

# Tips for Using Experiential Games

## Understand what a Training Game is

A training game is a way of providing participants with a fun experience from which they can learn more about themselves and their interaction with their world. The game provides a safe environment to observe and participate. It is the natural way to learn. Young animals as well as children use games as a primary learning tool. As adults, learning by experience and experimentation is still every bit as relevant. A game has the power to concentrate real life issues into a compact activity devoid of the detail that often mask what is really going on.

## Understand that Games are Metaphors

WorldGAMES training games are powerful metaphors. That means, like stories, they can and do mean different things to different people. The task of the facilitator is to ensure that all participants get the message in the game that is relevant to themselves and translate that message back to the workplace. In other words, the purpose of the game is to have participants see things differently and as a result positively change some element of their workplace behaviour.

## Facilitate what happens in the Game, not what you want to happen

You will be using the game in your training because you have a learning outcome in mind. In the majority of cases you will get this outcome. However, you will frequently get additional outcomes, and sometimes even very different ones, too. The key to successful games facilitation is to watch what happens very carefully and debrief the game according to the outcomes that happened not those that you thought would happen. Participants will hate you if you tell them what they **should** have done or **should** have experienced.

## Allow the Game to work

All WorldGAMES games work. They go through a rigorous testing and refinement process before they come to you. The power of the games is that they will unfold differently every time and produce the learning outcome that the group needs. This can be spoiled by a facilitator trying to control the game too tightly. Relax, allow the game to work for itself, become the game tour guide not the game controller.

## Have fun

Participants learn more easily and deeply when they are having fun. They will also be more forgiving of any mistakes you may make as facilitator if they are having fun. So keep your facilitation light, interesting and, above all, fun. If you have fun, so will they.

## Draw out experiences

Games are very different from the normal "talk and chalk" learning at schools and lectures. The best learning is achieved by asking participants what happened in the game for them and what they learned from it. This makes the learning totally relevant to them. If you are in telling mode, they may well listen less and be less involved. Assist their learning by asking questions to draw out their own experiences in the game and how these are relevant to them.

## **Ask plenty of Questions**

Whenever you feel like telling the group, or individuals, what happened or what they learned, stop, think and reframe what you were about to say as a question. It will draw people in, provided you make it safe for them. So ...

## **Honour the experience in the room**

Whatever a participants experience was, it was true for them. Use their experience to lead them to the learning. If they are making excuses for their behaviour you may need to coach them carefully past this barrier. Whatever you do ...

## **Avoid making participants feel wrong**

Few people enjoy failure and negative feelings can obstruct the learning process. Keep the game light and fun. Ensure that they feel like winners because they participated, had fun and learned something valuable.

## **Follow the Script**

The script has been developed with plenty of thought and care to make facilitation easy. Each word has often been carefully selected and refined. Please use the script.

## **Use both Verbal and Written Instructions and Demonstrate the Game as shown**

Individuals use one of three key representational systems to learn. Use their preferred system and the participant will learn easily. Roughly 45% of people prefer to see what they are learning; 40% prefer to "learn on the job" or do it for themselves; and only 15% prefer to hear what they are learning. WorldGAMES activities are carefully designed to appeal to all three key systems. So when the script calls for written rules, verbal instruction and a demonstration, please use all three. As a general rule it is best to give verbal instruction first, demonstrate second and give the rules out last, otherwise some participants will be reading and miss the other methods.

## **The Power of Experiential Learning**

Recent statistics (as set out in *The Learning Revolution* by Dryden and Voss) suggest we learn about 10% of what we read, 15% of what we hear but 85% of what we experience for ourselves. This goes much further than just being a result of appealing to all learning preferences. Games are powerful experience anchors. This means that the participant is much more likely to recall the experience of a game when confronted with the issue they were learning about than they are to remember text or visual references. In turn this means they are much more likely to put the learning into practice.

## **About Debriefing**

Debriefing is the key to the learning experience. Most participants will not see the effect of their action in the game until you draw it out from them. Still fewer participants will immediately draw the link between their behaviour in the game and what they do in the workplace. If you are not experienced at debriefing games, follow these simple rules:

## Debriefing Rules

- Use the individual debrief sheets first. They will help participants note down what really happened for them.
- Get participants to discuss in their teams, or in small groups, what happened in the game, what they learned and how the learning applies in the workplace.
- When debriefing all participants together, draw out their experiences by asking open questions.
- Never tell participants what they experienced - you cannot know what happened inside someone else.
- Get participants to tell you what they learned.
- Guide them to tell you the relevance of what they learned to the workplace.
- Use the debriefing notes in the Facilitators Guide as guidelines not as a manual to be followed exactly. Adapt the ideas to what really happened in each game and what is really happening in the workplace. All circumstances will differ.

## If you make a mistake at any time ...

Admit it. Participants are much more likely to forgive you for being fallible than they are if you try and cover it up.

## Be Open. Be Honest

You will get the best results if participants are open and honest with you. Be prepared to lead by being open and honest yourself.

## Action Plans

It is always a good idea to get participants to document what they are going to do differently as a result of any training. This can be done as a group flipchart, individual action sheet or a verbal commitment to a colleague or "buddy".

## Frame Up

WorldGAMES always sets a tight context for training. We get three agreements up front. Be willing to participate, be willing to take responsibility for your own outcomes and behaviour, be willing to learn.

Once you have agreement to these three, it is important to address the unspoken questions in participants minds. The most important is to cover is **Why?** are we using a training game. (e.g. because it is a proven, safe and natural way to learn). Participants will also need to know **What?** do you want me to do? **How?** do I do it? And a range of **What If?** types of questions. These are generally covered in the script.

**If in doubt ...** Contact WorldGAMES by phone, fax or e-mail.

Above all remember to:

**Keep it simple, keep it fun, enjoy yourself and link the learning back to the workplace.**