

# **WORKSHOP DESIGN**

**BY**

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## **WORKSHOP DESIGN**

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### **PEOPLE \* SYSTEMS POTENTIAL**

Niela Miller founded People \* Systems Potential to assist individuals and organizations fulfill their potential as well-functioning systems with the capacity for learning, growth and change. We provide a variety of consulting and training services aimed at the "people skills" side of life and offer both public and on-site workshops and seminars in personal and professional development as well as clinical experiential and expressive therapies for individuals and couples.

## INTRODUCTION

Designing a learning experience for adults requires a specific set of skills which are separate from the subject matter being taught. This learning experience can be referred to as a workshop, training program or seminar and is characterized by the active participation of attendees. We will refer to it as a workshop in this manual.

Its setting may be at a conference, school, corporation, or any place where people gather to learn. It may be executed by one person or a team who will be referred to as facilitators although their role designation may be presenter, teacher, manager or therapist.

## PRINCIPLES

A detailed set of principles underlying this design process will be presented later in this manual. Here are a few general principles:

1. In adult education, learners are the ones primarily responsible for their learning and the facilitator is a guide in acquiring the skills needed.
2. Good learning design is based on experience, is flexible, is balanced between structure and flow, is interactive and pays attention to the whole person (physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual).
3. Satisfying adult learning experiences generally take place in a supportive, relaxed, informal atmosphere.

## MAIN STEPS

STEP	ACTION
1	FIND OUT WHAT ATTENDEES NEED AND EXPECT
2	CONVEY YOUR GOALS AND PLAN FOR WORKSHOP
3	PRESENT GROUP BUILDING AND SUPPORT EXERCISES
4	PRESENT INITIAL EXPERIENCE
5	SHARE LAST EXPERIENCE WITH TOTAL GROUP
6	PROCEED WITH MAIN BODY OF WORKSHOP
7	GIVE AND RECEIVE FEEDBACK AND EVALUATION
8	OPTION: BUILD ON PRIOR LEARNING
9	COMPLETE UNFINISHED BUSINESS

## IN ADDITION...

**GUIDELINES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE EFFECTIVE FACILITATOR**  
WILL BE FOUND ON THE LAST PAGE OF THIS BOOK.

## WORKSHOP DESIGN

## WORKSHEET

TITLE		
GOALS		
PLAN	<u>PRIOR TO WORKSHOP</u>	<u>AFTER STEP 1</u>
EXERCISES	<u>GROUP BUILDING AND SUPPORT</u>  <u>INITIAL EXPERIENCE</u>  <u>MAIN BODY</u>	
EVALUATION QUESTIONS		
CLOSURE ACTIVITIES		

## STEP 1: FIND OUT WHAT ATTENDEES NEED AND EXPECT

### PURPOSE

In order to match your design with the learning needs of your attendees, you must have some basic information which will help you to gear your exercises, input, and sequencing to your learners. In some cases, you can get some of this information prior to the workshop. Here, we will approach it as though that were not the case.

### ACTIVITY

If group is large (over fifteen)....Choose some categories to respond to with a show of hands. Find out whether there are exceptions. In this way, visible data is available to all and attendees with common interests can identify each other.

If group is small..... Ask attendees to introduce themselves and make a brief statement about what they want out of the workshop. You might ask them to mention what types of meetings they lead or are interested in leading.

### EXAMPLE

#### *How To Run Effective Meetings*

"HOW MANY OF YOU ARE CURRENTLY RUNNING MEETINGS?"

"HOW MANY OF YOU WOULD LIKE TO DO THIS BUT HAVEN'T YET?"

"HOW MANY OF YOU ARE FROM CORPORATE SETTINGS....  
NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS?"

"WHO ELSE IS HERE AND NOT COVERED BY THESE  
CATEGORIES?"

"CALL OUT SOME TYPICAL PROBLEM AREAS FOR US TO  
LOOK AT"

### ASSIGNMENT

1. Make a list of what you want to know about your attendees which might influence your design.

**STEP 2: CONVEY YOUR GOALS AND PLANS FOR THE WORKSHOP****PURPOSE**

You cannot successfully design a workshop unless you have goals which are clear and realistic based on the needs of attendees, the requirements of the situation (such as a curriculum), and the time permitted. By sharing your intentions, you give attendees a chance to adjust their expectations or to influence your plan so that the experience is mutually satisfying.

**ACTIVITY**

Share your goals for the workshop. Let attendees know what they can expect from you and what you expect from them. If certain plans are inflexible, let them know. Also tell them how Step 1 has influenced your design. Announce rules such as no smoking.

**EXAMPLE*****How To Run  
Effective  
Meetings***

"I came here prepared to identify with you the problems you are having (or might have) running effective meetings and to present some alternative ways for coping with typical situations. Also, I'll provide you with a bibliography.

From the information you've given me (Step 1), your main problems seem to be in the area of responding to the group dynamics, so I'll concentrate on that.

Today will be spent on developing good listening and communication skills for giving and receiving feedback at meetings.

You can expect a coffee break mid-morning. "

**ASSIGNMENT**

1. Write down your goals for the workshop.
2. Write down steps in a temporary plan.
3. Write down rules or norms you wish to establish.
4. Write down expectations you have of yourself or your attendees.

Remember that your plan may change when you meet attendees and do step 1.

**STEP 3: PRESENT GROUP BUILDING AND SUPPORT EXERCISES****PURPOSE**

To establish an atmosphere of cooperation, trust, respect, and ease, it is often necessary to help attendees become acquainted, share some feelings and data about themselves and their experience with the subject matter. More learning can take place when people recognize each other as potential resources and are relaxed.

**ACTIVITY**

If group is large...Ask attendees to form small groups of four to six. These can be random or based on common interest. If it doesn't matter to you, give them the choice. These can be "home groups" to which they return periodically to share tasks, feelings, ideas, etc.

If group is small.... Provide opportunity for sharing first impressions, questions, feelings, introductions.

**EXAMPLE*****How To Run  
Effective  
Meetings***

"Take a few minutes to get acquainted. Share with your group the kinds of meetings with which you're typically involved. What do you like about your meetings?"

**ASSIGNMENT**

1. Write down what types of "home groups" you want to form or the choices you want to give attendees.
2. Write down a few ideas for what you might ask them to share.
3. Decide whether this group will meet just once or at various times during workshop.

**STEP 4: PRESENT INITIAL EXPERIENCE****PURPOSE**

The initial experience helps in several ways:

- It involves the attendee on a personal level which creates interest in what is to follow
- You begin to establish some norms for working toward the goals of the workshop
- The participants begin to discover their inner resources and to take responsibility for their learning.
- Some ideas may begin to form which are applicable for later learning.

**ACTIVITY**

Give the attendees something to do which taps into their personal experience, is in some way related to the subject matter, and is shareable with others.

**EXAMPLE*****How To Run  
Effective  
Meetings***

"Close your eyes. Recall a meeting which you thought was a disaster and another one which was great. Meetings use all your senses. If you can't remember a specific meeting right now, imagine a typical meeting of each sort...What elements were different in each situation?

Write down the differences you perceive. Share with the group."

**ASSIGNMENT**

1. Choose an initial experience which you think would reflect the purpose as stated above.
2. Write down what directions you would give.



## STEP 5: SHARE LAST EXPERIENCE WITH TOTAL GROUP

### PURPOSE

Here you begin to establish yourself in your role of educator as well as facilitator of a process. You stress what is relevant in light of your goals. You also establish the opportunity for attendees to begin to learn from each others' experiences and to see the value of personal experience for learning. You help attendees focus on the important elements of the workshop.

### ACTIVITY

Bring the whole group together. Ask them to share what was important to them or what they learned from this initial experience.

### EXAMPLE

#### *How To Run Effective Meetings*

"Let's identify the characteristics in each type of meeting experience you thought of." (List on newsprint)

#### Good meeting:

Leader is relaxed and well prepared  
Agenda is clear  
Everyone contributes  
Decisions get made

#### Bad meeting:

Dominated by one person  
Attendees compete for attention or are apathetic  
No discussion is allowed.

"We've been conditioned with two basic meeting models, neither of which may be relevant to current needs: the traditional meeting (leader makes all decisions) and parliamentary procedures (rigid rules and rituals) enforced by power figure."

### ASSIGNMENT

1. Write down several questions to ask group which will help attendees pick out what is relevant for the learning ahead of them.
2. Write down what points you want to make based on guessed responses.

## STEP 6: PROCEED WITH MAIN BODY OF WORKSHOP

### PURPOSE

You are now ready to fulfill your learning goals with appropriate activity while attending to the stated needs of attendees to which you have agreed to respond. In other words, you are carrying out your contract.

### PRINCIPLES

Good workshops allow for flexibility and change.

Both the facilitator's and the attendees' needs must be taken into account.

Learning best takes place in a supportive, relaxed, open atmosphere suited to the age and experience of the attendees.

Learners can take a lot of responsibility for their learning if they are helped with the skills for learnings.

Learners usually learn more from doing than from listening or watching. Include all three if possible.

Good learning is interactive not just between facilitator and attendees, but among attendees.

Learners need time to reflect and assimilate

A balance should be provided between stillness and activity, structure and flow, providing information (teaching) and bringing forth material from attendees (educating), thinking and feeling.

Evaluation and feedback are essential parts of the learning experience.

### EXAMPLE

#### *How To Run Effective Meetings*

Depending on what came out of the initial experience, the first exercise might be based on learning some *listening skills*. Facilitator might *demonstrate* this, then ask attendees to *practice* in pairs and *give feedback* to each other. Next have them *repeat the exercise* with someone else, then *share their learnings* in large group and *evaluate*.

### ASSIGNMENT

1. Brainstorm lots of ideas for fulfilling goals and try them out on someone else, if possible.
2. Write down a sequence of learning which fulfills stated principles.

**STEP 7: GIVE AND RECEIVE FEEDBACK AND EVALUATION****PURPOSE**

It is important now to tie together the experiences of the workshop and to draw out the learnings which have taken place. It is also necessary to know how the process has worked for attendees, what remains unclear, what helped or hindered the learning so that you can respond appropriately with either more information, more practice, more sharing time, etc. to fulfill goals of workshop.

**ACTIVITY**

Find out what attendees have learned about the subject which they either did not know or were not clear about before, and what value it has for them. Encourage them to evaluate the workshop and your performance in the light of the stated goals. Attendees might also want feedback from you and each other.

**EXAMPLE*****How To Run  
Effective  
Meetings***

"Now evaluate the exercises on the basis of what you have learned about yourself in doing them; in this case the skills of learning how to listen in order to give and receive feedback effectively (one of the stated goals in Step 2). Find out what areas of this skill are still weak for you and what you need more practice in."

**ASSIGNMENT**

1. Write down some questions to ask attendees which enable them to evaluate their learning in the light of their own learning needs.
2. Write down some questions which will enable attendees to evaluate the workshop in accordance with the stated goals.
3. If you want feedback about your performance, devise questions which give you the information you want.

**STEP 8: OPTION: BUILD ON PRIOR LEARNING****PURPOSE**

If time permits, it's a good idea to strengthen and solidify what has been learned thus far in the workshop. It also provides an opportunity for attendees to take more responsibility to further their own learning experience and to use each other as resources.

**ACTIVITY**

Send attendees back to "home groups" to try out ideas they have for further practice and experience with the areas of learning they need to strengthen. Each person in the group can receive feedback and ideas from the others as well.

**EXAMPLE*****How To Run  
Effective  
Meetings***

"You have an opportunity now to practice the skills we have introduced. Concentrate on the skill area which has been weakest for you ." For instance:

ACTIVE LISTENING  
ENCOURAGING BALANCED PARTICIPATION  
GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK  
HAVING A CLEAR AGENDA

**ASSIGNMENT**

1. Write down the instructions you would give to attendees which would enable them to take responsibility for strengthening skill areas in their group.
2. Find a way to reflect the feedback you heard (step 7) and incorporate it into your sanctioning process.

**STEP 9: COMPLETE UNFINISHED BUSINESS****PURPOSE**

Both you and attendees should feel, when you leave, that you can say goodbye to this experience satisfied that you've done what you could to achieve the stated goals and to express reactions to the experience. It is also the time to summarize what has been learned and its value to all, in addition to whatever possibilities exist for next steps or additional learning in this subject matter or related areas.

**ACTIVITY****Fulfillment of learning objectives**

Ask attendees to summarize what they've learned in short phrases or words. Write these on flip charts. Relate to stated goals whether they have been fulfilled or not.

**Applications**

Ask how attendees want to make use of what they have learned both professionally and personally.

**Problems**

Find out what is still unclear, needs more work. You won't have time to do anything about it now, but at least they have time to make explicit statements or ask questions which will help them figure out how to fill in the gaps later.

**Responses to workshop design and facilitator**

In Step 7, the emphasis in the feedback was on the particular learning which was taking place plus an interim check-in about how the workshop was going. Now you want to get more substantial feedback on any aspect of the workshop about which attendees have thoughts or feelings. This helps them to leave the experience feeling more finished and it helps you improve your design next time.

**STEP 9: COMPLETE UNFINISHED BUSINESS (Continued)****EXAMPLE*****How To Run  
Effective  
Meetings*****Here are some possible closure activities:**

Write a letter to a friend or colleague summarizing your experience with the above listed activities. Read to group.

Make a graphic representation of your learning. Share with entire group.

Discuss each activity point with "home group" and share, through a representative, with the entire group.

Make an outline for a design of a meeting which you will chair, incorporating what you have learned here.

**ASSIGNMENT**

1. Tailor your closure design to your appraisal of what you and attendees need by way of evaluation and finishing up. Write down the specific points you'd like to have covered.
2. An alternative is to have a written evaluation form which attendees fill out and return to you before they leave. However, there should always be an opportunity for them to share feedback in the group if they want to.
3. Make sure to hand out any materials you have brought for attendees such as a bibliography plus your publicity materials, if appropriate.

## GUIDELINES FOR THE EFFECTIVE FACILITATOR

Convey your enthusiasm for your subject and the process; it's catching!

Be present and available to attendees. Welcome feedback and contact. Stay focussed on whoever is speaking to you. If you are busy at the moment, state this and agree to be available at a later time.

Be a role model; as much as possible, be with attendees as you would like them to be with you and each other.

Symbolically, keep your finger on the pulse of the group; watch the noise level, the amount of body movement, the amount of eye contact and so forth. All these signals can give you information about when to stay with an activity and when to move on. Attend to your body as a barometer for how the group energy is going; if you feel low energy, others are probably feeling it too and something different needs to happen. If you are out of breath, rushing to cram things in, your attendees will also feel pressured or rushed and could build up resistance to the activity. Slow down!

Be aware of how much you are talking in relation to attendees' "air time". If there is a great discrepancy, bring it more into balance.

Attend to the physical comfort of attendees: ventilation, arrangement and kind of furniture, refreshments, etc., all affect how positive the experience is.

Ask for help when you need it and admit to not knowing something rather than bluffing.

Be flexible in your design so that you can change what is not working. You will know by energy level (discussed above) or by confusion and resistance.

Be supportive and positive in your transactions with attendees.

## RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE EFFECTIVE FACILITATOR

Set goals.

Assess needs of attendees.

Provide appropriate environment and materials.

Design workshop and/or have group help you create a plan to meet goals.

Clarify roles; yours and theirs.

Clarify any rules, norms, and/or expectations.

Take care of problems as they arise by bringing problems to attention of group, changing your behavior in relation to group, enlisting aid of group in making necessary change, changing the activity, speaking to a person who is troubled.

Honor your contract with the group and be yourself as fully as possible.