

TIP #15 – FEBRUARY 2007
LEADERSHIP HISTORY: SEARCHING THE PAST FOR INSIGHT
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EXERPTED FROM
PFEIFFER'S CLASSIC ACTIVIES FOR DEVELOPING LEADERS

Goals

- To increase participants' awareness of their leadership styles
- To compare and contrast individual leadership experiences within a group
- To allow participants to share their past learnings in a creative forum

Group Size

Ten to twenty participants

Time Required

Sixty to ninety minutes, depending on the number of participants sharing their leadership histories

Materials

- A copy of the Leadership History Survey for each participant
- Pens and paper for each participant
- Flip-chart page for each participant
- A variety of colored markers for each participant
- Masking tape

Physical Setting

A room with chairs and a surface on which participants can spread out and work on their drawings.

Process

1. Give all participants paper and pencils to take notes.
2. Announce the goals of the activity, briefly explaining that the leadership styles we currently exhibit come from experiences we have had with leaders in our past. Say that they will have an opportunity to reflect on those people who have influenced their leadership styles.
3. Give everyone a copy of the Leadership History Survey. Read the first question and have participants individually write their answers. Continue through the questions, reading them out loud to give participants time to reflect and write their answers. (Five to ten minutes)
4. Once the participants have all completed the Survey, tell them that they will now create a poster of their "Leadership History." Give everyone a sheet of flip chart paper and colored markers, and ask participants to create a drawing of their own leadership history, based on their answers to the Survey.
5. Tell them there is one very important rule for creating leadership history posters. They must not use any words, but only pictures. (Fifteen to twenty minutes)

6. Once all participants have completed their drawing, have them hang their posters on one of the walls of the room with masking tape.
7. Ask each participant, one at a time, to share his or her leadership history poster with the rest of the group, describing the events depicted. (Two minutes per person)
8. Once all participants have described their posters, debrief the activity by having the group compare and contrast the different experiences that were shared and their learnings. (Ten minutes)
9. Conclude with a discussion about the impact we have on others and their leadership styles. Encourage participants to think about the influence they have in their reporting relationships. Address the following questions:
 - What common leadership experiences did you notice?
 - What were some of the most significant events in people's leadership histories?
 - In what ways might we actively impact leadership within an organization?(Ten minutes)

Variation

Instead of participants drawing their Leadership Histories, they can use magazines and cut out pictures that represent the events of their past, then tape or glue them to a poster.

Leadership History Survey

Instructions: Answer each of the following questions in as much depth as possible. Wait for the facilitator to read each question rather than reading ahead.

1. Where were you born? What type of neighborhood was it (city, suburb, or country)?
2. How large was your family? Any brothers or sisters? Were you youngest, oldest, or in the middle?
3. What games did you enjoy playing as a child? Did you usually lead, follow, or do a little of both?
4. List your best friends as you grew up. What did you especially like about each of them?
5. Name an adult (a parent or other adult) you were close to as you grew up. What leadership qualities did this person exhibit?
6. Name a teacher who had a strong influence on you as you grew up. What did this person do that influenced you?
7. What was your first "real" job? What leadership learnings did you obtain from that job?
8. List all the jobs you have had in your career.
9. Who was your best boss? In what ways was this person a good leader?
10. Who was your worst boss? In what ways was this person a poor leader?
11. Identify mentors (formal or informal) who have influenced you. What changes have you made as a result of their influence?
12. What one significant piece of leadership advice would you give to others?

From Pfeiffer's Classic Activities for Developing Leaders, Jack Gordon, Editor, ©2003, Pfeiffer.