

THE CREATIVE GORILLA #111

With the right factors in place you can make your workshops outstanding...

A Creative Approach to Away Days ...

"In the closing session, participants described it as the best away day they had ever experienced."

Manager, Government department



Surprise people

Would you like to make your next team away day really creative?

As you may know, I really love to see examples of people putting creativity in to action. This article describes an away day facilitated by a student (and fellow Gorilla) who attended the Open University Creativity and Innovation residential workshop and joined my group of Creative Gorillas.

She based the day on what she learned from our group, from her course material and from her own experience and creativity. She wrote the article for her in-house intranet site and I asked her if we could share it with other Gorillas.

This is a great example of how someone with limited experience of facilitation and creativity can produce a terrific outcome, using simple principles and relevant tools.

Away days generate mixed expectations. Some people want to address the nuts and bolts of delivery; others are focused on team cohesion; a few just welcome a change of scene.

When I undertook to plan the away day for our department, I felt it should be possible to address all of these, with some creativity and fun thrown in for good measure.

With help from my Open University course on Creativity, Innovation and Change, and thanks to the energetic participation of my colleagues, we exceeded expectations.

So how did we do it? Three simple rules stand out:

1) BUILD A CREATIVE CLIMATE

Being creative involves taking risks, being playful and subverting the rules. To enable people to unlock their creativity, it is essential to generate an atmosphere where they feel safe and supported by their colleagues. In our away day we used a range of technique to create the right climate:

1. We started by decorating the room with quotations about creativity, which helped get people into a creative mindset.
2. We used a range of energisers that made people move, talk and most importantly laugh. This created a sense of playfulness and broke down barriers between colleagues.
3. We surprised people. Whether it was making them lie down on the floor, draw images, or having a whole session delivered in verse, the events of the

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day challenged the normal way of doing business.

4. We kept sessions short and integrated fun techniques into the core business of the day, helping us to maintain the high energy levels needed for creative thinking.

2) DRAW OUT THE CREATIVITY IN EVERYONE

Everyone has the potential to generate creative ideas, but some people need more time to reflect, and may not volunteer their ideas immediately. We tried to draw out and value the contributions of everyone:

1. We involved the whole team from the planning stage. Virtually everyone in our 20-strong group was involved in facilitating or planning a session. This emphasised the valuable contribution that all team members could make to the away day.
2. We built in space for quiet reflection. Before gathering ideas from the group, we allowed time for people to collect their thoughts.
3. We gathered ideas from group members one-by-one. This gives each person time to hear and understand an idea, and also means that everyone is encouraged to participate.
4. We welcomed every idea. As soon as you start to criticise you inhibit creativity.
5. We made sure everyone was involved in the process of choosing and prioritising options, either through small group work or voting techniques. This ensured full buy in to the outcomes of each session.

3) MAINTAIN A CLEAR SENSE OF PURPOSE

Creativity is all very well, but people will quickly switch off if they don't understand the point of an exercise or if they can't see the direction of travel. By combining a clear structure and direction with creative approaches we can generate innovative and useable real world solutions. For our team this resulted in a four step process:

1. First we explored our operating environment, in particular the key external forces that influence our chance of success.
2. We then collectively generated a single vision for our diverse team (spread across four cities, and representing four UK government departments).
3. We spent considerable time thinking about how to achieve our vision. This included a brainstorming session which generated nearly 150 ideas, the most innovative of which we explored in detail. We also debated how we could work better, faster and cleverer through a range of sessions tailored to team needs.
4. Finally, we identified priority areas, and set clear action points to take forward the away day outcomes.

SO

Each event is different, but these guidelines show how easy it is to begin the process of unlocking the creativity that lies in every team and individual.

The next challenge is how to sustain this creative team dynamic now we are back at our desks. Given the energy with which the team embraced the away day, and the practical actions that we generated, I am confident that our creativity will

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continue to flourish, enabling us to deliver even better results on the ground. Watch this space!

ACTION

If you have a workshop soon, consider how these ideas might help you. How might you continue creativity at your desks?

TO CLOSE

I think the best way to finish is with another quote from the facilitator:

“In the closing session participants described it as the best away day they had ever experienced. We left with a clear vision for the coming year, a list of priority actions to take forward, and most of all, the belief that by combining our formidable strengths we could really change the world for the better.”

I hope this will encourage you to facilitate an event for your team. Please contact me if you need any advice.

Have interesting meetings this week...

John Brooker, *Facilitate, Innovate, Transform.*



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