.

TGL: Who are your favorite game designers?

Mike: Sam Sikes is my favorite. He is closely followed by Thiagi, Tom Heck, Michelle Cummings, and Chris Cavert.

TGL: Do you have any book recommendations?

Mike: The first book that really opened my eyes to corporate facilitation and team building activities is Sam Sikes' book *Raptor*. I have used and adapted variations of much of Sam's work.

The More the Merrier by Sam Sikes, Faith Evans, and Chris Cavert is a must-have book for all team building facilitators. It is an excellent resource for the facilitation and design of large group activities. This book changed my career for the better. Now I can lead a group (and have led groups) of 500+ people with just myself and a microphone.

Until you read *The Leader Who is Hardly Known* by Steve Simpson, your knowledge of facilitation and leadership is not complete.

The Go-Giver by Bob Burg and John David Mann is another book in my list of recommendations. No other book speaks more eloquently about giving value to your clients. When I consult with camps and other facilities that wish to incorporate "corporate team building" into their existing business plan, I have them read this book. It has a profound effect upon how you view any group that you are serving as a facilitator.

TGL: What is your prediction about the future of games?

Mike: They will stop being called games and be recognized as just training. As a new generation enters the workforce, a new style of training will be needed and lusted after. Team members want to learn, want to lead, and want to be a part of the solution. What experiential games do is to show teams immediate and measurable results. When we recognize that teams and team members wish to feel relevant, experiential initiatives will be part of every trainer's tool kit.

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

Construction Game

BOTTLE TOWER by Michael Cardus



Purpose

To explore various aspects of teamwork, planning, and delegation.

Participants

10 to 30, divided into teams of 4 to 5 members

Supplies

- One piece of rope approximately 30 feet long for each team
- 10 or more water bottles for each team (Teams should have an equal number of water bottles.)

Flow

Brief the teams. Give the following instructions:

1. Each team is going to build a tall tower using water bottles and ropes. The team that builds the tallest tower will win the challenge.
2. The tower you build should only use the water bottles and the piece of rope. It must be standing on its own, without anyone touching or holding the bottles or the rope. You may do whatever you want with the rope. However, you may not cut it.
3. You have 5 minutes to plan what you want to do. During this planning period, you may touch the rope, but not the water bottles.

Start the tower building activity. After 5 minutes of planning, say "Go!" and ask the teams to begin their tower building activity. Announce a 10 minute time limit. Start a timer.

Conclude the activity. After 9 minutes have elapsed, give the teams a 1-minute warning. Conclude the activity at the end of 10 minutes.

Determine the winner. Identify the tallest free-standing tower. Lead a round of applause for the winning team.

Debriefing

Conduct a discussion by asking the following questions:

- Did you have a plan? Explain your plan (or the reason for not having a plan).
- How did you spend your planning time?
- What roles did each team member take during the planning period? During the building period?
- What problems did you encounter while planning and building your tower?
- What creative techniques did you try?
- How would you do this activity differently?
- What can we learn from this activity?

Facilitator Notes

The rope makes it possible to build tall towers. The activity does not work well without the rope.

The idea behind the planning time is to encourage the team to develop a system for thinking through and discussing a problem. Walk around while they are planning and pay attention to the conversations, actions, and behaviors.

I have found that the team that spends time actually planning and assigning roles and responsibilities to different team members usually builds the tallest tower.

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

Invitation

Thiagi's Summer Workshops in Switzerland

I would like to invite you to two public workshops that I am conducting in June 2009.

Last summer, I conducted a 3-day workshop on how to design and conduct training activities, games, and simulations in Switzerland. This is what participant Dimis Michaelides (Managing Director of Performa Consulting) said about the workshop:

During my first day in Thiagi's workshop I gathered ideas and material to substantially and immediately enrich two new business proposals I was preparing—and I remember laughing a lot.

The second day was when I really learnt how to drive my clients with content generated by themselves or outside sources that I did not need to master myself—and again I laughed a lot.

On the third day, I understood how I might let myself be driven by participants in my workshops—and there was yet more laughter.

Three months later, I find myself reflecting to further enrich what was my most engaging learning experience ever and, yes, I am still laughing!

Here are my plans for this year:

Workshop 1. Interactive Training Strategies

This three-day workshop practices what it preaches. It helps you design and conduct 24 different types of effective training games, simulations, and activities. Based on 30 years of field research, these design formats enable you to create training faster, cheaper, and better. You will receive a hefty collection of training games during the workshop and have access to hundreds of web pages with additional games, activities, and facilitation tips.

For more information, see [the brochure](#) (500k PDF)

[Register now](#) (opens in a new window). To get the registration form in English, click the

→ ENGLISH

link in the top right corner of the web page.

Or register by phone by calling Brenda at +1 812 332-1478 .

Workshop 2. Evidence-Based Positive Psychology Activities

In this two-day workshop, Thiagi offers an intriguing alternative to stress-reduction. The workshop explores principles and procedures from positive psychology about how to measure, increase, and sustain your happiness. You will also learn how to help other people be happier, improve their health, and enhance their productivity. This is not an inspirational touchy-feely seminar but a workshop that incorporates scientific evidence-based facts, concepts, and techniques.

For more information, see [the brochure](#) (500k PDF)

[Register now](#) (opens in a new window). To get the registration form in English, click the
→ ENGLISH link in the top right corner of the web page.

Or register by phone by calling Brenda at +1 812 332-1478 .

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

Feedback from Readers

Newsletter in Action

My friend William Hall is a talented improv actor who runs an innovative business theater (<http://fratellibologna.com/>) . He recently sent me an email note about the February issue of TGL. Here's an excerpt:

Last night Rich Cox and I hosted a *Thiagi GameLetter* study group. It was small but powerful. We had a great time.

We all agreed that the Graphics Game ([VALUES COMPASS by Gareth Kingston](#)) sounded, well...how do I put this, not great? Silly? Hard to sell to a room full of business people?

Given that, we had to try it. One hour and 15 minutes later, we all agreed that there was real value in the activity and agreed to give it a try as soon as possible. Wow! We used the values of improv for our values compass. And one of the values was "Try it".

We went on to explore the debrief activity of whispering to your partner. We sat in a circle and tried to take away the competitive aspects. It ignited a flurry of conversation and applications.

Maybe you should get a couple of friends and run a Game Night based on this issue of *TGL*.

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

Announcement

Firefly News Flash

Most *TGL* readers are familiar with Brian Remer's monthly 99-words column. Some readers may also be avid readers of his monthly online newsletter, [*Firefly News Flash: Spark Your Passion for Continuous Learning*](#).

Brian, Tracy, and I met in Atlanta to figure out how we can better add value to all our newsletter readers. Among other things, we decided to attach an issue of the *Firefly News Flash* to every issue of *TGL*. Each issue of Brian's newsletter contains four brief and crisp columns: *Say It Quick*, *Discoveries*, *Ideas*, and *Activities*. Read, enjoy, and apply the following four articles from Brian.

If you want more, go to Brian's web site (<http://www.thefirefly.org/>) . While you are there, be sure to sign up for his newsletter.

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

Say It Quick



Reprinted from the [*December 2008 issue*](#) of **Firefly News Flash** by permission of the author.

Better Decisions by Brian Remer

This 99-Word Story for December raises the question of how our physical space influences our decisions. In [Discoveries](#) you'll find a way to apply this concept to important group discussions while the [Activities](#) column offers an experiment for using your free time.

Better Decisions

Coffee cake, cookies, fruit salad, there was everything short of a full breakfast at the all-staff meeting. I'd planned to take only a muffin; I'd just eaten, after all. But the poor thing looked lonely on my clean, white plate so I added more food until it was loaded down.

I wasn't that hungry but it's easy to forget that, whatever space we have, we tend to fill—whether we need to or not. Maybe I should have taken a smaller plate!

Next time I'll surround myself with healthy, wise choices—and a plate I can handle.

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

Discoveries



Reprinted from the [December 2008 issue](#) of **Firefly News Flash** by permission of the author.

A Matrix of Possibilities by Brian Remer

	A	B	C	D	E
a					
b		bB	bC		
c		cB			
d					
e					

Just as every coin has two sides (and an edge!), we know that every issue has at least two ways of being viewed. Sometimes it's a challenge to identify all the nuances of meaning in an issue. To make things more complicated, we are usually holding a handful of coins!

This can make it difficult to sort out and compare all the aspects of all the concepts. That's where a Matrix Activity can be invaluable. Take each concept and make it the heading of a column on a grid. Then take the same headings and run them down the left side of the grid so they become the headings for each row. Point to a cell of the grid and it shows the interaction of a row and a column. Each concept can then be compared to every other concept—and itself. That's your matrix.

Master game inventor Sivasailam "[Thiagi](#)" Thiagarajan has devised dozens of activities using a square matrix game board to...

- Compare and contrast different concepts
- Discover the impact that increasing or decreasing one factor will have on the other factors
- Identify cause-effect connections among different activities
- Compare advantages and disadvantages of alternative solutions
- Explore diverse perceptions or points of view
- [And more...](#)

I often use a simple matrix to help people delve into a topic more deeply. Posting the empty spaces of a giant matrix at the front of the room, I invite people to speculate about how the various concepts are interrelated. As the group fills the cells with a statement or collage to express the relationships, a complete picture of the concepts and their impact emerges.

You can see how a public school invited teachers, students, and the community to participate in an on-going conversation about core values by clicking [here](#). For an interactive example of how a matrix activity can be used to surface critical issues for the orientation of new staff at a social services agency click [here](#).

Visit [Thiagi's site](#) for dozens of matrix games and find out how designing some empty space into your training can result in a more fulfilling learning experience!

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

Ideas



Reprinted from the [December 2008 issue](#) of **Firefly News Flash** by permission of the author.

Fuel for Continuous Learning by Brian Remer

When we built our house, the contractor asked if we planned to use the attic. My wife couldn't imagine what we would store there but for a few extra bucks, a trap door was installed to access the space. Today, that attic is crammed with clothing, luggage, holiday decorations, and childhood keepsakes!

It's almost a scientific law: if we create an empty space it will get filled! This is as true for my attic as it is for the virtual "space" of a meeting, coaching session, or workshop. Left alone, those empty spaces become a magnet for clutter and confusion. But with a bit of focused management, they can also spark creativity.

As mentioned in [Discoveries](#), leaving some open space can inspire important conversations. Another useful way to invite dialogue is the use of silence. When most North American teachers and facilitators ask a question, they wait an average of only three seconds before rephrasing their question or asking a different one. Imagine how the quality of thinking in the room would increase if they waited as few as six seconds before expecting a response! Even if a facilitator waits what feels like an uncomfortably long time, the Law of Empty Space will kick in. Someone will fill that silence with a brilliant insight that keeps the discussion in motion!

So make your own experiments with silence and then let us know ([email Brian](#)) how the

Law of Empty Space has worked for you.

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

Activities



Reprinted from the *December 2008 issue* of **Firefly News Flash** by permission of the author.

Space-Time Boundaries by Brian Remer

What if we thought of our time as a “space” to manage for our own creativity? Would it be a way to cut the clutter that culminates in stress? Here are a couple experiments you might try.

The office was closed for the day. Should I use that time to accomplish something just for me that I wouldn't ordinarily do? Or, should I use the time to finish off a half dozen work projects that had been lingering? Here was my solution: I set aside thirty minutes for each of my pending projects. At the end of a thirty minute period, I made a decision about whether to extend the time or move on to another project. By noon, I switched my focus and spent the afternoon doing that special thing for myself. As a result, I got more done on each project than if I had tried to complete just one of them. And, I had time for something enjoyable!

My friend, Anne, also had the day off—and the same dilemma. Her solution, however, was to turn her cell phone off. For the whole morning, she ran personal errands, worked on a sewing project for her new granddaughter, and had her car serviced. After lunch, she turned on her cell phone. With her life now in order, she felt refreshed and ready to reply to the three messages that she'd received.

Both Anne and I set some boundaries around our use of time and, in doing so, actually opened more space for its creative use. Please let us know ([email Brian](#)) how you have

managed your space-time boundaries.

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

Single Item Survey

The First 90 Days by Tracy Tagliati



Did you read the [90 DAYS](#) game featured in this issue of *TGL*?

The first 90 days as a manager can be full of surprises. Anticipating possible situations that may arise on the job allows you the time to prepare and make your best impression during these first critical 90 days.

Considering the set-up of the game, here's this month's single item survey:

Let's pretend that you are a new manager.

*What are some situations you might anticipate during the first 90 days on the job?
Please include both positive and negative examples.*

Here are some situations that our previous players came up with:

- The previous manager was well liked. The staff often comments how much they miss her and they are constantly comparing your management style to hers.
- Your boss has asked you to come up with a new mission statement for your department.
- Your manager has given you a few days to set up your workspace and get used to your new work environment.

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

anonymous. You may check out other people's responses by clicking the "Peer Answers" button before or after you send your response.

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