

YES! AND... CREATIVE GORILLA # 129

Need to make a demotivated team more positive...?

Elicit Issues Safely ...

"I rant, therefore I am." Dennis Miller, Comedian



"Rant in the rain"

Do you need to elicit issues safely?

When you hold a meeting it can be important to let people discuss their work problems and frustrations. However, if a lot of people state their concerns to the whole group it can consume time and create a negative mood in the meeting.

How can you effectively let people vent their frustrations and create a positive mood in the meeting, quickly? Here is a technique I have adapted from one called "Moan, Moan, Moan". I call it the "Constructive Rant."

I use it a great deal when I facilitate because it is enjoyable for participants and it works. Typically, I use it at the start of a meeting to create a "platform", a starting point from which the group can move on. I have used it with group sizes from 5 to 90 and results have ranged from good to excellent. Without tempting fate, there is no down side that I have found, unless it rains.

Instructions (This example is based on a team building session)

Pair people up (If you have an odd three people left over, it is still possible for them to do Constructive Rant, but you will need to allow extra time) and brief them as follows [I

recommend you write a summary of this on a flipchart to make it easier to follow]:

- You are going to go for a walk
- Whilst you are walking, one of you will speak for three minutes about whatever irritates, annoys and frustrates you about working on this team. [It is important that you phrase your instructions carefully so that people rant about the correct topic]
- Whilst one of you is speaking, the other person should not interrupt. They must listen and can say only, "What else?" if the speaker stops talking for longer than ten seconds
- The listener will keep time and bring the rant gently to a halt after three minutes
- Repeat the exercise with the second person speaking and return towards the meeting room (to reduce the walk back!)
- When you have finished speaking, come back in to the room and remain in your pair; we will instruct you on what to do

When they return to the room, give each person a Post It Note and a flipchart marker. Brief them as follows:

- I would like you now to ask your partner the question, "So what is it that you want to happen?" For example, your partner might say, " I want people to talk face to face more"
- If your partner wants more than one thing, ask them what is most important. [If you have fewer than eight people you can give them each two Post It notes]
- Write down the answer on the Post It note using the marker pen

Give them five minutes to complete this. When they have finished, ask them to bring their notes and put them on a flipchart.

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Read aloud each note and ensure that all understand it. There is no need to categorise them, but it is useful to point out similarities, especially if there are a lot. Now explain:

What we have done here is to have you discuss your issues, identify what it is that you want and share it with everybody. This provides us with a starting point for enhancing the team's performance. Let's move on to the next topic, which in Solutions Focus is normally the Future Perfect.

SO

What insights have I obtained from doing this exercise many times?

- The technique is quick and easy to use
- Allowing people to vent their concerns puts most in to a much better state
- Pairing people prevents the negative thoughts "contaminating" the whole group and is much quicker than a whole group discussion
- Talking for three minutes enables people to order and articulate their thoughts, sometimes for the first time
- Being listened to for three minutes, uninterrupted by another person, is rare in business. This can help people to feel they have been heard
- Less assertive people often welcome the opportunity to have their say
- A walk is not essential but I have found it is the most positive way to do this exercise, giving fresh air and privacy
- Walking side by side is also less confrontational than a normal face to face conversation and seems to enable less assertive people to be more open
- You can coach individuals with the technique

ACTION

The next time you have the prospect of a negative meeting, consider trying this approach.

TO CLOSE

I have been without usable broadband for two weeks and have spent an age on the telephone talking to several agents who are never the same, nor who work in the same centre. Inevitably, I have sometimes begun to rant as they ask again, "So can you explain what the problem is?"

Not once have any of them asked me, "So what is it that you want to happen... Mr Brooker?" Yes, they might argue that asking me that would produce the retort that I want my broadband fixed, but actually what I really want is that one person take responsibility for the issue.

So I end up having the conversation in a very negative mood, despite all the apologies for the poor service; just a thought for any customer service people out there.

Have an outstanding week.

John Brooker | Facilitate, Innovate, Transform.



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