

POLAR ACTIVITIES; ACTIVITIES TO WARM UP THE AUDIENCE

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Jennifer Williams
Graduate Assistant
Oklahoma State University
jenaggie02@yahoo.com

Presentation Track: Practice

As leadership educators, we are constantly on the lookout for new openers to use in our classrooms and meetings. The problem is searching through the endless stack of books and then trying them out to see if the activity actually works takes a lot of time. This presentation will allow you to participate in warm up activities that introduce leadership topics.

Jennifer Williams is currently working on her PhD. at Oklahoma State University. Previously, she taught leadership theory and practice courses at Texas A&M University.

Introduction

Leadership Educators are constantly on the search for new openers or warm up activities to use in their lectures, presentations, and/or organizational meetings. While there are a plethora of activities available, one may not have the time to search through the endless warm up activity books like *Encyclopedia of Icebreakers* or *101 Great Games and Activities*. If one does take that time to search, he/she is probably trying to find an activity that correlates to the topic at hand and then must then try the activity to make sure that it does work. Sharing activities and icebreakers among leadership educators is a great way to try a new activity to add to your collection.

Participants in this presentation will experience three openers/warm up activities that are geared towards leadership competencies. Learner objectives include:

1. Learn the difference between icebreakers and openers
2. Use openers effectively
3. Discuss and learn facilitation techniques for three openers

Participants will also take away a booklet with lesson plans and facilitation techniques for these openers.

Background

Openers/warm up activities are "like appetizers to the full meal, they allow participants to get a taste of what is to follow" (Siberman, 1998, p. 39). An interesting analogy but it makes a lot of sense. The goal of an opener is to pique the interest of your audience and get them ready for the leadership topic. Openers allow the presenter to set the tone of the presentation. Openers come in many different options. They can be very active physically, or very active mentally, or both.

When putting together a lesson plan or a workshop plan, most leadership educators have been told that you need a snappy icebreaker/opener to start things off on the right foot. Surprisingly, there is little to no data or research that shows openers are an integral part of leadership training. Experience seems to be the catalyst of the importance of using openers for training.

How it Works

The word icebreaker is usually used interchangeably with opening activity or warm up activity. This is incorrect. An icebreaker is not necessarily connected to the content of the presentation. The purpose of an icebreaker is "to help reduce tension and anxiety, energize the group, set a tone for the program, and involve everyone" (Lawson, 1998, p. 129). Openers or warm up activities are "subject-matter-oriented activities that accomplish everything that an icebreaker does and

also introduces the participants" to the content of the presentation (Lawson, 1998, p.129).

The first opener uses the assumptions of the participants to the game to discuss what happens when there are preconceived notions in teams. The second opener uses zoo animals to discuss group member roles. Participants are asked to break into groups and then work together to create a new zoo and select an animal, person, or thing at the zoo that represents them. The third opener in this presentation is a different spin on diversity. In this activity, participants try to match self-reported information to people in their group.

Results to Date

All three openers have been used, successfully, in leadership workshops or leadership courses. Facilitating the openers and using probing questions are the hardest parts to master. With openers, it is important that the audience understand, at the conclusion of the activity, what the point of that activity was and the connection to the topic at hand. Openers fail when that connection is not strongly made.

Conclusions

Finding quality openers takes a lot of time and effort on the part of the leadership educator. A fun activity with a point and good content is a hard find. Sharing lucrative openers with each other is a great way to help increase the number of quality openers in ones' arsenal of activities.

References:

Lawson, K. (1998). *The Trainer's Handbook*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer.

Silberman, M.L. (1998). *Active Training* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer.