



### Introduction

The facilitators' role is to help participants gain the most from the learning opportunities provided. We have found that having some straightforward guidelines has helped us to do this more effectively. Our intention is to share these with you, in the knowledge that no one method is right and everything we do can be continually improved. We regularly see great practice that we copy and adapt. We hope that you will look at what we do, try it out and see if it produces good results for you. We would be delighted if you let us know. What changes did you make? What different ideas do you have and are willing to share them with us? Give us a call or drop us an email and hopefully we can all learn from each other.



### How to get the best learning from experiential activities

#### Before the Activity Starts – “Start at the End”

Be clear about what the group needs/ wants to learn from the situation and choose an appropriate task. For example, if you want to look at how a group can improve on their previous performance, does the task bear repeating or does it quickly become boring for the participants.

We have found that one activity can be used to draw out a variety of learning if the facilitator does their job well. If we approach the task with the end goal for the learners in mind we will be much more focused when we draw the learning together.



Some of the things you may wish to explore could include:

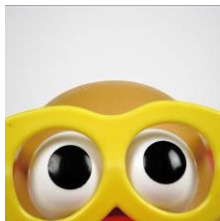
- Communication
- Problem solving
- Leadership
- Participation and teamwork
- Creativity
- Working under pressure
- Setting goals



Even within this list it is possible to seek greater clarity. For example which aspect of communication do we focus on? Is it listening skills, body language or how language impacts on individuals that is important? Once you are clear try not to become drawn in to other interesting things that may occur or a confused message may result.

Set the scene with the group. Let them know that you will be asking them questions about their participation and will look for and value their comments.

### **During the Activity – “Don’t miss a trick !”**



To do your role well you need to make sure that you observe as much as possible of the action. Are there things happening around you that will distract you from quality observation of the task?

We often keep a note pad to help us capture what we see as we have found that keeping a record of the words spoken and by who adds extra power to the feedback. Being able to say *“At this point, 8 minutes in to the task, you asked Gavin to get out of the way and shut up for a minute”* can really make the person involved think about the impact of their behaviour. A video camera or series of photographs can be useful but be wary of trying to do this if you are facilitating by yourself. You can miss the most important action whilst fiddling with cameras!

### **Try to be non judgemental –**

We all have favourites and research shows that we will notice the things that align with our prejudices or preferences and ignore those that don't. Experiential tasks often result in unexpected behaviours and performances and give all a chance to excel.

### **Success or Failure –**

If the group look like they may fail in the task will this be beneficial or should they be given more time and some assistance to ensure success? We usually chose a series of tasks with some easy wins to start. This allows the team to be self reflective about success. As they become more comfortable with the reflective process they are happier to discuss their own unsuccessful actions without becoming defensive or negative.

### **After the Activity – “The Debrief”**

On completion of the task we tell the group that we are going to look at what happened and analyse it. We make sure we tell them that we are not into character assassination. We are not there to single out poor individual performance but will look at the overall



group work. This helps put individuals at their ease and lets them contribute without the fear of being singled out negatively.

We explain that we like to look at two aspects of performance. What went well and how can we improve? We like this approach as it allows people to realise that it's not about strengths and weaknesses, good and bad, right or wrong but a continuum of performance. It also allows us to explain that we can do things very well and still see room for improvements. Many of the points raised may well feature under both headings. We use a flipchart and divide it into two with those headings at the top.

*A Typical Flipchart with group comments collected in a review:*

<b><u>What Went Well?</u></b>	<b><u>How Could We Improve?</u></b>
We worked well as a team.	We could have spent some time thinking about it before we started.
We all had a chance to speak.	We didn't ask many questions or challenge the rules.
Nobody laughed at any of the ideas.	We talked over one another and missed some good ideas.
We never gave up.	I ignored Isabel's idea and made her cross
We had a positive attitude.	We dropped the ball at the end because we thought we had finished and lost our concentration
We were very creative with our ideas.	
We listened to each other.	
We did it!	
Jacob told us to listen when we got noisy.	

We always start with "What Went Well?" and ask the group to answer this question. We make sure we exhaust this side of the discussion before we move to the 'improvements' side. We make sure we write exactly what they say not our own interpretation. It is important that they see us valuing their words. When people say things like "we worked well as a team", we always dig deeper. What did you do well as a team? We like to encourage everyone to think, not just about what they saw, but the impact of this on the group and to explore the feelings this roused in them.

Once the group start to offer good observations we like to link the comments to the working/ learning environment. We use questions like;



*“You said you had a positive attitude. What effect did that have and how do you think that links with what you do in school/work?”*

At this point we can start to discuss the point raised and it's implication for learning. It is often useful to have some examples, quotations or anecdotes to add the observations. For example – *“There is evidence to suggest that a positive mind set does indeed make success more likely. In videoed examples of tasks the individuals who believe the solution will not work actually subconsciously slow their performance. Do you think you do this in the classroom or with your homework?”* There are many web sites with snippets of research and theoretical models available on the net. You can find some links to such places on our website. We find the site [www.businessballs.com](http://www.businessballs.com) very useful for these and other additions.

Once the group has exhausted their input we will sometimes add observation of our own if the group has missed anything obvious or important, but we try to ensure that most of the information comes from them.

We like to ask groups to identify one or two things they have recognised on the improvement side of the chart, and ask them to focus on these during the next task or lesson. We then have a common language and understanding to work from.

