

Lessons from the Rainbow and the Kaleidoscope

Just like the colors of a rainbow, people have many facets, attributes, skills, and experiences that make them who they are. However, in the workplace, because of the business at hand and sometimes because no one ever asks, they don't always reveal these facets.

This month's "Training 101" offers two exercises to uncover these unique perspectives and experiences. In the first, Mary Nestor shares a team-building exercise meant to build self-esteem and strengthen relationships. In the second, James Mapes shares the secret of motivating employees to increase productivity.



GETTING TO KNOW YOU: A TOOL FOR TEAMBUILDING

BY MARY NESTOR

When MJN began developing a Total Quality Management training course for Augusta Technical Institute (ATI), we wanted a fun, thought-provoking, highly interactive, flexible team-building exercise that would help the participants get to know each other better. What emerged was a colorful, decorative "rainbow mosaic" that drew participants back many times over a two-day training period, triggering conversations, revealing new insights, and initiating questions.

The Rainbow Profile gets its name from the colorful, mosaic-like wall display that is the result of completing the exercise. The answers to survey questions, written on colored paper, are matched to the names of class participants. Participants may know each other well, in passing, or not at all. With up to 20 participants per class, and six survey questions, the result is a wall filled with 120 colorful papers.

Though not designed as a diversity exercise, it reveals how we make assumptions about people. It shows how we tend to stereotype others by their appearance, race, ethnic background, position, or education. It demonstrates that the more we reveal about ourselves and learn about others, the better we will appreciate, value, and form positive working relationships.

Over the past 10 months, we have done this exercise with more than 180 senior- and mid-level managers, instructors, deans, administrators, and other professional staff, as well as clerical, maintenance, and custodial personnel. The first group was ATI's Continuous Improvement Council (CIC), a cross-functional team representing all departments and grade levels.

Preparation: Two weeks prior to the class participants fill out a short questionnaire; the survey states that the answers will be shared in class. The surveys should be returned at least one week prior to the class, but have some extras available the day of class for those who haven't returned one.

The survey questions are:

- ▶ What is the most exciting or exotic place you ever visited or vacationed?
- ▶ Name the high school you attended, and the city and state where it is located.

- ▶ What was your first full-time job?
- ▶ What is your favorite leisure-time activity? What do you like to do for relaxation?
- ▶ What is the most dangerous (exciting, risky, scary) thing you have ever done (such as, bungee jumping, quitting a job, saving a life, running a marathon, and so forth)?
- ▶ Name a person (celebrity, famous, notorious—living or dead) whom you would like to meet and talk with.

The answers to the questions are then printed verbatim on squares of colorful paper (neon is nice). (Tip: Cut an 8.5" x 11" piece of paper into four pieces.) Key the questions to the color of the paper. In other words, all the answers to question number one would be put on the same color paper, question number two on a different color paper, and so on. Print each participant's name on white or neutral 8.5" x 11" paper, one name to a sheet. You'll also need a roll of masking tape.

The day of the training exercise:

Before the participants arrive, tape the name sheets in a line high across one wall of the training room. Leave enough space below each name to tape six answer sheets. If wall space is at a premium, the name papers can be taped in two rows. Schedule the exercise about an hour or two into the morning session to allow time to prepare answer sheets for any late surveys. The exercise can take from 45 to 90 minutes, depending on the class size and length of debriefing.

Begin the exercise:

Give each participant a length of tape for taping answers to the wall and go over the following rules:

- ▶ No one can add anything to his or her own name.
- ▶ No one can take anything away from his or her own name.

- ▶ No one can reveal the correctness or incorrectness of an answer sheet posted under his or her own name while the posting is in progress.
- ▶ At the end of the exercise, there should be six papers, one of each color, taped below each name.

Begin the exercise by reading the first question. Spread the answer sheets to that question on a table close to the wall. When the participants find one that they feel matches someone, they tape it to the wall underneath that person's name. Some answers will be matched quickly, a few will remain a mystery. Since everyone answered each question, have participants look at those names on the wall without a paper of that color taped underneath, and make a guess. Continue with the rest of the questions until all of the answer sheets have been posted. Then, allow some time for rearranging them.

Once all the answers have been posted, gather everyone around the wall and debrief the exercise, using the following questions:

General:

- ▶ Did you find the task of matching the answers difficult or easy? Were some questions easier than others?
- ▶ What techniques did you use to match answers to a certain person?
- ▶ Were some people easier than others to match answers to? Why?

Next, have the participants look at their own profiles. Are they surprised at what people put under their names? What do those responses tell about how people perceive them? Do we always project our true personalities?

Part two: rearrange the profiles. Have participants post the correct responses under their own name. This part of the exercise generates lots of lively conversation, since participants are eager to find out who matches the more outrageous or intriguing answers, such as who went hang-gliding in the nude, saved a life by pulling someone out of a burning building, broke up a fight by stepping in front of an ex-husband who was about to be shot, escaped from a Korean war prison, drove 120 mph on the Autobahn, and

so forth (real answers).

Once the answers have been rearranged, allow time for participants to read the wall, comment, and ask questions. This is a time of discovery and revelation. One woman had gone to high school in the same small town in Mississippi where another man's father had been born. Three of the men in one group discovered that, for their first job, they had all been telegraphers for the railroad. Several had been helicopter pilots in the Vietnam war, had the same favorite vacation spots or leisure activities, and were interested in meeting the same people. Many were amazed at the daring feats of bravery, foolhardiness, or thrill-seeking of some of the most unlikely people.

Debrief further with questions such as:

- ▶ Find someone who has an interest or experience similar to yours. Take a few minutes to share a little more about that experience.
- ▶ Is there an answer you would like information about? Allow a few minutes to elaborate.

Finish debriefing by asking what participants felt was their greatest benefit or revelation from the exercise. Past responses include not taking the time to get to know people we work with every day, making false assumptions about people, and needing to take the time to build relationships.

Further debriefing for team-building: Begin by discussing how team members are chosen: Each person is an expert at what they do because they perform their duties every day, and know the job better than anyone else. But they also bring much more: attitudes, values, experiences, and their own unique perspective. The "rainbow profiles" of these people have nothing to do with their jobs, but reveal valuable qualities they bring as team members. Have each person look at the profile directly to the right of theirs as posted on the wall. (The person whose profile is at the far right takes the first one on the left.) Have them read the answers, and from that information, surmise what that person would bring to a team. What

qualities, expertise, knowledge, or character traits would they add to the success of a team? Give them an example, using one of the profiles.

This part of the debriefing has a twofold purpose. First, it gives the opportunity to look for positive attributes in others and how who they are can add value to a team. Second, hearing those positive attributes expressed by another person builds self-esteem and gives those being profiled a good reputation to live up to.

Debriefing for diversity training.

When using this as a diversity exercise, focus on stereotypes—how we automatically match responses to people because of such factors as race, age, nationality, religion, sex, or disposition. The question about what school you attended and the final question, "who would you like to meet and talk with," lend themselves well to diversity discussion. In one session, I answered the last question by saying I wanted to meet the rock singer, Sting. During the posting, "Sting" was taped under the name of the youngest woman in the group. The group was amazed that I, a 40-something mother of two, would like to talk to the former lead singer and bass player for the rock group, "The Police."

This exercise helps people begin to get to know and value one another. It takes some advance planning, time to conduct, considerable debriefing, and processing. It is, however, an exercise that keeps on producing for your team or training class long after it is over since it leads to continued conversations based on the information revealed.

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THE MOTIVATIONAL MAGIC OF VALUES

BY JAMES MAPES

Would you like to know the secret of motivation? It may not be what you think it is. Here's a metaphor I discovered for understanding the process:

I have a beautiful, hand-crafted brass kaleidoscope. It's a metal tube about 10 inches long with a lens at either end. Attached to one end is a wire frame in which I can place a marble. Not just any marble, though; it has to be a semi-transparent one, which as children we called a "boulder."

Boulders have swirls of bright colors trapped inside and each one is different. When I place the marble in the wire basket, hold it up to the light, and look through the lens, I see an explosion of color in a symmetrical design. By rotating the marble, I can create what seems to be ever-changing patterns.

If I play with it long enough, I discover that what I thought were limitless designs are restricted by the swirls of color in the marble. The designs shift and change but only within the limitations of the marble. If I want to create more designs, I have to change the marble.

New marble, new colors, new possibilities. But even with the new marble, I find limits of perception. I view the marble as a representation of personal values.

What are values anyway? Values are your personal beliefs about what is important. Values are the mental maps of the way you think things should be. They are your deepest convictions, and they are the primary filter through which you view reality.

Imagine that the marble represents the sum total of your values and the marble cannot be replaced. You can rotate the marble to form different perceptions of your reality, but the basic color and design—your values—remain the same.

Our values began to develop at a very early age. Our parents told us what to do and not to do, say and not to say, believe and not believe. If we did as we were expected, we were rewarded; if not, we were punished.

As we grew up, this input extended to our peer groups, teachers, and religious mentors. Then the media began to play a role. We learned from newspapers, magazines, television, and radio programs.

TV presented heroes and role mod-

els. For example, my heroes were Rin Tin Tin, The Cisco Kid, Roy Rogers, Hopalong Cassidy, and Sergeant Preston of the Yukon. Wrongs were righted. Good conquered evil.

To this day, my personal values, such as honesty, loyalty, and integrity, reflect the values of these early TV role models as much as the values I was taught at home or at church.

It may appear that influences on our lives are too complex to understand, but they aren't. The trick is to uncover your basic values and the values of others.

Values are the key to motivation. Let's suppose that I am a manager who wants to motivate my employees. Let's further suppose that my number one value in life is money, so I offer bonuses and cash rewards for higher productivity, promptness, and client satisfaction.

If I had taken the time to talk with my employees, I may have found that Employee A wants to be home early so he can be there for his son when he comes home from school.

Employee B prefers to work alone and would like to have a quiet office away from the corridors. Employee C wants a promotion with a title. However, I assumed that everyone is motivated in the same way I am. And when I didn't get the results I wanted, I assumed that my employees are lazy. I call this attitude "The Arrogance of Assumption."

There is no such thing as pure motivation. The process ought to be called "value satisfaction." Employee A's number one value is family. Employee B's is privacy. Employee C values recognition. If I had promised each employee the reward that satisfied his or her values, I would have had my deadlines met.

Value-based communication is the first step to success. You look at the world through your personal value-marble. No matter how you turn the kaleidoscope, it will always be your marble. The first step

■ *You will always move in the direction of your number one value* ■

to motivating others—our employees, children, partners, suppliers, and business associates—is to determine what their values are, to look through their marble.

We need to frame the tasks at hand in a way that validates or

supports the other person's values. Awareness is the touchstone to this journey.

We need to think about the flip side, too. How can I ask for what I need to satisfy my values if I don't know what they are? It is my responsibility to know my own values.

What are your personal values?

I've drawn up a list of 20 commonly named values; there are others. Look these over and choose six: integrity; honesty; love; freedom; compassion; trust; family; self-growth; money; health; fun; adventure; spirituality; creativity; fairness; courage; recognition; career; comfort; and reputation.

After you've chosen six, prioritize them by asking yourself questions: Is integrity more important than money? Than family? Than compassion? You may be surprised what comes up first.

Understand that you will always move in the direction of your number one value and away from that which threatens that value. This happens from the heart—often without your even knowing it.

Move beyond the arrogance of assumption. Knowing this about yourself will help you better understand those around you. Employee A may want to report to work on time, he'll try; but he will take that extra 10 minutes to be sure that his son is prepared for school even if it means he'll be late for work.

Employee B will want to attend groupthink meetings, she'll try; but she'll always "forget" what time they meet and end up working alone in her office.

Employee C will want to work harder, he'll try; but unless he can see a promotion in the future, he'll be just a little less excited about his job.

The antidote to the arrogance of



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■ Training 101

■ Find out
people's order
of priorities
and satisfy
them ■

assumption is asking the right questions. Go through the same exercise that you went through yourself with the people you want to motivate. Find out their order of priorities and try to satisfy them.

It's all so simple:

1. People are motivated by many different values that may not coincide with yours.

2. Understanding your own and others' most important personal values will increase the effectiveness of your communication.

3. Commit yourself to support and nurture, by whatever means necessary, the highest values in others. This inspires and motivates them more than any other reward.

A stage magician surprises and delights us, but when he explains how his tricks are done, we are amazed at how simple they are. And so it is with motivation; once you understand the power of personal values, you'll discover simple magic.

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This month's "Training 101" was compiled by Pamela Leigh. Send short, "how-to" articles on training basics to "Training 101," Training & Development, ASTD, 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22301-2015.