PROGRAM OVERVIEW

About the Training Program

Groups convene to generate ideas, to give support, to solve problems, and to make decisions. All too often, however, groups can be inefficient and ineffective as they go about these tasks. What a waste of human resources! This program teaches group skills in an enjoyable yet powerful way.

The program assumes that individual participants come from groups that are committed to their goals. The focus, therefore, is not on motivation but on behaviors of members as they try to pursue their goals. Through participation in this program, individuals quickly become aware of their unproductive behaviors and are guided to more productive ways of being group members and leaders.

Training Objectives

Participants will have the following opportunities:

• To develop communication skills that can help a group to move forward;

• To learn techniques to facilitate a group through a task;

• To examine ways to prevent and to resolve disagreements and conflicts;

• To apply strategies for building group consensus; and

• To become keener observers of group process.
# PROGRAM OUTLINE

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I. Opening Activities

A. Who’s in the Group? (Icebreaker; Materials: Form A)

1. Distribute one copy of Form A to each participant.

2. Instruct participants to read the handout. After a minute or so, signal the participants to find someone in the group to whom each item might apply. When they find an appropriate person, the participants are to write the person’s first name in the space under the item. Explain that a person’s name cannot be used more than once.

3. Declare the first participant to complete the list the winner, then reassemble the group. Poll the participants about their answers to each item and write their responses on the newsprint flip chart. Prompt short discussions of some items, using questions such as the following:
   • What month do you think has the most birthdays and why?
   • Can a person who likes to do things alone be an effective group member?
   • When is conflict helpful? When is it harmful?

B. Getting Further Acquainted (Small-Group Discussion)

1. Assemble the participants into teams of approximately five members each. (Note: these teams will remain together for the remainder of the program.)

2. Give the teams the following instructions: “Take turns within your team and share some examples of particularly effective or ineffective groups in which you have participated.”

3. After each team member has had a chance to speak, instruct each team to make a list of responses to the following question:
   • What do you need from a group in order to be the best possible member?

4. Reconvene the total group and have teams report their responses. Chart the results on newsprint and post the lists from each team. Note common elements and surprising entries.
II. What Makes a Group Effective?

A. House Building (Problem-Solving Activity; Materials: Sets of Index Cards)

1. Provide each team with a stack of index cards of varying sizes.
2. Challenge each team to construct “the house of its dreams” solely from the index cards. Participants may fold, tear, and draw on the cards, but no other supplies can be used for the construction.
3. Allow at least ten minutes for the construction. Do not rush or pressure the groups, because it is important for each to have a successful experience.
4. After the teams have finished construction, invite the full group to “take a tour of the neighborhood.” Visit each construction and request that team members show off their work and explain any intricacies of the house. Applaud each team’s accomplishments.
5. Reassemble the teams and ask them to reflect on the experience by responding to this question:
   - What were some helpful and not so helpful actions we did as a group and individually when working together?
6. Reconvene the total group and discuss what they learned from this experience.

B. Are Several Heads Better Than One? (Simulation)

1. Ask the full group the following question:
   - Are several heads better than one?
   Invite their responses, leading toward the conclusion that this question can only be answered positively when a group is working together effectively.
2. Select and conduct a group problem-solving activity with which you are familiar. (Note to the facilitator: Some classic activities you might select are Lost at Sea, Wilderness Survival, and NASA Moon Survival Task.)
3. Assemble the full group and ask them to imagine that a new team had just entered the room to do the activity just concluded. Record the group’s advice to the new team on how to be effective with the activity. Add advice of your own that participants overlook.
C. Views on Group Effectiveness (Read-and-Discuss Group; Materials: Form B)

1. Distribute or refer to Form B.

2. Ask each team to discuss the contents of Form B. Urge them to draw examples from their experiences in the program thus far as well as from their own life experiences. Encourage them to disagree with the views expressed on Form B if they see things differently.

3. Reassemble the full group and process opinions together.

III. How People Communicate in Groups

A. Competitive Communication (Story)

1. Briefly introduce this topic in any appropriate way and then inform the group you have a story to tell them. Read or put into your own words the following story.* (You may choose to substitute any issue that will have a high likelihood of bringing about differences of opinion.)

A ship sank in a storm. Five survivors scrambled aboard two life boats: a sailor, a young woman, and an old man in one boat; the woman’s fiance and his best friend in the second. During the storm, the two boats separated. The first boat washed ashore on an island and was wrecked. The woman searched all day in vain for the other boat or any sign of her fiance.

The next day, the weather cleared, and still she could not locate her fiance. In the distance she saw another island. Hoping to find her fiance, she begged the sailor to repair the boat and row her to the other island. The sailor agreed, on the condition that she sleep with him that night.

Distraught, she went to the old man for advice. “I cannot tell you what is right or wrong for you,” he said. “Look into your heart and follow it.” Confused but desperate, she agreed to the sailor’s condition.

The next morning the sailor fixed the boat and rowed her to the other island. Jumping out of the boat, she ran up the beach into the arms of her fiance. Then she decided to tell him about the previous night. In a rage, he pushed her away and said, “Get away from me! I don’t want to see you again!” Weeping, she started to walk

slowly down the beach.

Seeing her, the best friend went to her, put his arm around her, and said, “I can tell that you two have had a fight. I’ll try to patch it up, but, in the meantime, I’ll take care of you.”

2. Reconvene each team and tell the members that their task is to rank each character in the story in terms of how offensive he or she was. However, request each team not to function cooperatively. Instead, for the purposes of this activity, all members of the team should argue as forcefully as possible for their own point of view. Above all, direct them “not to give in” but rather to persist in getting others to view the characters the way they do.

3. Process the experience, asking these questions:
   • How did it feel to argue and compete with each other?
   • What characterized the communication in the group?

4. Emphasize these key points:
   • Communicating competitively makes people defensive and closed-minded.
   • Cooperative communication requires people to be nonjudgmental and to listen, ask questions, state views as one’s own, and avoid outright certainty.

5. (Optional) Invite participants with strongly different views on the “sailor” story to hold a discussion in front of the full group. Ask observers to note behaviors that induced defensiveness or openness.

■ B. TV Commercial (Simulation; Materials: Paper Clips)

1. Ask members of each team to create a thirty-second TV commercial that advertises their group, the organization they work for, or a fictional product or service. The commercial should contain a short slogan and visuals. Explain that the general concept and an outline of the commercial is sufficient. However if group members want to act out a commercial, let them. Before each team-begins planning its commercial, discuss the characteristics of currently well-known commercials to stimulate creativity (e.g., use of a well-known personality, humor, comparison to competition, sex appeal). Explain further that, as a communication activity, you will be structuring their interactions in three different ways while they work on the task.

2. For the first five minutes, direct each team to split into pairs and discuss initial thoughts about the commercial.

3. After five minutes, get everyone’s attention and explain that you are placing three
paper clips for every member of the team on their tables. For the next several minutes, request that anytime a person speaks, he or she should relinquish one paper clip. Once a person is out of paper clips, he or she must remain silent until the next phase of the activity.

4. Interrupt the teams again and request that they continue to work on the commercial without the aid or hindrance of paper clips. Instead, participants can speak up freely so long as each person briefly paraphrases what the preceding speaker has said. (Quickly demonstrate what paraphrasing entails.)

5. After five minutes, suspend the paraphrasing rule and allow teams another ten minutes to finish planning the commercials.

6. Request that each team process the activity by discussing the impact, positive or negative, that each phase (pairs, paper clips, and paraphrasing) had on the group.

7. Invite each team to present its commercial and applaud each team’s creativity.

8. Conclude with these key points:

   • The purpose of the activity was to increase awareness of communication issues in groups, but you are not recommending that groups literally follow these “rules.”
   • Sometimes, forming smaller groupings for a short period enhances group communication.
   • People tend to interrupt each other less, listen better, and speak more concisely if they imagine that the paper-clip rule is in effect but not actually use the clips.
   • Occasional paraphrasing improves listening and validates the contributions of each member.

IV. Facilitating Group Work

A. Ten Ways to Facilitate Group Discussion (Full-Group Discussion; Materials: Form C)

1. Convene the full group and ask participants to read Form C silently.

2. Hold a full-group discussion on the following question:
   • What is useful and not useful about these guidelines?

3. As you facilitate the discussion, demonstrate as many of the guidelines as you can.
B. Rotating Facilitators (Skill Practice; Materials: Facilitator Cards)

1. Reconvene into teams and give each team a card with the word “Facilitator” written on it.

2. Explain that this activity will give each team member a chance to practice facilitating the group’s work on a task.

3. The task is to develop in the next thirty minutes three recommendations for solving a major societal problem (e.g., homelessness) or an actual problem faced by the group or organization (e.g., managing costs at XYZ Corporation).

4. Divide the number of people on a team into thirty to determine the number of minutes each person should serve as the facilitator of the task. Rotate facilitators by moving the “Facilitator” card one person clockwise for each turn. Ask a volunteer in each team to be the first facilitator.

5. When the task is completed, ask each team to note the facilitating behaviors that occurred during the thirty minutes. (Optional: Designate a rotating feedback-observer by simultaneously passing around a “Feedback-Observer” card.)

6. Share the recommendations of each team.

V. Preventing and Resolving Group Conflict

A. Unproductive Ways to Express Disagreement (Demonstration)

1. Describe typical ways that people express disagreement and ask participants to think about whether they have done the same. You may use the following key terms:

   • Ignoring: not responding to someone’s idea when you disagree and proceeding to express your own point of view.

   • Hinting: expressing disagreement indirectly by asking rhetorical questions (e.g., “Don’t you think . . . ? “).

   • Arguing: debating rather than disagreeing (e.g., “Yes, but . . . “).

   • Rejecting: totally dismissing the validity of someone’s point of view (e.g., “You’re wrong.”).

2. Explain and demonstrate more productive ways of disagreeing. Encourage the use of direct, straightforward assertions such as “I have a different point of view,” followed by an attempt to explain your views and asking for feedback (e.g., “What do you think about what I’m saying?”). Indicate that destructive, time-wasting conflict can often be prevented when people express disagreements directly but without hostility and then check with others about their perceptions.
B. An Alternative to Arguing (Brainstorming; Materials: Form D)

1. Explain that brainstorming (a process with which most of the participants will probably be familiar) is not only a way to increase creativity but also an excellent process to prevent endless discussion and debate. By allowing several ideas to be contributed without criticism, brainstorming promotes a group, rather than individual, mind set.

2. Indicate that brainstorming, however, presents its own problems. Once a group generates a number of ideas, it can still get bogged down in deciding which are the best ones.

3. Ask each team to quickly brainstorm and record uses that could be made of a “belt” by people marooned on an island.

4. After three minutes, stop the teams and ask each to choose two of its most original ideas. Ask each team to share these ideas with the other groups.

5. Point out that these decisions were not especially difficult because the task was frivolous and nothing was at stake.

6. Now provide the teams with a more challenging, real-life brainstorming task (e.g., How can performance reviews be improved?). Guide them through the process in these steps:
   • Generate no more than five ideas or solutions;
   • Seek clarification of people’s suggestions but do not express disagreement or reservations;
   • Generate criteria to evaluate the available ideas or solutions (e.g., cost, time factors, etc.);
   • Evaluate each idea or solution, one at a time; and
   • Discuss and decide which two ideas hold the most promise.

7. Explain that brainstorming ensures that everyone has equal input but other procedures are needed to efficiently get a group reading on issues. Describe and refer to the example of “multivoting” (voting to select the most favored ideas) found in Form D.

VI. Building Consensus

A. The Problem with Majority Voting (Observation)

1. Recruit four volunteers and ask them to agree on the best answer they can give to this question: What is the major disadvantage to making decisions by majority vot-
ing? Tell them that they have ten minutes to reach a decision. As they deliberate, give the rest of the participants the following observation questions:

• Do they listen carefully to each other?
• Does anyone change position just to keep peace?
• Do they explore alternative ideas?
• Do they resolve differences through discussion or compromise?
• Is consensus actively sought by some form of verbal polling or is it assumed that everyone agrees?

2. Have the observers explain to the volunteers what they were observing and present their feedback.

■ B. Keys to Consensus Building (Lecturette)

1. Emphasize the following points:

• Consensus building is important whenever a small group not only has to make a decision but also has to implement it.
• Without everyone’s commitment to a decision, the implementation of the decision can create tension.
• Consensus does not mean total agreement; it means that everyone is willing to support a certain decision (even though that decision may not be everyone’s first choice).
• Consensus building can be expedited by taking nonbinding polls of the group’s opinions to assess what majority and minority opinions exist.
• In larger groups, a 75-percent majority vote can serve as an effective standard for commitment when a total consensus may prove futile.

2. Obtain participants’ reactions to and questions about your lecturette.

■ VII. Closing Activities

■ A. Practicing and Observing Group Effectiveness (Fishbowl)

1. Divide the full group into two subgroups.
2. Designate one group “A” and the other “B.”
3. Explain to the two groups that they will each be given the same task. The purpose
of the activity is both to be able to form an effective group and to observe another
group trying to do the same thing.

4. The task will take approximately thirty minutes. Develop a task that you feel will have
relevance to your participants. Here are some generic suggestions:

- Compose a list of things leaders can do in any group to make it better.
- Target the most important changes your organization or group should make in
  the way it operates.
- Suggest improvements most organizations need to make in how they treat employ-
  ees.

5. Arrange a fishbowl setup so that Group A is being observed by Group B. If possible,
place a Group-B member directly behind each Group-A member.

6. Obtain a volunteer from Group A to be its first facilitator. The group will meet ini-
tially for ten minutes.

7. After ten minutes, stop the meeting and ask Group-A members to turn their chairs
around and form groups of two or four (your choice) with Group-B members. Have
Group-B members give feedback on what they observed that was helping or hinder-
ing Group A in getting off to a good start.

8. Move Group B into the inside so that Group-A members are now observing. Obtain
Group B’s first facilitator and proceed in identical fashion as before.

9. In sum, each group will have three ten-minute rounds to complete their work. Feed-
back can occur after each round.

B. Personal Contracting (Writing Task)

1. Reconvene the small teams you utilized earlier in the day.

2. Ask them to compile a list of skills and suggestions that were covered during the pro-
gram.

3. Using this list, request that each participant choose a few items that he or she will
attempt to use actively after the program. Have each person fill out a simple contract
and arrange a system whereby team members contact each other in two weeks to
inquire how each is doing with his or her contract.
PRODUCTIVE GROUPS
FORM A

Who’s in the Group?

Find and write down the name of someone:

1. Who has the same first initial as you have.

2. Who does not think that several heads are better than one.

3. Who meets in groups more than three hours a week.

4. Who was born in the same month as you were born.

5. Who likes to do things alone.

6. Who thinks that an effective group usually has a fair amount of conflict.
PRODUCTIVE GROUPS
FORM B

Characteristics of Effective Groups

1. Members communicate *with* each other as opposed to talk *to* each other.

2. Goals are clear to and accepted by members.

3. All group members have equal opportunity to participate.

4. Responsibilities are shared.

5. Consensus is sought for important decisions.

6. Conflict is not ignored or suppressed.

7. The well-being of the members is as important as completing the task.

8. Periodically, members assess the effectiveness of the group and discuss how to improve its functioning.
PRODUCTIVE GROUPS
FORM C

Ten Ways to Facilitate Group Discussion

1. **Paraphrase** what a person has said so that he or she feels understood and so that the other members of the group can hear a concise summary of what has been said. For example:

   So what you’re swing is that you have to be very careful about asking an applicant where he or she lives during an interview, because it may suggest some type of racial or ethnic affiliation. You also told us that it’s O.K. to ask for an interviewee’s address on a company application form.

2. **Check** your understanding against the words of a participant or ask a participant to clarify what he or she is saying. For example:

   Are you saying that this plan is not realistic? I’m not sure that I understand exactly what you meant. Could you please run it by us again?

3. **Compliment** an interesting or insightful comment. For example:

   That’s a good point. I’m glad that you brought that to our attention.

4. **Elaborate** on a participant’s contribution to the discussion with examples or suggest a new way to view the problem. For example:

   Your comments provide an interesting point from the subordinate’s perspective We could also consider how a manager would view the same situation.

5. **Energize** a discussion by quickening the pace, using humor, or, if necessary, prodding the group for more contributions. For example:

   Oh, my, we have lots of humble people in this group! Here’s a challenge for you: For the next two minutes, let’s see how many ways you can think of to increase cooperation within your department.
6. *Disagree* (gently) with a participant’s comments to stimulate further discussion. For example:

   I can see where you are coming from, but I’m not sure that what you are describing is always the case. Has anyone else had an experience that is different from Jim’s?

7. *Mediate* differences of opinion between participants and relieve any tensions that may be brewing. For example:

   I think that Susan and Mary are not really disagreeing with each other but are just bringing out two different sides of this issue.

8. *Connect* ideas, showing their relationships to one another. For example:

   As you can see from Dan’s and Jean’s comments, personal goal setting is very much a part of time management. You need to be able to establish goals for yourself on a daily basis in order for you to more effectively manage your time.

9. *Change* the group process by altering how you obtain participation or by moving the group to a stage of evaluating ideas that have been placed before the group. For example:

   Let’s break into smaller groups and see if you can come up with some typical customer objections to the products that were covered in the presentation this morning.

10. *Summarize* (and record, if desired) the major views of the group. For example:

    I have noted four major reasons that have come from the group’s discussion as to why managers do not delegate: (1) lack of confidence, (2) fear of failure, (3) comfort in doing the task themselves, and (4) fear of being replaced.
### An Example of Multivoting

Ten people used this technique to vote on twelve organizational goals for the next year.

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**First Vote:** Each person votes on as many items as he or she wants, but only once per item. Goals A, C, F, G, J, and K received the highest number of votes, and the list was reduced by one-half.

**Second Vote:** Multivoting was repeated and the list was, again, reduced by one-half.

**Final List:** C, F, and K remain after two rounds of multivoting. These items should be thoroughly discussed before one is chosen by consensus.