

PLAY FOR PERFORMANCE: July 2001

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

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PLAY FOR PERFORMANCE:

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

Mission

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

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Feedback Request

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

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Editorial

A Note From Thiagi

Here's the second issue of *Play for Performance*. Read, enjoy, and use!

Not too many people sent me feedback on the first issue, which is slightly depressing. But the nice people who responded "complained" about the size of the issue. So I decided to reduce the number of pages in this issue. However, I decided that each issue should contain certain regular features, including a tool-kit article, a featured game, a puzzle, and a contest.

Speaking of contests, the response to the June contest was underwhelming. Only two readers responded: Les Lauber from Topeka, Kansas and Lou Russell from Indianapolis, Indiana. You will see Les's creative modification of TIC TAC TOE in the next issue.

Les, our first contestant, believes that he can win every contest and accumulate enough gift certificates to buy out the company. Please don't let him do that. Enter this month's contest and all future contests. Because of the general apathy, you have a good chance of winning the \$50 gift certificate offered as the monthly prize.

Even if you don't enter the contest, you can still win a \$20 gift certificate. Send me an e-mail feedback note (thiagi@thiagi.com) about this issue or the previous issue. Let me know which items you like and which ones you don't. Let me know which games you used, what changes you made, and what results you got. Or just let me know about any typos you find so we can fix them for future readers. Send me your questions, comments, and sarcastic remarks. Every month, we will put the e-mail addresses from the feedback notes in a virtual hat and draw one of them at random. The sender of this e-mail note will

receive a \$20 certificate that can be used toward the purchase of any Workshops by Thiagi product.

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Commentary

How To Evaluate Training Activities

In my earlier life, I was a professional evaluator of instructional materials. In recent years, clients have frequently hired me to evaluate training games and simulations. Every day, I evaluate my own games and training activities. So I figure that I know a thing or two about instructional evaluation: how the principles and procedures related to the evaluation of training games are similar to other types of evaluation and how they are unique to this specialized area.

Here are some of my thoughts on the *why*, *what*, and *when* of evaluating training games (and other such activities).

Why? Proving and Improving Effectiveness

We do evaluation for providing information to assist decisionmaking. There are two types of decisions to be made and, therefore, two goals for evaluation of training games. The goal of one type of evaluation, called summative evaluation, is to *prove* the effectiveness of a game.

Summative questions that are usually asked by training managers and administrators include these types of *yes/no* items:

- Should I use this game to train my nurses on patient-oriented medical records?
- Do experts agree that this simulation faithfully reflects the reality of doing business with the Japanese?
- Does the cost of this computer game fall within our training budget allocations?
- What does the game do that other alternative training techniques cannot do?

The goal of the other type of evaluation, called formative evaluation, is to *improve* the effectiveness of a game. Formative questions that are usually asked by the game designers include such items as these:

- Employees don't like to fill out the inventory-control forms. Does this simulation game clearly reflect the importance of this activity without scaring off the players?
- Players who win in this simulation game perform miserably in real-life work situations. How can we tweak the game to ensure increased transfer from the game?
- The level of competition in this game is so high that players focus on winning the game without trying to learn anything. How can we tone down the intensity of competition to better balance interest in the game and its instructional effectiveness?
- When we conducted this game with a mixed group of Asian men and women, players did not participate with the level of enthusiasm exhibited by other groups. What adjustments do we have to make in order to ensure that the game is positively received by people from different cultures?

Of course, the same evaluation data may be used in both summative and formative decisionmaking.

What: Expert Opinion and Player Reaction

Evaluation data can be collected from the opinions of experts in the field based and from the actual play of the game by representative participants. Very often, a training game rated high on design sophistication by experts may be a flop with the players. On the other hand, a training game that excites players may actually teach inaccurate principles and inappropriate procedures. Obviously both player testing and expert reviews act as complementary sources of evaluation data and check and balance each other. Both types of evaluation are needed for formative and summative decisionmaking.

Different types of experts are qualified to pass judgment on the worth of an instructional game. A **subject-matter expert (SME)** helps us evaluate the appropriateness and adequacy of the instructional content through checking such items as:

- Are the objectives of this game related to the training objectives?

- Does winning the game reflect the attainment of the training objectives?
- Does the game accurately and adequately simulate the reality that it is supposed to reflect?
- Does the game present up-to-date and accurate information about the training topic?

A **game-design expert** provides valuable information on the playability and the potential interest level of a training game. This person focuses on the structure of the game and sequence of play and checks such items as these:

- Does the game have the best frame for dealing with this type of training content?
- Are the rules of the game fair and simple?
- Is the pace of the game appropriate?
- Are chance elements in the game appropriately controlled?
- Can the game be played without the need for special supplies and equipment?

A **target-population expert** is knowledgeable about the types of people who will be playing the game. This person evaluates the feasibility of using the game with potential players by exploring these types of questions:

- Will the potential players consider the game to be too frivolous?
- Is the pace of the game suitable for the attention span of typical players?
- Are the players familiar with the game materials (such as playing cards and dice)?
- Does the game require certain behaviors (such as cross-gender touching) that are incompatible with the cultural values of the players?
- Can the players afford the time and cost of the game?

While all these expert opinions are useful and important, the final proof of the effectiveness of the game depends on player behaviors and responses. The types of questions that are explored by observing players and interviewing them include the following:

- How do the players appear to enjoy the game?
- What skills do players acquire by playing the game? Do these skills transfer to their workplace situations?
- What attitude changes take place as a result of playing the game?
- What insights do the players sharing during the debriefing discussion after the play of the game?
- What complaints do the players have about the game?

Side Effects and Main Effects

Because training activities provide a powerful holistic learning experience, they present a special hazard: Participants in games, simulations, roleplays, and other such activities learn much more than what the designer intended for them to learn. Recently, for example, I play-tested a realistic simulation game that vividly portrayed the plight of a terminally-ill patient. It effectively helped participants (who were newly hired health-care providers) to empathize with the patient. This was one of the major training objectives. At the same time, participants reported a very strong feeling of futility and depression. Many of them began to seriously reconsider their career choice. This attitude change was definitely *not* a part of the training objectives. To remedy the situation, we toned down the intensity of simulation and added several optimistic questions to the debrief.

Unanticipated and undesirable consequences of participation in games present a major training challenge. Questions about such effects usually occur in the use of simulation games in soft-skill areas. As an evaluator, I have to be especially conscious of such side effects since players focus on winning the game. With their defenses down because of this distraction, they are especially susceptible to unintentional attitude changes.

A checklist for this area of evaluation includes the following types of items:

- Does the simulation simplify the variables to such an extent that the player gets a distorted picture of reality?
- Does the reduced risk in the game teach the player inappropriate behaviors that are likely to be punished by real-life consequences?

- Does the chance element in the game reduce the player's feelings of self determination?
- Does the high level of motivation reduce the player's tolerance toward less exciting training activities?
- Does the intense competition in the game create lasting feelings of hostility toward each other?

This stress on side effects does not negate the need for measuring the main effects of a game. In some game-design circles, it has become fashionable to be vague and evasive about the training objectives of the game under the rationalization that complex and affective outcomes are not easily measurable. The practice of criterion-referenced measurement—setting up behavioral goals and validly measuring their attainment—has been extended to complex cognitive and affective objectives. The use of performance tests and unobtrusive measures, many of them built into the game itself, enables the evaluator to measure primary outcomes such as these:

- What principles do the players master? How far are they able to generalize them?
- What is the probability of the players being able to apply newly-learned principles to real-life situations?
- What are the attitudinal objectives of the game? What behaviors during the game and after its conclusion indicate the achievement of these objectives?
- Do the questions used in the game require such higher-order thinking skills as predicting, problem solving, critical thinking, inductive reasoning, and strategic planning?
- How reliable is our measurement of main effects of playing the game? With what degree of confidence can we assert the attainment of various objectives?
- How does the game incorporate measures of attitudes and values in the debriefing discussion?

When: During Play and After

Another evaluation dimension is represented by the process-outcome distinction. *Process*

evaluation (also known as level 1 evaluation) concentrates on the play of the game and concerns itself with these types of questions:

- How long does the game last? How long do the players think it lasts?
- Which aspects of the game are too slow? Which aspects are too fast?
- Do players demonstrate increased skills as the game progresses?
- How do team members collaborate and consult among themselves?
- How does the players' attention level fluctuate during different stages of the game?

Outcome evaluation (also known as level 2, 3, and 4 evaluation) involves measuring and judging what happens after-and as a consequence of-the play of the game. Questions asked in this type of evaluation include the following:

- How does the players' attitudes toward the topic of the game affect their on-the-job performance?
- What are the unanticipated negative consequences of playing the game?
- What feelings and emotions predominate players' debriefing discussions? How are these feelings carried over to real life?
- What new principles do the players learn? How are these principles applied to the work place?

Both ... And ...

We explored four polarized dimensions related to the evaluation of training activities:

- Formative and summative evaluation
- Expert opinion and player reaction
- Main effect and side effect
- Process data and outcome result

The question is *not* which type of evaluation should we undertake: formative *or*

summative, expert *or* player, main *or* side effects, and process *or* outcome. As in the case of any polarity, it is always *both* formative *and* summative, *both* expert *and* player, *both* main *and* side effects, *and both* process *and* outcome.

When you are evaluating your own training game, don't forget to check out all of these dimensions.

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Tool Kit

*Trainers and consultants can use a variety of interactive, experiential strategies and techniques to improve human performance. In each issue of **Play for Performance**, the Tool Kit section explores a specific interactive tool and presents practical suggestions and field-tested examples.*

Debriefing Games

Debriefing Games are interactive strategies that are used for encouraging reflection and dialogue about an earlier activity or event. These games require processing of a common experience to extract key learning points from it. They generally encourage participants to identify and express emotions, recall events and decisions, share lessons learned, relate insights to other real-world events, speculate on how things could have been different, and plan for future action.

MOOD CHECK: a Sample Debriefing Game

The best way to understand how a debriefing game works is to participate in one. So get ready to participate vicariously in this game.

You are one of the 30 employees attending a discussion session today. You work for a pharmaceutical company that recently merged with another European company. You notice that about half of the participants are from the other company. You are still feeling somewhat sore about the suddenness of the merger and you don't know how to interact with the "others".

Lori, your facilitator, briefly welcomes all of you and asks everyone to spend a few minutes thinking back on the merger. This doesn't sound like an auspicious beginning, but you keep your mouth shut and let your mind wander. After a couple of minutes, Lori distributes a one-page handout that contains these 16 different adjectives: angry, betrayed, challenged, confused, cooperative, dynamic, enthusiastic, excited, expanding, global, growing, indifferent, optimistic, powerful, uncertain, and uninformed. She asks everyone to review these adjectives and circle the three that best describe your current feeling toward the merger. You scan the list and impulsively circle "betrayed" and "uninformed". It requires a few minutes of reflection before you grudgingly circle the word "global".

After a suitable pause, Lori collects the handout from everyone (without looking at the circles) and replaces it with an unmarked copy. She now asks you and the others to make a prediction of the top three adjectives selected by all the participants in the room by placing the numbers 1, 2, and 3 in front of the appropriate word. You figure out that most of your coworkers would have circled words similar to the ones that you circled, but you are not sure about the "others". Maybe they feel positive and excited about the whole deal. While you are pondering this dilemma, you notice that Lori is busy with the marked lists and a calculator.

After a couple of minutes, Lori checks to see that everyone has made a prediction. Because she wants to maintain confidentiality of participant responses, she explains that she would not ask anyone to publicly reveal which word that he or she selected. Instead, she goes through the list, one word at a time, specifying how many people circled that word. Lori builds up the suspense by pausing after reading the word and before announcing the number of people who circled it. "Betrayed" turns out to be the word with the highest number of circles—28! What surprises you is the fact that many of the "others" are obviously feeling the same way that you and your colleagues do.

Shortly after the announcing the results, Lori conducts a discussion about the causes of different negative feelings and how the new organization—and its individual employees—reduce these feelings and to replace them with other more positive ones.

Using Debriefing Games

Debriefing games have several benefits. We have repeatedly established the case for debriefing. While experience may be the best teacher, raw experience alone does not automatically guarantee that people learn from it. People learn from experience only when

they reflect on it, gain valuable insights, and share these insights with each other.

A major challenge in conducting a debriefing discussion is how to channel the energy and enthusiasm of the group so none of its valuable insights is lost in the chaos and confusion of everyone wanting to talk about everything at the same time. Debriefing games add control and order to the discussion without killing its spontaneity. These games prevent the few vociferous speakers from dominating the conversation with shallow thoughts.

Debriefing games have their limitations. For one thing, the time requirement is hard to predict because a lot depends on the chemistry among the participants. Therefore, these games are hard to schedule. Unless you and your participants are flexible, you may have not enough time to explore different avenues of discussion. Worse yet, the group may continue beating a dead horse in an attempt to fill the allotted time.

It is also important to realize that debriefing in general, and the debriefing game in particular, is not a license to practice amateur psychotherapy. As a facilitator, it is important that you seek additional professional help before attempting to conduct a debriefing game following a traumatic event.

Types of Debriefing Games

A convenient method for classifying debriefing games is to relate the purpose of the game to one or more of the phases in a debriefing model. Most of you are probably familiar with my debriefing model that contains these six phases:

- **How do you feel?** Invites participants to get strong feelings and emotions off their chest. Make it easier for them to objectively analyze the experience during the later phases.
- **What happened?** Collect data about what happened during the earlier experience. Encourage participants to compare and contrast individual recollections.
- **What did you learn?** Encourage the participants to generate and test different principles. Ask participants to come up with key learning points and discuss them.
- **How does this relate to the real world?** Discuss the relevance of the experiential activity to participants' real world experiences.

- **What if ... ?** Encourage participants to apply their insights to new contexts. Use alternative scenarios to speculate on how people's behaviors would change.
- **What next?** Ask participants to undertake action planning. Invite them to apply their insights from the experiential activity to the real world.

MOOD CHECK, the debriefing game described earlier, is an example that belongs to the first ("How do you feel?") phase. The next section contains examples of debriefing games related to other phases.

More Examples of Debriefing Games

GROUP GROPE. The debriefing version of this popular game is best suited for use in Phase 3 ("What did you learn?") of the debriefing model. Ask participants to reflect on their common experience and individually come up with four different answers to the question, "What did you learn from this experience?" Hand out four blank index cards to each participant for writing each answer on a different card. After a couple of minutes, collect the cards, mix them well, and redistribute four random cards to each participant. Instruct participants to review the responses on the cards and exchange cards with each other to make their sets better reflect their personal insights. Any participant may exchange any number of cards with any other participant; and every participant must exchange at least one card. Later, direct participants to compare their cards with each other and form teams with people with similar cards. There is no limit to the number of participants who may team up, but a team may keep no more than three cards from its combined collection. At the end of this process, ask each team to read the responses from the three cards selected by its members.

DEBATES. This game is designed for use with Phase 3 ("What did you learn?") of the debriefing model. It encourages participants to check general principles against data and logic. This game is an effective follow-up to the previous GROUP GROPE game. Prior to conducting the game, come up with a set of principles based on the lessons learned from the earlier experience. (Example: *People are excited about new ideas while they attend a conference but they implement very few of these ideas back in their workplace.*) At the beginning of the game, present each principle and briefly explain it. Divide participants into twice as many teams as there are principles. (Example: *If you have explained four principles, organize eight teams.*) Assign two teams to each principle. Between the two teams, identify one as the *supporter* and the other as the *attacker*. Give sufficient time for

each team to reflect on their previous common experience and other similar experiences, and come up with arguments to support or attack the principle assigned to it. Later, select a team at random and give it 2 minutes to present its case. Then, ask the opposing team to present its case. Repeat the process with other teams and other principles.

IFFY ENVELOPES. This version of the ENVELOPES game is best suited for Phase 5 (“What if ...?”) of the debriefing model. Before the game, prepare four or five what-if questions. (Example: *What if professional conferences were conducted on the Internet?*) Write each of these questions on the face of a blank envelope. Divide participants into teams of one to seven members. Distribute a different what-if envelope to each team. Ask its members to brainstorm suitable responses to the question and write them on an index card. At the end of the time limit, ask teams to put the index card inside the envelope and pass the envelope (with the index card inside) to the next team. Each team now reads the new what-if question and (without looking at the card inside the envelope) comes up with its own responses within the next 2 minutes. Repeat the procedure until each what if envelope contains three sets of responses. After the envelopes have been rotated one more time, ask each team to open the envelope and review the response cards. Instruct each team to identify the top three best responses (which may be in the same or different cards) and report them to the entire group.

RAPID SURVEY. This game can be used to collect information related to all phases of the debriefing model. Divide participants into six teams. Assign a question related to a different phase of the debriefing model to different teams. Ask the teams to assemble in convenient corners and spend 3 minutes designing a strategy for collecting responses from all participants (including its own members) to the team's question. After 3 minutes, announce the beginning of the survey period. Ask teams to collect responses to its question using the strategy designed earlier. After 3 minutes of data collection, ask teams to retire to their corners and analyze the data. Each team produces a summary of its results on a sheet of flip chart paper. Finally, conduct a show-and-tell period during which each team makes a 1-minute presentation of its findings.

What's Next?

Modify and use the debriefing games described above. Visit Roger Greenaway's brilliant web site, <http://www.reviewing.co.uk>, for more information and techniques related to debriefing (which Roger calls “reviewing”). Check out the tool-kit chapter on “Structured

Sharing" (from my book, *Interactive Experiential Training*) and the chapter on "Item Processing" (from my other book *More Interactive Strategies for Improving Performance*) for additional debriefing games. Read and use the featured game ([WHISPERS](#)) and the debriefing game ([THIRTY-FIVE](#)) in later sections of this issue of *Play for Performance*.

Life is full of learning moments. Use debriefing games to capture and exploit these lessons.

* * *

At the risk of sounding like a commercial, you can get more information about PDF versions of [Interactive Experiential Training](#) and [More Interactive Strategies for Improving Performance](#) from the "E-Books" page of [our online catalog](#). (We also sell printed and bound versions for \$10 more, plus shipping and handling charges.)

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Featured Game

WHISPERS

You can use WHISPERS as a follow-up activity to any interesting experience among a group of friends. It's my favorite game to informally debrief my colleagues at the airport or during the drive back home after a conference.

Purpose

To reflect on a common experience and share insights with each other.

Participants

3 - 7. You can divide larger number of participants into smaller groups and ask each group to play among its members.

Time

10 - 30 minutes, depending on the number of questions

Supplies

A prepared set of debriefing questions. (See the sample set at the end of this article that I use to debrief the experiences at a professional conference.)

Flow

Brief participants. Ask them to think back on the common experience they had earlier. Explain that you are going to ask a series of questions. Encourage participants to answer these questions truthfully—and to preserve the confidentiality of the answers.

Add additional details. Explain that each participant will try to guess the answers of another participant in the group. This is to encourage people to learn more about each other and to expand their points of view.

Encourage reflection. Request that each person to take time to think of the answer to each question—without blurting it out.

Ask the first question. Select the most appropriate question from the prepared list. Pause for participants to reflect on their earlier experience and come up with an answer.

Ask for predictions. Instruct each person to turn to the player on her *left* and whisper a prediction of the response from the player on the *right*.

Ask for responses. Tell participants in each group to take turns to give their personal response to the question.

Score the prediction. If a participant's response matches the prediction made by the person on her left, then ask the predictor to give herself a point.

Continue the game. Ask one question at a time. You may ask questions from the prepared list or ad-lib spontaneous questions that probe previous responses. During later rounds of the game, you may invite participants in each group to take turns coming up with their own questions.

Conclude the game. Stop the game when you have used up the allotted time. Thank participants for their cooperation. Invite them to continue asking themselves more questions about and answering their own questions.

Variations

Bored of predicting the same person's responses? Alternate between predicting the responses of the person on either side. In the middle of the game, ask participants to switch seats. Or forget the whole idea of making predictions.

Sample Set of Questions

Here are the types of questions that I use for debriefing participants at the conclusion of a professional conference:

1. What one word best describes your overall reaction to the conference?
2. What grade would you give to the conference?
3. What was the highlight of the conference for you?
4. Who had the most impact on you during the conference?
5. Approximately how many new ideas did you get at the conference?
6. What's one of the new things that you learned at this conference?
7. What major trend in our field did you notice during the conference?
8. What major criticism do you have about the keynote speech?
9. What was a popular theme among the different sessions at the conference?
10. On an average, how much time did you spend each day on networking activities?
11. What one idea do you plan to implement immediately in your workplace?
12. If you were to make a presentation next year, what topic would it be on?
13. What was the most *exciting* event during the conference?
14. What was the most *boring* event during the conference?
15. What advice do you have for someone who would be attending this conference next year for the first time?
16. What advice do you have for the presenters at this conference?

17. What advice do you have for the organizers of the conference?
18. How would you behave differently during next year's conference?
19. How would you behave differently at your workplace as a result of attending this conference?
20. What is one thing about the conference that you will tell your best friend?
21. What was your primary motivation for attending the conference?
22. What do you think was the primary motivation of most people who attended the conference?
23. What would help you to better implement new ideas from the conference at your workplace?
24. If you had to justify the cost of attending next year's conference to your boss, what would you tell her?
25. If you are not able to attend next year's conference, what one thing would you miss the most?
26. As a result of attending this conference, what one thing would you stop doing in your workplace?
27. What support do you need to apply the new principles that you learned at this conference?
28. If you were writing a news report about this conference, what would the headline say?
29. How does the cost of the conference compare to the benefits gained from it?
30. What was the most threatening message that you heard during the conference?
31. Which buzz word or phrase was used most frequently in the conference sessions?
32. If a six-year old asks you, "What did you learn at this conference?", what would you tell her?

33. With which person back in your workplace are you most likely to talk about the conference?
34. How long do you think it will take for you to implement the new ideas from the conference?
35. What did you do at the conference that you feel most positive about?
36. What did you do at the conference that you feel most negative about?
37. What is one key lesson that you are taking back with you?
38. How can your organization get the most benefit from sending you to the conference?
39. What are some of your unmet expectations at the conference?
40. What one thing that made you the most uncomfortable during the conference?

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Improv Games

THE WORLD'S WORST

Improv games are activities adapted from improvisational theater. In these activities, the actors do not use a script but create the dialogue and action as they perform.

I have been using improv games as an instructional tool for several years. One of my favorite improv games is "THE WORLD'S WORST" which involves participants acting out comical blunders of people in different professions. For a long time, I have used this game as a fun energizer. Recently I discovered a powerful instructional application. As a result, during the past couple of months, I have played more than a dozen specific versions of this game depicting the world's worst professionals in a variety of routine and emergency situations. My scenarios include the world's worst facilitator, trainer, safety inspector, help-line operator, story teller, change agent, workshop attendee, diversity trainer, and conflict mediators.

The power of this improv game as a training technique resides in the uncanny ability of the human brain to zoom in on a variety of mistakes in any field. Once we identify such mistakes, it is easy to figure out how to avoid them. This approach is equivalent to the powerful double-reversal technique in creative problem solving. The effectiveness of the approach is demonstrated in the titles of many best-selling books (example: *Women Who Love Too Much*) that focus on mistakes that people make.

Purpose

To identify effective behaviors associated with different on-the-job situations.

Time

15 - 20 minutes plus 10 - 30 minutes for debriefing

Participants

4 - 5 volunteers from a larger group

Supplies

A doormat or a piece of carpet placed in front of the room. This serves as the "platform".

Flow

Invite participants. Explain that you need a few willing volunteers for an improv theater activity. Point out that the activity will be a lot of fun.

Position the actors. Ask them to stand behind the platform, facing the audience.

Brief the actors. Identify an occupation that the actors are to portray. Explain that you will briefly describe a job situation. Any actor who is ready to portray the blundering behavior of a person in this situation should step on the platform and act it out. This portrayal should be brief and comical. Actors don't have to take turns, but whoever feels ready to step on the platform should do so. After all actors have portrayed this situation, you will call out another situation. Actors will repeat the same procedure. You will continue the game until you have explored a wide variety of situations.

Describe the first situation. Use a phrase or a short sentence. Remind the actors that anyone who wants to act out the behavior of the world's worst job holder in this situation

should step on the platform.

Model if necessary. After a reasonable time, if no actor steps on the platform, you do it. Demonstrate a suitable (but not too brilliant) portrayal. Then wait for the other actors to do their stuff. Applaud each portrayal.

Move on to the next situation. Describe this situation briefly. (I usually prepare a list of situations, but end up with spontaneous ideas.) Wait for the actors to do their portrayals. Take your turn, preferably somewhere in the middle of the sequence.

Continue the activity. Call out new and different situations. Try to cover a variety of normal and unusual situations. For a change of pace, invite audience members (and the actors) to suggest some situations.

Conclude the activity. Stop the drama when you feel that you have covered a sufficiently diverse set of situations. Thank the actors and lead a round of applause.

Debrief the activity. This critical component is what converts a fun activity into an instructional exercise. Ask participants to brainstorm a list of Dos and Don'ts based on the earlier portrayals. (Review the debrief game, THIRTY-FIVE for an effective strategy that can be used in this situation.)

Field Notes

Recently, we played THE WORLD'S WORST SALESPERSON with a group of financial-service professionals. Here are some of the situations and a couple of sample lines from the actors:

Greeting the customer

- Your name sounds Jewish. So what do you think of the Palestinian situation?
- Hey let's not waste time with small talk. How about signing this order form right now?

Analyzing customer's needs

- What do you want?

- You may not know this, but you sure need our Model 114-HB.

Describing your product

- This is the greatest thing since sliced bread. Forget the details. Let me tell you that this gizmo is going to change your life.
- Here's our 300-page reference manual. We are proud of this baby. Let me walk you through the book, one page at a time.

Customer yawns at the middle of your presentation

- I have the same effect on my husband.
- Want some Java? You need to focus on what I am saying because the good part is yet to come.

Customer interrupts with a question

- Don't ever do that again. You will make me forget my sales points. I'll take questions later.
- If you stop interrupting me, I'll get done faster. I'll tell you everything you want to know in the correct sequence.

Customer explains that she has another meeting scheduled in 5 minutes

- They can wait. This is more important.
- You better make time for this presentation. Otherwise, you'll be sorry.

Customer claims that the price is too high

- (Winking at the customer) Tell you what. You help me get this order and there will be something in it for you.
- Okay, let me give you a 60 percent discount. MasterCard or Visa?

Concluding your sales call (without an order)

- If you call me with an order within the next 30 minutes, I'll throw in a microwave egg poacher.
- I don't hold any grudges. But if you ever get downsized, don't call me.

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Debriefing Game

Using THIRTY-FIVE for Debriefing

You are probably familiar with this game as an item-processing activity. THIRTY-FIVE can also be used as an effective debriefing game.

In this version, participants reflect on an earlier experience and identify important lessons they learned. They write one of these lessons as a brief item. The winner in this activity is not the best player, but the best item.

The sample activity described below involves sales guidelines. It is used as a debriefing follow-up to THE WORLD'S WORST improv game described earlier.

Participants

Any number. The best activity involves 10-100.

Time

15-30 minutes

Materials

- Index cards
- Whistle

Flow

Brief participants. Recall an earlier experience. Ask each participant to write an item on an index card that captures an important lesson learned from this experience. Instruct

participants to keep the item short, specific, clear, and legible. Ask for an example to illustrate the item. Announce a suitable time limit.

After playing THE WORLD'S WORST SALESPERSON, I asked participants to think back on the humorous blunders portrayed by the actors. I asked them to write a short practical guideline for being an effective salesperson based on what they experienced in the game. I asked for someone to give me an example and one of the participants suggested, "Never imply a kickback or any such unethical tactic."

Let go. After 3 minutes, blow the whistle and give instructions for getting ready for the next steps. Ask each participant to review his or her idea and silently gloat about its elegance and power. Then, ask participants to emotionally detach themselves from their guideline and get ready to launch it into the world.

Switch items. Ask participants to their turn cards down to hide the item. When you blow the whistle, participants are to stand up, walk around, and exchange the cards with each other. Participants should not read the items on the cards they receive but should immediately exchange it with someone else. They should continue doing this until you blow the whistle again.

Find a partner. Blow the whistle to begin the exchange process. After about 20 seconds, blow the whistle again to stop the process. Ask participants to stop moving and to pair up with any other nearby participant.

Compare and score. Ask each pair of participants to review the two items on the two cards they have. They should distribute seven points between these two items (no fractions or negative numbers) to reflect their relative merit. Participants should write these numbers on the back of the cards.

Conduct the second round. After a suitable pause for scoring, blow the whistle again and ask participants to repeat the process of moving around and exchanging cards. When you blow the whistle again after 20 seconds or so, participants stop moving, find a partner, compare the two items on their cards, and distribute seven points. The new score points should be written below the previous ones.

Conduct three more rounds. Tell participants that you will be conducting three more rounds of the activity. Suggest to participants that they should maintain high levels of

objectivity by disregarding earlier numbers and by keeping a poker face when they have to comparatively evaluate the item they themselves wrote.

Count down to the winning items. At the end of the fifth round, ask participants to return to their seats with the card they currently have. Ask them to add the five score points and write the total. After a suitable pause, count down from 35. When a participant hears the total on the card, he or she should stand up and read the item on the card. Continue this process until you have identified the top 5-10 items.

Discuss the items. Briefly comment on the top items and invite participants to make their comments.

Follow up. Thank participants for generating the items and evaluating them. Tell them that you will type up a complete set of items and distribute them either through regular mail or e-mail. (Be sure to follow up on this promise!)

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Jolt

By the Numbers

Quick, look at these sets of three numbers:

3; 6; 7

14; 28; 29

5; 10; 11

2; 4; 5

Review these sets to discover the pattern among the three numbers in each set.

Now write (or say) a few more sets of three numbers that follow the same pattern.

This discovery activity is the basis for the following quick jolt. I frequently use this jolt as a

99-seconds demonstration of an interactive exercise.

(And before you read further, let me apologize to you. You are probably in for a rude awakening.)

Purpose

To explore causes and consequences of stereotyping.

Participants

Any number, "playing" in a parallel fashion

Time

5 - 10 minutes

FLOW

Brief the players. Tell them that you are going to present a few sets of three numbers. Ask them to listen carefully and discover the pattern among the three numbers in each set. Present the four sample sets listed above.

Invite participation. Most players will have a knowing grin and some may blurt out their explanation of the relationship among the numbers. However, ask everyone to listen carefully to your instructions. Tell them to supply you with test sets by yelling out three numbers. Ask the players to wait until you have said "Yes" or "No" to each test set before offering the next one.

Provide feedback. Players will give you test sets that fit this pattern: n , $2n$, $2n+1$ (any number, twice that number, one more than twice the original number). Listen to each set and say "Yes" to confirm that it follows the pattern.

Nag the players. After verifying a few test sets, ask the players how they are feeling. Comment on the smug look on most faces. Present the following information, in your own words:

Many of you are falling into the trap of hasty generalization. You found a formula that links the numbers. You immediately start proving your hypothesis by offering a test set that fits the formula. You feel happy when your test set

gets a "Yes". You offer more test sets of the same type and enjoy feeling smart and superior. You don't present a test set that doesn't fit the formula because if you get a "No" everyone will think that you are stupid. You yourself will feel stupid.

A true scientist, however, keeps an open mind. She attempts to disprove her hypothesis. So how about if you try some test sets designed to get a "No" from me.

Give feedback. Here's where the jolt comes: In spite of how it might appear, the pattern is simply *any three whole numbers in ascending order*. According to this formula, these test sets will receive "Yes":

7; 9; 10

19; 24; 25

10; 20; 2,000

8; 60,000; 7,000,000,000

And these test sets will receive "No":

5; 9; 9

12; 200; 9

98; 15; 3

Listen to new test sets and answer "Yes" or "No" according to whether they contain three whole numbers in ascending order.

Return to your nagging. Whenever someone's test set receives a "No", ask the person how she feels. Explain that most people feel depressed when their hypothesis is rejected. Actually, a "No" provides valuable information, sometimes more valuable than a "Yes".

Speed up the process. Explain that you are going to try out some more test sets yourself. Use crazy sets of numbers (such as "5; 78; 2,365,897") and give a resounding

“Yes” to each.

Explain the pattern. Ask players to tell you the formula or the pattern that you are using. Confirm the formula of any three whole numbers in ascending sequence.

Relate the experience to the process of stereotyping. Explain that this simple activity illustrates the human tendency to stereotype things, including people from other cultures.

Just because we meet a small sample of people from a different culture who share a few common characteristics, we assume that everyone in that culture will share the same characteristics. We strengthen this narrow opinion by selectively looking for the same characteristic among new members of the culture. We don't pay attention to other unique characteristics that would challenge our hypothesis. We may actually feel upset if someone does not conform to our stereotypical perception.

Encourage players to share real-world experiences. Ask for examples of being surprised by the unexpected behaviors of people from other cultures. Conclude the session by encouraging participants to try to disprove their own assumptions and hypotheses.

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Humor

Not John Doe

My name is *Sivasailam Thiagarajan*. People usually sympathize with me when they hear the name.

They don't realize the wonderful advantages of having this name.

I travel a lot by air, but nothing flies out of Bloomington, Indiana where I live. I have to drive for an hour to Indianapolis to catch my flight.

Last Monday, I left at 5 am to catch an early-morning flight to Chicago from where I was to catch another flight to Phoenix. I was under the impression that most policemen would

be having coffee and doughnuts at that time.

Wrong!

Half way between Bloomington and Indianapolis, just outside Martinsville, I was stopped by a friendly Indiana state trooper. He was obviously trained by an ASTD member because he had great passion for his job. With a glint in his eyes, he opened his ticket book and started tapping his pencil in anticipation.

I rolled down my window.

The trooper asked, "What's your name, sir?"

"Sivasailam Thiagarajan" I drawled out slowly.

The trooper closed his notebook and said, "Don't let me catch you again!"

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Networking

International Association of Facilitators

If you are serious about facilitation, join this professional organization immediately!

The IAF promotes, supports, and advances the art and practice of professional facilitation through methods exchange, professional growth, practical research, collegial networking, and support services.

Here's the cost: individual annual membership is \$125.

Here are the benefits:

- Access to the IAF website, including the special "Members Only" section which includes a webring for linking your webpage, a virtual library of more than 8,000 publications on facilitation and related subjects, proceedings from the past IAF conferences, and an on-line membership directory (updated monthly)

- Monthly e-letters
- Free referral network (in collaboration with 3M) called the *Facilitator Clearinghouse*
- IAF-sponsored GRP-FACL listserv on group facilitation: process expertise for group effectiveness
- Discounts for Facilitator Certification
- Copy of *Group Facilitation: A Research and Application Journal*

Annual Conference. I just returned from the IAF annual global conference *The Art and Mastery of Facilitation: Navigating the Future*. More than 1,100 facilitators from 30 countries gathered for international networking, professional development, information exchange, and fun. Next year's conference will be held in Fort Worth, TX during May 23-26, 2002. As an IAF member you get a discount at the conference.

Details. International Association of Facilitators, 7600 W 145th Street, Suite 202, St. Paul, MN 55124. Telephone: (952) 891-3541. Website: www.iaf-world.org. Email: office@iaf-world.org.

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Puzzle

Six Chunks, Three Words

Imagine these three-letter combinations are printed on six different tiles:

ACT

FAT

HER

NIH

NOI

WIT

Visualize the tiles. Move them around.

Here's the challenge: Can you rearrange these six tiles to spell three English words that can be found in any unabridged dictionary?

Each of the words will be six letters long.

[A hint](#)

[The solution](#)

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Contest

Every month, we challenge our readers with an exciting contest. The winner will receive a \$50 gift certificate toward the purchase of any book or game from Workshops by Thiagi, Inc.

The World's Worst

This contest is related to THE WORLD'S WORST SALESPERSON game described earlier.

Here's your challenge: Review the eight different situations (along with the actor's comments) listed in the Field Notes. Pretend that you are the world's worst salesperson working in area of financial services. Come up with a blundering statement for each of the eight situations: greeting the customer, analyzing customer's needs, describing your product, customer yawns in the middle of your presentation, customer interrupts with a question, customer explains that she has another meeting scheduled in 5 minutes, customer claims that the price is too high, and concluding your sales call (without an order).

If the judges decide that your statements are the stupidest and the most comical, you win the contest.

The Rules

- Judging criteria include humor and appeal to the readers of this newsletter.
- Mail your contest entry to Thiagi, 4423 East Trailridge Road, Bloomington, IN 47408-9633, or e-mail it with "Contest 107" on the subject line to thiagi@thiagi.com, or FAX it to 812/332-5701.
- Include your name and e-mail address with your entry.
- You may send more than one entry.
- We reserve the right to award no prize if we receive no entries of adequate quality.
- The decision of our judges is final.
- Results will be announced in a future issue of *PFP*. All entries become the property of *Play for Performance*. (Of course, you will get full credit.)
- Deadline for the contest is 11:59 PM EST, July 31, 2001. All items must be *received* by the deadline. (Keep this in mind if you send your entry by postal mail.)

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Hint

Hint

Try standing on your head!

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Pithy Advice

Gaming and Aging

***You don't stop playing games when you grow old.
You grow old when you stop playing.***

This piece of pithy advice is attributed to several different people, most frequently to Oliver Wendell Holmes.

If you follow this advice, you will grow up without growing old.

Prescription for preserving your youth: play a game every day.

Corollaries to this piece of advice: Play different games with different people. Play games with children-and with adults. When nobody's around, play a game on your computer.

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Solution

Solution

ACTION, FATHER, WITHIN.

We turned the tile with

NOI

around to spell

ION

and we did the same thing with

NIH

to spell

HIN

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