
50 Activities for Interpersonal Skills Training

Sue Bishop and David Taylor

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Preface

We have lived with this book for the past year. We knew what we were letting ourselves in for when we took it on, but our thanks go to Mags, to Val and to Niel for their patience and support.

Our thanks must also go to the countless trainers and writers whose work is our foundation, not the least of whom are Pfeiffer and Jones who started it all.

As trainers concerned with the evolution of good training practice we have enjoyed sharing these activities with a wider audience and we would welcome any comments from users of their own experiences.

Sue Bishop
David Taylor

Introduction

About Us

We both became trainers when “chalk and talk” was still popular. Training was something that was done *to* you. It was essentially a passive process; the trainer knew best! Consequently the result was often something to be endured, and the best that could be said for it was that it was a break from work.

We suffered this approach as “victims” and as people who were expected to train in this style. We enjoyed neither experience, and met plenty of others who were also dissatisfied with this method of training. We felt instinctively that there had to be a better way; a way that encouraged *active* learning. The arrival of participative learning methods signaled this for us and we have been committed to developing activities this way ever since.

About Course Participants

In our experience—and there is a good body of theory to support it—adult learners must be motivated in order to learn. They need to be engaged actively in learning and be self-directed; less dependent on the trainer. They should be able to relate the learning to their own experience, needs and situation. Meeting these needs does not mean that participants will always enjoy every activity. However, a course may be remembered as enjoyable if the relevance of all its activities is clear and the learning environment is supportive.

It is important to recognize both the life- and the work experiences that people bring with them to training courses. This should be valued by the trainer, and all of the activities in this volume reflect a fundamental principle—that the group itself is a vital training resource.

About You

If you truly value your participants as a training resource, your training method and approach should demonstrate it. This is nowhere more true than in the field of interpersonal skills, with which this volume is concerned. There are two points to remember when using this volume: first, you must familiarize yourself with the material and think about how it can best be applied to your particular group; second, you should be the best possible role model of interpersonal skills.

You may be an experienced trainer, or a manager, or a trainer who is still new to participative methods. However, you will almost certainly have too little time to spend in mapping out training activities and deciding how they should be used. This volume is intended for you! Use our *Notes* (in the right-hand

columns) if they are helpful to you, but if you prefer to develop your own, feel free to do so.

About This Volume

In designing a volume such as this, which contains not only 50 activities but also guidance on how to use these activities we are, we believe, breaking new ground. The notes are extensive. This is not simply to save the trainer time but is a fundamental part of our philosophy. We have considerable evidence of participant dissatisfaction with training activities that have been insufficiently developed and explored. In our view any activity should include five main elements:

- establishing the context
- conducting the actual exercise
- "unpacking" participant experience of the exercise
- discussing the activity and highlighting the learning points
- considering how to apply the learning in real life.

The last three elements are often neglected, even omitted, which leaves participants wondering "What was all that about, then?" We have tried deliberately to avoid this common failure, and the *Notes* are the result.

This volume contains a wide variety of activities. They range from the simple and light-hearted to the complex and risky. Many different training methods are also used. You will find questionnaires, physical activities, games, role plays and simulations. In our view, a well-constructed course should contain a mixture of methods, and this volume reflects that philosophy.

Interpersonal skills necessarily involve the unpredictable. We may strive to improve them and to adopt good practice but when other people are involved we can never be entirely sure of the outcome. The notes and the handouts in this volume therefore tend to suggest questions and issues rather than to provide exact answers. The conclusions drawn by one group will often differ greatly from those of another, and yet the activity itself may be the same. You should not be surprised by this; the unpredictability can be, in itself, very rewarding for all concerned, if you have the courage to allow your group to take responsibility for their own learning. This can be risky and we hope that our notes will help to minimize some of these risks. Activities like these evolve; do not be afraid to put your own personal stamp on them. That is precisely what we have done in writing this volume!

About the Activities

Each activity is presented in a uniform way. The trainer is provided with the following:

- *Activity number and title.* The order of appearance in the volume is alphabetical by title.
- *Description.* A short outline of the activity.
- *Objectives.* What the activity is designed to achieve.
- *Participants.* Guidance on size and type of group.
- *Time required.* This is an estimate only, and timing will depend on the group and the depth to which you may wish to pursue learning points.
- *Resources needed.* For the sake of brevity, we have omitted the most important resource for each activity which is, as stated above, the group itself.
- *Method and notes.* The left-hand column is a step-by-step, at-a-glance guide to conducting the activity. The right-hand column provides guidance on timing, how to best use the activity, background information and suggested discussion points. In order to initiate the discussions we have provided, in many cases, some questions the trainer might ask.
- *Exercises.* These are in a form that can be readily photocopied. Exercises provide the focus for a specific aspect of group work within the main activity.
- *Handouts.* Again, these are in a form that can be readily photocopied. They provide a means for learning some of the more important objectives of the activity.
- *Observer sheets.* These are also in a form that can be readily photocopied. They normally supplement exercises.
- *Trainer's notes.* These notes provide either further background information or precise details of materials required for the activity. They are not intended for distribution.

Some last words on terminology. We have throughout referred to "the trainer." The approach advocated is more properly that of facilitator, but we have used the word "trainer" as this is more familiar. The word "exercise" is used consistently and purposely to refer to an activity within an activity. "Participant" is used to reflect our beliefs about the importance of participative (i.e. active) learning. We have used the convention "s/he" throughout and such terms as "Chairman," "Master copy" only where this is essential to avoid confusion or in a direct quote. Otherwise we have adopted terms that are non gender-specific.

About CCTV (Closed Circuit TV)

Activities 2, 38 and 39 in this volume suggest the use of CCTV as a powerful aid to learning. In order that it proves to be just that, and not the technical distraction/disaster it often turns out to be, we offer the following practical hints that are based on painful experience!

- If a technician is available, make sure s/he knows exactly when you propose to run your video session and how long you will require her/his services.

If a technician is not available (the usual situation) . . .

- Make sure (at the start of the day) that you know how the equipment is operated, that it has been connected properly and that it is actually working. Which channel does the monitor (TV) need to be set to in order to play back from the video recorder? *Try a dummy recording and play it back.*
- Sound is the worst distraction when it fails to work properly. Microphones that do not record, or—worse yet—that enhance the noise of airplanes and traffic are commonplace. Lapel microphones are better than free-standing ones, but they can also be a minefield, being prone to dead batteries, loose connections and broken clips! Turn down the volume control on the monitor (TV) when recording in order to avoid ear-splitting electronic shrieks.
- Check the length of videotape. Is it enough for all of your proposed recording? It is not unknown for a 30-minute tape to be supplied for interviews that may last for up to an hour.
- Investigate the pause button. How does it work and, just as important, how do you start the tape running again?
- Check how much time elapses between starting the machine and the start of acceptable recorded tape and sound. This may be as long as 10-15 seconds on some machines; long enough to miss a carefully-planned introduction!
- The equipment should be as unobtrusive as possible during the actual recording. Try not to fiddle with the camera(s) while recording.
- Role players should not be able to see themselves on the TV while recording is taking place—it can be extremely distracting.
- Finally, set the tape counter to zero before your first recording. Record (with reference to the tape counter) items of interest so that you can find them quickly later.

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Activity No.	Activity Title	Page No.	Icebreakers	Assertiveness	Behavior Analysis	Conflict	Decision Making	Delegation	Evaluation	Group Work	Leadership	Listening	Management	Motivation	Negotiation	Non-Verbal Communication	Oral Communication	Perception	Power and Influence	Presentation Skills	Problem Solving	Teamwork	Written Communication	Course Closures
1	A Timely Reminder	13							•															•
2	Actions Speak Louder	17														•								
3	Adjectival Alex	29	•																					
4	Against All Odds	33															•							
5	Are We Both OK?	37		•	•	•				•			•				•					•		
6	Belonging	47								•	•											•		
7	Circulating	53	•									•												
8	Course Contract	59	•			•				•				•								•		
9	Crossed Lines	63			•	•					•	•	•					•						
10	Crosstalk	73			•					•	•	•	•						•			•		
11	Don't Make an ASS of U and Me	79			•				•										•					
12	Down the Line	85			•	•	•	•			•			•					•					
13	Fact or Fiction?	89			•				•										•					
14	A Gift From the Group	97																					•	•

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15	Giving Feedback	101		•	•							•					•	•		•	•			
16	Hole in the Middle	109			•	•	•			•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•		
17	How Shall I Tell Them?	123										•	•			•	•		•	•		•		
18	I Wish You Hadn't Asked Me That!	131		•	•	•									•	•	•			•				
19	I Fear the Worst	139			•	•	•				•		•								•			
20	I'd Like to Know	145															•	•						
21	Is There Anybody There?	157										•												
22	It Looks Like This	167										•					•			•				
23	Just a Minute	177															•	•						
24	Know Your Audience	181															•	•				•		
25	Let Me Put That Another Way	187															•			•				
26	Let's Sum Up	193					•			•	•	•	•	•	•		•				•	•		
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30	Ouch!	245		•		•						•					•							
31	People and Places	253	•							•								•				•		
32	Perceptions	255			•				•	•								•						•
33	Pictures	263	•								•							•						
34	Re-entry	269							•				•	•							•			•
35	Receiving Criticism	275		•		•			•			•			•		•			•				
36	Reflections	285			•					•		•					•			•		•		
37	Self-disclosure	293								•		•						•		•		•		
38	Simulating a Meeting	303					•			•	•	•				•	•			•			•	
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40	Skillsquare	319	•	•								•		•			•							
41	Stick	329								•		•					•							
42	Team Challenge	333			•	•				•			•	•			•					•		•
43	Team Roles	349			•	•	•	•		•	•		•	•			•					•		•

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44	That's Not What I Said at All!	369								•		•					•		•			•		
45	Two Heads Are Better	373																			•			
46	Ups and Downs	379			•	•					•		•									•		
47	We Haven't Got Enough...	389			•	•				•	•		•								•			
48	What's Going to Happen?	399	•																					
49	Where Am I Now?	403							•															•
50	Why Don't You Say What You Mean?	409																						

Time Checklist

This checklist gives an approximate indication of the minimum time necessary to run each activity. The *actual* time will depend on size of group, length of time allowed for discussion and other variables which can occur during any course.

Up to one hour

A Timely Reminder
Actions Speak Louder
Adjectival Alex
Against All Odds
Circulating
Course Contract
Crossed Lines
Down the Line
Fact or Fiction?
A Gift From the Group
How Shall I Tell Them?
Is There Anybody There?
It Looks Like This
Just a Minute
My Interpersonal Style
People and Places
Pictures
Re-entry
Skillsquare
Stick
That's Not What I Said at All!
Two Heads Are Better
Ups and Downs
What's Going to Happen?
Where Am I Now?

Between one and two hours

Are We Both Ok?
Belonging
Crosstalk
Don't Make an ASS of U and ME
Giving Feedback
Hole in the Middle
I Wish You Hadn't Asked Me That!
Know Your Audience
Let Me Put That Another Way
Managing Meetings
Memory
Ouch!
Receiving Criticism
Reflections
Self-disclosure
Team Challenge
We Haven't Got Enough . . .
Why Don't You Say What You Mean?

Over two hours

I Fear the Worst
I'd Like to Know
Let's Sum Up
Perceptions
Simulating a Meeting
Simulating an Interview
Team Roles