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30 Games to Boost Performance

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Best of the Wurst

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● PURPOSE

- To create a dialog about the role on values in the workplace.
- To identify the specific values that matter most to people.

● GAME OBJECTIVE

To develop a consensus on the “best” of the worst.

● PLAYERS

Eight or more.

● TIME

Twenty-five to forty minutes.

● SUPPLIES

- Deck of ten to fifteen index cards for each group.
- Pens/pencils.
- Set of blank index cards.

- An overhead projector (if using transparencies) or a newsprint flip chart and felt-tipped markers.
- Masking tape (optional).
- Noisemaker (optional).

● PREPARATIONS

For each team, prepare a deck of ten to fifteen index cards describing a variety of “worst” workplace situations. Include blank cards so teams can create their own “worst” situations. Alternative: Prepare a worksheet with “worst” situations. (For sample “conditions,” please see Sample Play and General Comments.)

● GAME PLAY

1. Divide group into teams of four to six players each.
2. Give each group a deck of index cards or a worksheet describing a variety of workplace characteristics.
3. Give each group 10 minutes to select and rank those characteristics that are most likely to undermine productivity, squash creativity, and totally demotivate the workforce. (See General Comments: Team Voting.)
4. Have groups present their lists and then explain their rankings.
5. Using one blank index card for each selection, have players vote for the three “best” of the “worst” conditions or characteristics. (See Customizing: Scoring for point scoring system.)

● POST-GAME DEBRIEFING

After each team shares its top ten list, ask:

- What is the impact of each condition? How does this degrade or impede performance?
- What specific values came up for your team? If this were the “worst,” what would you say constitutes the “best”?

- Is this situation an accurate description of your organization? If so, what changes would you suggest?

Ask participants: “How did you arrive at your ranking?”

- Was it a case of majority rules (the most votes win)?
- Was it through consensus building (where you fully discuss what is acceptable to most of the group most of time)?
- Or did the loudest voice win (the group gives in to whoever is the loudest or most forceful person)?
- Or did you abdicate the choice to one or more individuals (let Mike or Susie or the Project Manager decide)?
- What are the pros and cons of the decision-making approach you chose?
- Is the way you arrived at your decision typical of the way that most choices are made in your organization? What is the good news about that? What is the bad news about that?

● GENERAL COMMENTS

- Best of the Wurst was suggested by the framegame, “structured sharing,” as described by Dr. Thiagarajan in his book, *Design Your Own Games and Activities*. Thanks, Thiagi.
- This is a wonderful way to vent “ain’t it awful” sentiments. As in “Dilbert” cartoons, we can all relate to some of the “wurst” aspects of working for the Nightmare Wurst Company. The role of the facilitator is to turn attention from venting about the “worst” aspects of work to discussion of what “better” or “best” conditions would look like. The underlying issue is one of values—a subject we rarely discuss in the workplace. This is an exercise that can help employees talk seriously about the values that matter most to them and the characteristics that help create a meaningful workplace. The Best of the Wurst can be used to compare a variety of best-worst issues such as working conditions, new product launches, leadership traits, leaders, organizations (within own industry or outside), and so forth.
- *Team Voting*. Teams can use several different methods to select their top ten “worst” conditions or characteristics that are apt to demoralize workers, lower productivity, or simply get in the way of completing the work.

They may arrive at this decision through:

- Simple voting—the most votes “win,” aka, majority rules.
- Consensus—the process of discussion that arrives at a result that most participants can live with.
- Domination—the loudest voice wins, or whoever can dominate the group gets their way.
- Abdication—the group abdicates their right of choice by vesting it in a smaller group or a designated individual.
- The process by which the groups arrive at their decisions can provoke as much useful discussion as the decisions themselves.

Samples of Worst Conditions

- No discretion allowed in how you do your job.
- No flexibility in the work schedule.
- Revolving door management.
- No linkage between performance and rewards.
- There is rampant favoritism.
- Management is disengaged and uncaring.
- No opportunity to learn or grow on the job.
- No opportunity to build one’s skills.
- No opportunity for career growth.
- No one ever says thank you.
- No one ever willingly shares knowledge with others.
- Each unit sees itself in competition with all the others.
- No tools or support to help people learn or perform their jobs.
- People are punished for taking initiative.
- Suggestions for improvements are routinely ignored.
- Bureaucracy, rather than logic, governs procedures.
- Employees are routinely kept in the dark concerning current status or future plans.

- Employees have no say in how work is managed.
- Form is revered more than substance.
- Creativity is actively discouraged.
- Assignments are made on a purely arbitrary basis.
- The rules change unpredictably from one day to the next.

● SAMPLE PLAY

1. The group is divided into two teams—Team A and Team B.
2. Each player receives paper and pencil.
3. The facilitator provides the following instructions:

You work for the Nightmare Wurst Company, a meatpacking plant specializing in “wurst”—a variety of sausage or ground frankfurters. Despite the poor economy, people are leaving in droves and management has finally grasped that they have to get a handle on what people care about in order to persuade them to stay. Management has selected you and your colleagues as workforce representatives in a survey of worker values as a last-ditch effort to try to save the company.

You have been given a deck of index cards describing some of the conditions about which people have complained in the past. There may be other items that your group considers important that you want to add. Use the blank index cards to do so. Your job is to identify the top ten “worst” aspects of working at Nightmare Wurst Company and to suggest what management should do to address these problems.

4. The facilitator instructs the teams they have 10 minutes to create a list of ten items.
5. After 10 minutes the facilitator has each team present its list.
6. Team A presents its worst ten items:
 - No job security.
 - Dangerous working conditions.
 - Poor health coverage.

- Financially unstable company.
- Bad management (supervision).
- Hot and miserable plant environment.
- Noisy working conditions.
- Poor or no sick leave plan.
- Poor vacation leave.
- No concern for workers.

7. Team B presents its worst ten items:

- No flexibility in the work schedule.
- Revolving door management.
- No linkage between performance and rewards.
- There is rampant favoritism.
- Management is disengaged and uncaring.
- No opportunity to learn or grow on the job.
- No opportunity to build one's skills.
- No opportunity for career growth.
- No one ever says thank you.
- No one ever willingly shares knowledge with others.

8. The facilitator posts both lists.

9. Players use index cards to select their "favorite" top three items.

10. Final list: The "Best of the Worst":

- a. Dangerous working conditions.
- b. Bad supervision.
- c. No concern for workers.

11. Dialog begins as to what workplace conditions contribute to a good job and a satisfying career.

● CUSTOMIZING BEST OF THE WURST

Size of Group

- For small groups, play as one team. Compare the list against a list developed by the facilitator from previous sessions.
- For medium groups, eight to twelve, play as two teams.
- For larger groups, play as prescribed, but allow more time for presentations and ranking of the final three.

Time of Play

- Shorten or lengthen the time allowed for team meetings and presentations, as necessary.

Method of Play

- Have players create their own “best of the worst” lists from scratch, and then compare these lists against your own or previously developed lists.
- Have each participant write down one or more “worst case” working condition, each one on its own index card. Collect the index cards and create one working list for the entire group. Divide the group into teams and have each team develop a ranked list from the index card items.
- For larger groups, conduct a secret ballot in which teams vote only on other teams’ lists.
- Conduct this exercise before a break and allow your participants to review the item lists at their own pace.
- Suggest to participants that they think about an item or two for the next day’s program and then begin the next day with the compilation of items on the list.
- Conduct this exercise and then conduct a brainstorming session on the other side of the topic. For instance, have participants compile a list of unsafe conditions in the plant and then brainstorm ways to improve plant safety.
- Conduct this exercise and then conduct a brainstorming session on the most important issues which management should address in order to improve productivity and employee satisfaction.

- Have each team record its items on a newsprint chart and then post the charts. Encourage teams to review and even add to other teams' charts during breaks.
- Provide guidance about developing basic protocols to avoid petty annoyances in intact work teams.
- Additional Rounds of Play. If your group is taking the content to a higher level—such as developing recommendations on how to overcome or remove annoyances that exist at the level of the group/organizational culture (i.e., lessening organizational aversion to risk)—expand by the game by one or two additional rounds of play.

Scoring

- Award 1 point for each selection made by the players. Tally the votes and declare the selection that received the most points the winner.
- Alternate scoring system. Issue one red dot, one blue dot, and one yellow dot to each player. Have players use these dots to award “first choice” (red), “second choice” (blue), and “third choice” (yellow).
- Tally the points by multiplying all first choices by 5 points, all second choices by 3 points, and all third choices by 1 point. The team with the most total points wins.
- Award bonus points for the most convincing presentation.

PLAYER INSTRUCTIONS FOR
Best of the Wurst

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- **Form teams of four or more players each.**
- **Review the set of workplace condition cards or worksheet that you receive.**
- **Prepare a list of the “top 10” worst conditions.**
- **Present your list to the entire group.**
- **Each player selects the three “best” of the worst conditions.**
- **Teams are awarded points based on player selections.**

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