

Section I

Training Topics

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Communication: The Most Vital Skill

As a consultant, I frequently tell my clients that if they all communicated perfectly, I wouldn't have any business. They chuckle, but they know the statement is very close to the truth. Everyone needs to improve communication with someone. Whether you are working with groups and teams or individuals, an opportunity to develop communication skills always exists.


As for my opening statement about perfect communication, I don't think I'm too far off. The late Peter Drucker often noted that more than 60 percent of all management problems are the result of faulty communication. I think if he were alive and intimately involved with the communication challenges facing our organizations today he would increase his estimate by a sizeable amount.

The number of books written about communication could fill a library, and still most of us would say that we are not as good at communicating as we could be, should be, or wish we were. There are many aspects of communication, and as trainers you need reliable maps in your console and as many tools as possible in your trunk to provide the support your learners need and desire.

The Communication chapter opens *The Book of Road-Tested Activities*. What better way to ignite your learners' engines than with one of the most critical learning skills every employee needs? The first activity, "Story, Song, Poem, Saying," helps participants understand one of the most basic, although little understood communication skills, behavioral style. Whether you call it communication style, personality characteristics, or behavioral style, Barbara Carnes presents an activity with a twist to help participants see that we demonstrate our style in everything we do.

Sharon Dera and Rodger Adair share ideas for helping your participants learn about how important perceptions are in the communication process from a visual and an audio perspective. Paul Signorelli gives us an activity that he saw in a small Italian village one warm summer evening. The activity demonstrates the value of inclusive conversations. The last activity in this chapter is short and powerful. Curtis Curry describes a simple way to demonstrate the importance of a win-win attitude.

Trainers are called upon more to help learners communicate than to practice any other skill. Try some of these road-tested activities. You won't be disappointed.



Story, Song, Poem, Saying

Submitted by Barbara Carnes

Overview

Participants identify their own personality styles and characteristics using a standard scale such as DiSC or Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) before moving to a designated area of the training room set aside for that particular style or characteristic. The participants gathered in each designated area work together to construct and share or perform a story, song, poem, or saying that clearly describes the group's style or personality traits.

Objectives

- To demonstrate behavior style characteristics as defined in tools such as MBTI, DiSC, or other personality type assessments
- To energize participants by moving around the room

Audience

This activity works well with groups of ten up to one hundred or more. Managing extremely large groups can be a bit challenging, but it is still effective.

Time Estimate

15 to 30 minutes

Materials and Equipment

- No handouts, equipment, or materials are necessary. However, if you do provide handouts that describe the personality style or characteristic instrument you are using, encourage participants to refer to handouts and other materials to more accurately judge their own personality traits and styles.

Area Setup

There should be sufficient space at the perimeter of the room so people can congregate into small groups.

Preparation

Whichever personality assessment you use, participants should be briefed or provided with materials explaining personality styles, should know their particular style/profile, or have a basic understanding of the model before beginning this activity.

Process

1. After you have explained or given the participants an opportunity to study any handout you've provided on personality styles, ask the participants to raise their hands to identify their styles. For example, if you chose to use the DiSC tool, you might say, "How many of you came out with a high D?" (Regarding MBTI, this activity works best with E/I and/or P/J scales.)
2. Point to the specific corners of the room and ask the participants to "temporarily relocate" to an identified corner based on their own styles. For example, if using the DiSC, you would have four designated spots and might say, "Will all those who raised their hand for the D style move to the front, left corner of the room." Assign each of the groups to a location.
3. Once the participants have moved to their respective locations, ask them to work in groups to develop a story, a song, a poem, or (emphasize OR) a saying that best describes the group's style. State that each group will have 10 minutes to complete the activity. Tell them their groups will be asked to share or perform it.
4. As the groups work, observe how each group approaches their task and how this approach demonstrates the specific style of the group.
5. After 10 minutes, ask each group to demonstrate their results. Lead enthusiastic applause after each.
6. After all "performances" ask the groups to think back to their planning and design process. Ask how their processes modeled their styles. For example, extroverts typically begin the task by talking, whereas introverts begin by reviewing the materials and taking notes. You may need to provide a few examples of what you observed about the groups as they approached this task. Encourage contributions from all participants.



InSider's Tips

- Send the largest groups to the areas of the room where there is the most space.
- This activity works best if groups are allowed only a short time. After the first 4 minutes, apply gentle pressure to finish by reminding them they have “1 minute left.” Don’t allow any more than 10 minutes before you ask each group to deliver a short performance.
- Although initially they may push back, even the most serious participants get into this activity and enjoy it once they start.

Barbara Carnes, Ph.D., is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and writer in St. Louis, Missouri. She is the author of the book *Making Learning Stick* and co-author of the books *Making Training Stick* and *Making Training Stick: A Training Transfer Field Guide*. Formerly a trainer with Sprint, Barbara has her own learning and development consulting practice. She develops and delivers classroom learning programs as well as e-learning. She has a Ph.D. in human and organizational systems from The Fielding Graduate University and she is an adjunct professor for Webster University and for the University of Phoenix.

Barbara Carnes, Ph.D.
7251 Princeton Avenue
St. Louis, MO 63130
(314) 862.7733
Email: bcarnes@maketrainingstick.com
Website: www.MakeTrainingStick.com
ASTD Chapter: St. Louis

Personality Type Assessments

Personality type refers to the psychological classification of individual differences and behaviors displayed by people. Personality types distinguish and label traits individuals may exhibit. For example, according to one type theory, individuals might be introverts or extraverts. Introversion and extraversion are part of a continuum, with individuals exhibiting varying degrees of each from one end to the other. It is believed that all individuals are made up of a unique set of motivations that influence their behaviors in various situations. The idea of psychological types originated in the theoretical work of Carl Jung and William Marston in the early 20th century.

Two well-known instruments are used to assess individuals: the DiSC based on Marston's work and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) based on Jung's work. Both of these assessments help individuals better understand their strengths and limitations. This knowledge can help individuals understand and accept others' behavior, communicate better, and adapt to the needs of others.

The DiSC Profile assessment is a tool developed to identify an individual's natural behavioral tendencies, displayed in various environments. The resulting report shows an individual's strengths, weaknesses, motivations, behavioral tendencies, along with strategies that could increase daily effectiveness in both personal and work situations. The results are displayed in a four-quadrant behavioral model classified as:

- Dominance (D)—relating to control, power, and assertiveness
- Influence (i)—relating to social situations and communication
- Steadiness (S)—relating to patience, persistence, and thoughtfulness
- Conscientiousness (C)—relating to structure and organization

These four dimensions can be grouped in a matrix with the vertical dimension represents a factor of "Assertive" (at the top) versus "Passive" (at the bottom). The horizontal represents "Guarded" (left side) versus "Openness" (right side). The "D" and "I" share the top row, representing extroverted aspects of the personality, and "C" and "S" below represent introverted aspects. "D" and "C" also share the left column and represent task-focused aspects, and "I" and "S" share the right column and represent social aspects.

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a questionnaire designed to measure behavioral preferences in how people perceive the world and make decisions. These preferences were extrapolated from the personality type theories proposed by Carl Jung. The original developers of the personality inventory were Katharine Cook Briggs and her daughter, Isabel Myers. They began creating the indicator during World War II, believing that knowledge of personality preferences would help women who were entering the industrial workforce for the first time. The initial questionnaire grew into the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), first published in 1962. The self-assessment results in four dimensions:

- Flow of energy—extraverted (E) or introverted (I)
- How information is received—sensing (S) or intuitive (N)
- Preference for making decisions—thinking (T) or feeling (F)
- Preference for dealing with the outside world—judging (J) or perceiving (P)

The self-assessment presents one preference from each of the four categories. This is expressed as a four letter code, such as ENTJ. The sixteen personality MBTI combinations are often displayed in what is called a type table.



Do You See What I See?

Submitted by Sharon Dera

Overview

Participants explore the power of perception in this activity by providing their impressions and reactions to a set of images projected on a screen.

Objectives

- To define perception and discuss its importance
- To understand that others may see things differently

Audience

Twenty to fifty individuals

Time Estimate

20 to 35 minutes

Materials and Equipment

- Copies of various illusion images on PowerPoint slides or as large posters such as those found at www.123OpticalIllusions.com
- Projection capability for PowerPoint slides
- Flip chart and markers

Area Setup

Any room arrangement where all can see the images projected on a screen

Process

1. Ask participants for a definition of perception. Accept several comments and jot them down for reference later.
2. Project one of the illusion images provided or you may search for another example if you prefer. Ask participants for input on what they see in the image. Note the suggestions and offer one or two of the group's suggestions and ask "How many of you see X?" or "How many of you see Y?" Encourage each group to help others in the group see the image that they see.

3. Project another one of the images and conduct another large group discussion on what everyone sees. As before, discuss the different points of view and encourage the groups to help the others in their group see what they see.
4. Ask participants again for a definition of perception. This time write some of the words and phrases on flip-chart paper.
5. Summarize with questions such as these:
 - What happened during this exercise?
 - Why did some people see one thing and others see another?
 - How does this relate to real life?
 - What did you do to help others see what you saw?
 - How important are perceptions in real-life situations?
 - What will you do differently as a result of this exercise?
6. Wrap up the discussion by sharing the following quote from Tom Peters:

“Perception is all there is. There is only one perceived reality; it is the way each of us chooses to perceive a communication, the value of a service, the value of a particular product feature, the quality of a product.”
7. State that the perceptions of each individual are the only realities that matter and that we need to keep this human tendency foremost in our minds when we communicate, solve problems, or try to reach agreement.



InSider's Tips

- This activity is good for helping participants understand that there are different ways of looking at the same issue, problem, situation, or solution. This activity also reinforces the importance of communicating clearly, asking questions, paraphrasing, and gaining agreement on any transmitted message.
- Images for this activity can be found at the website www.123OpticalIllusions.com. This activity has been passed around the training profession for at least thirty-five years. It still brings “ah-ha’s” to those experiencing it for the first time and is an excellent demonstration of perception and its importance in communication.

Sharon Dera, CPLP, has more than seventeen years of experience in needs assessment, human performance, process improvement, and organization development. Her broad experience was acquired by working in the retail, finance, healthcare, government, manufacturing, hospitality, and travel industries in operations, business management, customer service, sales, communications, marketing, succession planning, leadership, coaching, and training. Sharon is owner and CEO of The Proficiency Group, Inc., working in partnership with organizations to identify the root cause of performance deficiencies and determine the best solutions/interventions that close the performance gap; lending a “fresh set of eyes” exposing possible blind spots. Sharon is currently serving on the National ASTD Chapter Recognition Committee. She holds an MBA from the University of Dallas.

Sharon Dera, CPLP
8948 Random Road
Fort Worth, TX 76179
(817) 236.7594
Email: sdera@charter.net
Website: www.proficiencygroup.com
ASTD Chapter: Fort Worth



Perception Reflection

Submitted by Rodger Adair

Overview

In this activity, participants discover how their perceptions are impacted when they hear only one side of a conversation and how conclusions they draw do not necessarily reflect reality.

Objective

- To better understand how we perceive communications

Audience

Any size

Time Estimate

10 to 20 minutes

Materials and Equipment

- Perception Reflection conversation sheet for the facilitator

Area Setup

No special room setup needed

Process

1. Ask the participants how many have experienced miscommunication due to a misperception of reality. Solicit examples if you wish.
2. Explain that to demonstrate this dynamic you will read one side of a telephone conversation and that the job of the participants is to imagine what the conversation is about based solely on what they hear.
3. Use the Perception Reflection conversation sheet and read only Part A. When you are finished, pause before engaging the audience in discussion.
4. Ask several participants to explain what they think might be happening in this conversation based on what they heard.
5. Ask for a volunteer to join you at the front of the room. Perform the Perception Reflection conversation again, but this time ask the volunteer

to read Part B of the conversation while you read Part A again. Pause for impact when you are finished.

6. Debrief the activity using the following questions:
 - How has your perception of this conversation changed? Why?
 - How did your perceptions differ from reality?
 - Have you ever gone into a situation with an incorrect perception? What happened?
 - How do perceptions cloud clear communication? What is often the result?
 - How can we prevent this from occurring? What tools do you have that you can use to prevent miscommunication due to incorrect perceptions (ask questions, listen, watch body language)?
 - What can you commit to doing in the future to ensure fewer misperceptions?



- Most people are surprised by how badly they misjudged the real story.
- Allow for reflection and learning before moving on.

For the last twenty years **Rodger Adair** has focused on organization development, industrial psychology, and corporate training, twelve of those years mainly in the Arizona market. He has a B.S. in adult/workforce education from Southern Illinois University. He has a master's in organizational management and an MBA from the University of Phoenix. He is in a Ph.D. program in I/O psychology with Northcentral University in Prescott Valley, Arizona. He serves as a director of continuous quality improvement with the University of Phoenix. He is a former member of the board of directors for the local Valley of the Sun ASTD chapter. He is also a former scholarship member interest group chair for the International Leadership Association (ILA). Rodger recently contributed a chapter on this topic to the book, *The Art of Followership: How Great Followers Create Great Leaders and Organizations*. He presented at ILA and the VOS chapter's Arizona annual convention. He consults with several non-profits.

Rodger Adair
4605 E. Elwood Street
Phoenix, AZ 85040
(602) 557.7035
Email: rodger.adair@apollogrp.edu
ASTD Chapter: Valley of the Sun

Perception Reflection

Part A

1. Hey Mike!
2. How was it up there?
3. Cold?
4. Great. For a while it got hotter than a cat with its tail on fire. Speaking of that, how is the CAT?
5. Sorry to hear that, man. I knew it was bad as soon as the fire spread through the cabin.
6. Yeah, I miss grandma already. As soon as those flames took out the instruments I knew we had to get out, or else!
7. Bury them? What's wrong with letting them lie around so the birds can pick at them?
8. Well, gotta' go. Give my condolences to grandpa.

Part B

1. Hey bud, found the AC problem. I had to go to the attic to fix it.
2. It was hot, but I got the AC fixed.
3. Just needed to replace the filters. Now it is fine.
4. The tractor is a total loss.
5. Hey, its not all that bad. We're insured. At least you and gramps are safe. That's all that really counts. And if grandma had heard what happened she would end her visit with Aunt June to get back and try to fix everything herself.
6. Well, you did what you could. We'll be renting a new CAT to finish plowing the fields. With a new tractor we can actually bury all of the seeds in one day instead of going back and covering them by hand. And grandma won't be here to help, either.
7. Very funny. I'm not letting that happen this year. We have been due for a new tractor for a few years now.
8. Will do. You know how much he loved that old CAT tractor.



Tuscan Summer Evenings

Submitted by Paul Signorelli

Overview

Participants in this activity form a “sharing circle” to reach consensus, clarify a decision, or reinforce learning as part of a training program.

Objectives

- To facilitate open discussion and engagement from all participants
- To foster a strong sense of team or community

Audience

Ten to fifteen participants

Time Estimate

Recommend 10 to 20 minutes, but time may vary depending on the situation and the level of interaction and participation

Materials and Equipment

- Flip chart and markers (optional)

Area Setup

A room large enough in which to form a circle that includes all participants

Process

1. Brief participants about the sharing circle and its intended purpose. Outline the topic to be discussed and the intended outcome, which is for the attendees to reach a decision or to foster discussion of a specific lesson learned during a workshop or any other topic that can be defined and discussed within a specified amount of time.
2. Ask the participants to form a circle. State the topic and the amount of time available for the discussion.
3. Begin by demonstrating how to participate in the sharing circle discussion. Take one step into the center of the circle, say no more than five or six sentences to express the point you want to make, then step back into

- the circle. Invite the next participant to react or otherwise add to the discussion by stepping forward into the circle.
4. Advise the participants that the sharing will continue until the time limit has been reached or no one else shows any interest in stepping into the circle—whichever comes first.
 5. At the end of the sharing activity, ask the participants to return to their seats for any further action, vote, or decision-making process you've established or simply summarize what has been accomplished or discussed during the activity.
 6. Post the decision or highlights of the discussion if you wish.



InSider's Tips

- Keep the conversation moving; if someone goes over the six-sentence maximum, remind the participant of the limit.
- Do not discourage participants from stepping into the circle to share more than once, but be attentive to ensure that as many participants as possible contribute to the conversation.
- This is a variation of something I saw in a small Italian village one summer evening several years ago. Everyone stood in a semicircle outside the village coffee house in the town square. Each person who wanted to add to or build on the ensuing conversation took one step forward into the circle, made a few comments, then stepped back into the circle. You can find much more on this powerful technique through a simple “sharing circle” key word search using your favorite search engine.

Paul Signorelli is a writer, trainer, and consultant who has served as president-elect and president for the ASTD Mt. Diablo chapter and joined ASTD's National Advisors for Chapters for a three-year term effective January 2011. He explores uses, writes about, and helps others become familiar with new technology to creatively facilitate positive change within organizations. He also develops and manages workplace learning and performance programs; helps clients improve their face-to-face and online presentation skills; writes for a variety of print and online publications; and develops and delivers innovative online learning opportunities.

Paul Signorelli
1558 16th Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94122
(415) 681.5224
Email: paul@paulsignorelli.com
Website: <http://paulsignorelli.com>
Blog: <http://buildingcreativebridges.wordpress.com>
ASTD Chapter: Mt. Diablo



Go for the Win

Submitted by Curtis D. Curry

Overview

In this lively activity, participants engage in a game of “thumb wrestling” as the facilitator leads the group toward a lesson in “win-win” solutions.

Objectives

- To energize the group
- To introduce a topic such as conflict or negotiation

Audience

Any size

Time Estimate

10 minutes

Materials and Equipment

None required

Area Setup

Any room arrangement that allows participants to work in pairs

Process

1. Ask for a volunteer to come to the front of the room to help you demonstrate the activity.
2. Tell the volunteer that the activity involves wrestling and that the first lesson is how to get in a proper wrestling stance. Demonstrate the stance as you say, “feet about two feet apart, knees slightly bent, chest aligned evenly with your knees.” For fun you might say, “Did I mention that I wrestled in high school?”
3. Invite your volunteer to mirror your wrestling stance. Once both of you have moved into the wrestling stance, only then tell the volunteer that you will be thumb wrestling.

4. Ask the volunteer to extend his or her right hand. Clasp each other's fingers leaving the thumbs free on top to wrestle. Show the rest of the participants the proper thumb wrestling "stance."
5. Tell the participants that you and your volunteer will demonstrate the activity. Say, "The objective of thumb wrestling is to 'pin' your partner's thumb."
6. With your hands remaining clasped, demonstrate, beginning by counting out loud "1—2—3—go." Raise and cross your thumb with your volunteer opponent's thumb as each number is counted and when you say "go" try for a quick "pin" of your opponent's thumb. If the volunteer pins your thumb that's OK, too.
7. Thank your volunteer and ask all the participants to stand up and find partners. Your volunteer may return to the audience to find a partner or, if you have an odd number of participants, you can continue to work with the volunteer.
8. Tell the group the activity will be timed, and that the goal is to "win as much as possible." Ask them to be careful not to bend the wrists of their partners, reminding them that the goal is to win, not to harm their partners.
9. Provide a beginning count of, "1—2—3—go." to begin the activity. The energy level in the room will increase within seconds and participants will be laughing and having a good time.
10. After 20 seconds, instruct the group to stop. Ask the group who had the most "pins" during the game. Typically, the best thumb-wrestler will have scored four or five pins. Tell the participants there will be one last round and that you think they can do much better. Remind the group that the goal is to "win as much as possible." Count, "1—2—3—go" to initiate the second round.
11. If you are still working with a volunteer, quietly mention that the goal is for your *team* to win as much as possible and suggest that he or she pin *you* as many times as possible in the remaining time, then ask whether you can pin him or her as many times as possible. Whether working with a volunteer or not, after about 20 seconds call time.
12. Ask how many pins were made this time. If a pair of participants has a high number of "pins" between them, have the team demonstrate their technique in front of the group (they may or may not have figured out the win-win angle). If no team has more than five pins, ask the volunteer to come up again (if you are not still working with the volunteer) so that you can demonstrate the most effective thumb-wrestling technique for winning as many times as possible. Instruct the volunteer to pin you as many times as he or she can within the time limit and then ask whether you can pin him or her as many times as you can within the time limit.

13. Tell the group that the goal of the activity was in fact to win as much as possible, not as individuals, but as a team. Explain that a win-win strategy leads to everyone being able to “win as much as possible.” Ask the participant what paradigm of human interaction they initially adopted (win-lose) and ask them why.
14. Transition into your presentation of conflict or win-win negotiating.



InSider's Tips

- This activity works best if the group members have already had worked together for a time.
- This is an excellent introductory activity to numerous classes, including negotiations training to demonstrate the win-win technique or conflict management to illustrate the collaborate style.

Curtis D. Curry has more than twenty years of leadership experience working with global organizations in HPI. He is the president of Quality Learning International. He has trained over 20,000 leaders and individual contributors in North America, Europe, Latin America, and Asia. Curtis specializes in global leadership development, managing conflict across cultures, coaching leaders, and helping organizations diagnose needs and design effective leadership development programs. Curtis has held leadership positions at Miami Dade College, the World Trade Center Miami, and Entrena Honduras/Nicaragua. He has an M.A. in international studies, an MBA, and is completing his dissertation for a Ph.D. in leadership at Barry University.

Curtis D. Curry
1050 Hollow Brook Lane
Malabar, FL 32950
(321) 724.1917
Email: curtis@leadershipqli.com
Website: leadershipqli.com
ASTD Chapter: Space Coast Florida

