

63 Jolts

Overview

Jolts are quick, dramatic exercises that surprise participants about something they normally take for granted or for which they hold untested assumptions. They are great segues into serious conversations. (See Chapter 32 in Thiagi's *Design Your Own Games and Activities* for several examples.)

Procedure

1. Pick a hot topic for which you want to elicit strong emotions. Arenas include:

Safety	Teamwork	Process Improvement
Diversity	Change	Self-Responsibility
Communication	Customer Service	Strategic Planning

2. Consider three ways to “jolt” participants. One is to confront them with information that surprises them. (For example, 90 percent of all employees who are fired are terminated because of poor interpersonal skills.) A second way is to ask participants to do something and observe the result and discuss its implications. (For example, asking a participant to cross his arms and then re-cross them the opposite way will seem uncomfortable even though about half the audience will find the “re-cross” to be perfectly comfortable.) A third way is to ask participants to watch you say, show, or do something for which the result is unexpected. (For example, demonstrating that a simple word like RUN can be used to mean over ten different actions.)
3. Invite participants to react to the “jolt.” Be careful not to act as if you are leading participants to a pre-determined insight or conclusion. Even if you feel that the jolt has a clear lesson or message, see what your participants think first. They may “jolt” you.

Case Example

In a workshop on communication, the instructor wants to demonstrate, in a dramatic fashion, that “nothing is so simple that it cannot be misunderstood.” The instructor displays a paper “butterfly,” made by folding and tearing an 8½ by 11-inch piece of paper. He then puts the butterfly in his pocket and gives participants a blank sheet of paper and says, “I’d like you to make a butterfly of your own by folding and tearing your paper correctly. Pay attention to me, because I’m only going to give these instructions once, without taking any questions.” Participants are then given the following directions:

1. Fold your paper in half.
2. Tear off the upper-right-hand corner.
3. Fold your paper in half again.
4. Tear off the upper-left-hand corner.
5. Fold your paper in half again.
6. Tear off the lower-right-hand corner.

The participants are then asked to hold up their “butterflies.” Because every single direction is open to interpretation (Which way do you fold the paper?), the results vary widely, with few, if any, butterflies. The exercise is then debriefed and conversations begin about the pitfalls of human communication.