



Coaching skills handout

Activists

Activists learn best from activities where:-

- There are new experiences / problems / opportunities from which to learn.
- They can engross themselves in short 'here and now' activities such as business games, competitive teamwork tasks, role playing exercises.
- There is excitement / drama / crises and things chop and change with a range of diverse activities to tackle.
- They have a lot of the limelight / high visibility, i.e. they can 'chair' meetings, lead discussions, give presentations.
- They are allowed to generate ideas without constraints of policy, structure or feasibility.
- They are thrown in at the deep end with a task they think is difficult, i.e. When set a challenge with inadequate resources and adverse conditions.
- They are involved with other people, i.e. bouncing ideas off them, solving problems as part of a team.
- It is appropriate to 'have a go'.

Activists learn least from, and may react against, activities where:-

- Learning involves a passive role, i.e. listening to lectures, monologues, explanations, statements of how things should be done, reading, watching.
- They are asked to stand back and not be involved.
- They are required to assimilate, analyse and interpret lots of 'messy' data.
- They are required to engage in solitary work, i.e. reading, writing, thinking on their own.
- They are asked to assess beforehand what they will learn, and to appraise afterwards what they have learned.

- They are offered statements they see as 'theoretical', i.e. explanations of cause or background.
- They are asked to repeat essentially the same activity over and over again, i.e. when practising.
- They have precise instructions to follow with little room for manoeuvre.
- They are asked to do a thorough job, i.e. attend to detail, tie up loose ends, dot the 'i's' and cross the 't's'.

To strengthen the Activist Style

1. Do something new, i.e. something you have never done before, at least once a week. Visit a part of the organisation you have neglected, go jogging, wear something to work one day, read an unfamiliar newspaper, change the layout of your furniture etc.
2. Practice initiating conversations especially small talk with strangers. At large gatherings, conferences or parties force yourself to initiate and sustain conversations.
3. Deliberately fragment your day by chopping and changing between diverse activities at intervals.
4. Force yourself into the limelight. Volunteer whenever possible to chair meetings or give presentations. When you attend a meeting set yourself the challenge of making a substantial contribution within ten minutes of the start of the meeting.
5. Practice thinking aloud and on your feet. Set yourself a problem and bounce ideas off a colleague and see if you can generate 50 ideas in ten minutes. Get some colleagues to join you in the game where you give each other topics and have to give an impromptu speech lasting 5 minutes.

Pragmatists

Pragmatists learn best from activities where:

- There is an obvious link between the subject matter and a problem or opportunity on the job.
- They are shown techniques for doing things with obvious practical advantages, i.e. how to save time, how to make a good impression, how to deal with awkward people.
- They have the chance to try out and practice techniques With coaching / feedback from a credible expert, i.e. someone who is successful and can use the techniques themselves.
- They are exposed to a model they can emulate, i.e. a respected boss, a demonstration from someone with a proven track record, lots of examples /anecdotes, a film showing how it's done.
- They are given techniques currently applicable to their job.
- They are given immediate opportunities to implement what they have learned.
- There is a high face validity in the learning activity, i.e. a good simulation, 'real' problems.
- They can concentrate on practical issues, i.e. drawing up action plans with an obvious end product, suggesting short cuts, giving tips.

Pragmatists learn least from, and may react against, activities where:-

- The learning is not related to an immediate need they recognise / they cannot see an immediate relevance / practical benefit.
- Organisers of the learning, or the event itself, seem distant from reality, i.e. 'ivory towered', all theory and general principles, pure 'chalk and talk'.
- There is no practice or clear guidelines on how to do it.
- They feel that people are going round in circles and not getting anywhere.
- There are political, managerial or personal obstacles to implementation.
- There is no apparent reward from the learning activity, i.e. more sales, shorter meetings, higher bonus, promotion.

Activities to strengthen the Pragmatist Style

1. Collect techniques, i.e. practical ways of doing things. The techniques can be about anything which is potentially useful to you, ego critical path analysis or cost benefit analysis.

2. In meetings and discussion of any kind, concentrate on producing action plans. Make it a rule never to leave a meeting without a list of actions to be carried out.
3. Make opportunities to experiment with some of your new found techniques. Try them out in practice. Experiment in routine settings with people whose aid and support you can enlist.
4. Study techniques that other people use successfully and then model yourself on them.
5. Subject yourself to scrutiny from 'experts' so that they can watch your technique and give you feedback.
6. Tackle a 'do-it-yourself project.

Reflectors

Reflectors learn best from activities where:-

- They are allowed or encouraged to watch / chew over activities.
- They are able to stand back from events and listen / observe, i.e. observing a group at work, taking a back seat in a meeting, watching a film or video.
- They are allowed to think before acting, to assimilate before commenting, i.e. time to prepare, a chance to read in advance a brief giving background data.
- They can carry out some painstaking research, i.e. investigate, assemble information, probe to get to the bottom of things.
- They have the opportunity to review what has happened, what they have learned.
- They are asked to produce carefully considered analyses and reports.
- They are helped to exchange views with other people without danger, i.e. by prior agreement, within a structured learning experience.
- They can reach a decision in their own time without pressure and tight deadlines.

Reflectors learn least from, and may react against, activities where:-

- They are 'forced' into the limelight, i.e. to act as leader / chairperson, to role play in front of on-lookers.
- They are involved in situations which require action without planning.
- They are pitched into doing something without warning, i.e. to produce an instant reaction, to produce an off-the-top-of-the-head idea.
- They are given insufficient data on which to base a conclusion.
- They are given cut and dried instructions on how things should be done.
- They are worried by time pressures or rushed from one activity to another.
- In the interest of expediency they have to make short cuts or do a superficial job.

To Strengthen the Reflector Style

1. Practice observing, especially at meetings where there are agenda items that do not directly involve you. Study people's behaviour. Keep records about who does most talking, who interrupts whom, what

triggers disagreements, how often the chairperson summarises and so on. Also study non-verbal behaviour. When do people lean forward and lean back? Count how many times people emphasise a point with a gesture. When do people fold their arms, look at their watches, chew their pencils and so on.

2. Keep a diary and each evening write an account of what happened during the day. Reflect on the day's events and see if you can draw any conclusions from them.
3. Practice reviewing after a meeting or event of some kind. Go back over the sequence of events identifying what went well and what could have gone better.
4. Give yourself something to research, something that requires painstaking gathering of data from different sources. Spend a few hours in your local reference library.
5. Practice producing highly polished pieces of writing. Write essays, a report or a paper about something. When you have written it put it aside for a week then return to it and do a substantial rewrite.
6. Practice drawing up lists for and against a particular course of action. Take a contentious issue and produce balanced arguments from both points of view.
7. Whenever you are with people who want to rush into action, caution them to consider alternatives and anticipate the consequences.

Theorists

Theorists learn best from activities where:-

- What is being offered is part of a system, model, concept, theory.
- They have time to explore methodically the associations and interrelationships between ideas, events and situations.
- They have the chance to question and probe the basic methodology, assumptions or logic behind something, i.e. by taking part in a question and answer session, by checking a paper for inconsistencies.
- They are intellectually stretched, i.e. by analysing a complex situation, being tested in a tutorial session, by teaching high calibre people who ask searching questions.
- They are in structured situations with a clear purpose.
- They can listen to or read about ideas and concepts that emphasise rationality or logic.
- They can analyse and then generalise the reasons for success or failure.
- They are offered interesting ideas and concepts even though they are not immediately relevant
- They are required to understand and participate in complex situations.

Theorists learn least from, and may react against, activities where:-

- They are pitchforked into something without a context or apparent purpose.
- They have to participate in situations emphasising emotions and feelings.
- They're involved in unstructured activities where ambiguity and uncertainty are high, i.e. with open-ended problems, on sensitive training.
- They are asked to act or decide without a basis in policy, principle or concept
- They are faced with a hotchpotch of alternative / contradictory / techniques / methods without exploring any in depth, i.e. as on a 'once over lightly' course.
- They doubt that the subject matter is methodologically sound, i.e. where questionnaires haven't been validated, where there aren't any statistics to support an argument.
- They find the subject matter platitudinous, shallow or gimmicky.
- They feel themselves out of tune with other participants.

Activities to develop the Theorist Style

1. Read something 'heavy' and thought provoking for at least 20 minutes every day. After you have read it try to summarise what you have read in your own words.
2. Practice spotting inconsistencies / weaknesses in other people's arguments. Go through reports highlighting inconsistencies. Analyse organisation charts to discover overlaps and conflicts. Take two newspapers of different persuasions and regularly do a comparative analysis of the differences in their points of view.
3. Take a complex situation and analyse it to pinpoint why it developed the way it did, what could have been done differently and at what stage. The situations may be historical, from current affairs or something you have been involved in personally.
4. Collect other peoples' theories, hypotheses and explanation about events. Try to understand the underlying assumptions about each theory and see if you can group theories together.
5. Practice structuring situations so that they are orderly and more certain to proceed in the way you predict.
6. Practice asking probing questions, the sort of questions that get to the bottom of things. Refuse to be fobbed off with platitudes or vague answers.