

The Serendipity Bowl

Gaining Insight About Oneself

Activity Summary

An activity that allows people to problem solve by a process of framing and personal reflection.

Goals

- To provide a new perspective from which to problem solve.
- To help participants reflect on how their own strengths and weaknesses can be brought to bear on a difficult issue.

Group Size

Any number between 10 and 50.

Time Required

Approximately 40 to 60 minutes, depending on the size of the group.

Materials

- A bowl filled with individual quotations or passages from famous sources. The quotes can be general inspirational quotes or, if the issues being addressed center around a specific topic (leadership, communication, conflict, etc.), the quotations can be about that topic.
- Paper and pencils for participants.

Physical Setting

Room arranged for small groups of 4 to 6.

Facilitating Risk Rating

Moderate.

Process

1. Give everyone paper and pens or pencils. Ask participants to think of things they are good at. Have them list a few of their strengths.
(3 minutes.)
2. Explain that a person's weaknesses are often their strengths taken to excess. Give a few examples, such as a person's gift for eloquent speaking sometimes crowding out the views of others. Ask participants what, when extended, makes their strengths work against them as weaknesses. Have them list a few of these weaknesses.
(3 minutes.)
3. Ask participants to think of work-related dilemmas, issues, problems, or paradoxes that they are currently facing. Have them write brief statements describing each of them.
(5 minutes.)
4. Explain that our strengths and weaknesses contribute both to the challenges we face and to our solutions to them. Ask the participants to frame questions that would help them gain more insight into how their strengths and weaknesses impact the issues they described in Step 3. An example might be, "How can I listen more deeply to the views of others and use my gift of eloquence in a more timely manner?"
(5 minutes.)
5. Pass the bowl of quotations around the room and have each participant pick one and read it silently. Ask them to reflect on whatever information, advice, or insight was on the slips they received and decide how it can help them answer the questions they framed in Step 4. Have them write any notes or observations that seem appropriate.
(5 to 10 minutes.)

6. In pairs or trios, ask participants to discuss their quotes and how they can use them to resolve their issues.
(15 to 20 minutes.)
7. If desired, responses can be processed in the whole group as well.
8. Close the activity by asking the participants to write one thing each that they can do differently to influence their problems in a positive manner.

Variation

- If the group is addressing a common issue, then the whole group should agree on the descriptive statement in Step 3. Take a few minutes to discuss this with the group and write the agreed-on statement on a flip chart or whiteboard where everyone can see it. Participants should still consider Steps 1, 2, 4, and 5 from their own individual perspectives. That is, they should consider how their individual strengths and weaknesses have affected the common issue and how they can help in its resolution.

Submitted by Steve Sphar.

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