

The Power of Debriefing

Designing dynamic and meaningful activities is essential to effective instruction. To ensure that youth get the most out of lessons, it's also essential to provide opportunities for youth to discuss what they've learned with one another after completing group activities. Follow-up discussions, or debriefings, allow youth to process what they've learned, ensuring that activities aren't left dangling, with youth wondering what they accomplished and why. Some say debriefing is so important that it is the learning experience.

Processing Questions

There needs to be a sequence in processing just as there needs to be a sequence within the activities chosen to accomplish the goals of the group. Processing is most effective if we deal with it in the same way we receive information, process it, and make decisions about what to do about it. This concept is based on three questions: "What?", "So What?", and "Now What?"

"What?" pertains to the substance of the group interaction and what happened to the individuals. The activity is viewed in relation to the objective or objectives of the processing session.

"So What?" pertains to the difference the experience made to the individuals, the consequences, and the meaning for them. This term refers to transforming the information and experience into relevant patterns of meaning.

"Now What?" pertains to the decisions about how to act on the experience by choosing the best alternatives and reapplying them to other situations.

An Example: Communicating Effectively

- Can anyone give an example of when you thought you communicated effectively with someone else in the group?
- How did you know that what you communicated was understood?
- How will the activities done today help you in the future?

Different Ways to Debrief an Activity

Thumbs Up, Down, Middle

This activity is a very valuable way to encourage participation in the debriefing part of your teambuilding activity for a couple of reasons:

- It allows participants to see how opinions of a particular experience vary greatly in the group.
- It provides the facilitator with an opportunity to focus the group discussion on a particular topic.

1) Have the group stand in a circle, facing each other.

2) Instruct them to place one hand behind their backs.

3) On the count of three, they will make a "Thumbs Up", "Thumbs Down", or "Thumbs in the Middle" sign with their hand.

In this example, the signs represent "how the group worked together as a whole."

* Thumbs up means the group functioned perfectly: took time to plan, listened to everyone's ideas, no one argued, everyone participated in a positive fashion, etc.

* Thumbs down means that the group did not function well as a team at all: there were lots of arguments, no planning, inappropriate communication, etc.

* Thumbs in the Middle means that the group did well, but there is room for improvement.

4) Once you explain the "thumbs" scale, count to three, and have everyone present their thumbs and keep them in front of their bodies.

5) Ask the group to go around the circle and discuss one specific example why they chose the way they did.

Apples and Onions Debrief

Gather the youth into a circle. Tell the youth that they should come up with an apple and an onion for the day or the activity they just completed...

Apple- something good that happened, they liked doing, or saw, etc.

Onion- something they did not enjoy, disapproved of, etc.

Resources:

Hoosier Recreation Workshop (2006) Team Challenge presented by Tony Miller and Mike Bredhold.

<http://www.ultimatecampresource.com/site/camp-activities/teambuilding-debriefing-activities.page-1.html>