Top Ten Seeds For Producing Functional Change In Adventure Experiences

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Introduction

There are a variety of ideas and techniques that work extremely well for seeding change during adventure experiences. While some ideas have have been translated from other fields (e.g., family therapy), others have evolved through the ongoing development of adventure programming. The focus of such "seeds of change" have been to assist client's in being a part of more fruitful adventure experiences. Ten such concepts that have been helpful for us are offered for use in your efforts to learn and grow as a facilitator.

One important caveat to offer is the rationale for these, as well as any other "seeds of change," utilized by facilitators. Such ideas work best when they are embedded in a theoretical structure, offered with the client's wishes in mind, and done truthfully and respectfully. Such seeding can fail to produce positive growth when they don't follow these criteria.

1. Utilize familiar activities for assessment but avoid 'canned programs' - Using a familiar activity (e.g., Group Juggle and Warp Speed; Rohnke, 1985) near the beginning of a group sequence) can help in tailoring presentations to the issues of the specific group with which we are working. The use of a familiar activity in our early assessment can help us scan the group for information such as is requested in a GRABBS technique:

- What is the group's goal and are they working on it?
- What type of activities are they ready to do?
- What is the group's observable affect?
- How well does the group use their bodies?
- How well do they behave toward one another?
- In which developmental stage are they operating?

A familiar activity allows us as facilitators to have past experience with other groups to compare the current group's performance For example a group might approach the shift in activities from group juggle to warp speed by without any creative thinking towards changing their structure. As a facilitator we observe the groups's frustration at trying one (and only one) solution over and over. We notice no respect for ideas and a very strong rule orientation. From the information we observe we might not do a more complicated activity next but focus them on simpler activities which help promote a more democratic leadership style, more team cohesiveness and much clearer communication; perhaps a maze activity. Assessment, of course, does not end with the use of a few familiar activities. As hypotheses about the group are confirmed or denied, the leader constantly listens for language from the group and observes actions of group members to monitor the flow (Gass & Gillis, 1995a).

2. Remember to constantly consider "why" you are there - The 'for whom am I working" is not a question to be taken lightly in seeding change. Are the individual group members, the group and the client's goals similar? Are they in conflict? Does the group 'just' want to have fun or (even worse) have NO desire to be in the 'required' experience while the client (*the one paying the bill) does want some change to occur? And, are you there to work on your own issues? The 'why' we are willing to run the 100 Spider's Web needs to be foremost in our mind. What information can I get from this group on this day during this experience that can help me meet their goals?

When faced with a situation of 17 angry maintenance staff who were 'required' to attend a day of teambuilding, my answer to the 'why was I there" question and "what do they need now" led to the use of a line up activity based on who wanted to be in the experience the least. Such dealing with the resistance (#4) led to a clarification with the group of why we were there and what the group was invested in doing.

Probably the most important guideline for facilitators is to understand when to say "when" and to no when "too much" is making efforts counterproductive. Learning to be "at peace" during a debriefing session and "trusting the process" often comes from accepting the fact that there will be ambiguous situations and the "unknown" elements of group dynamics often serve the group best when left alone. Two examples of this include:

(a) Learning what is changeable and unchangeable - When listening to a individual's/group's goal, listen for things that are stated as "unchangeable" as well as those things that are "changeable." Given this context, where should the focus be? Without limiting the power of the experience, where is the wisdom to know what might be changeable within the group or what is realistically "outside the bounds" of the experience.

(b) In running debriefing sessions, tolerating silence is an extremely uncomfortable experience for most facilitators.

3. Remaining neutral and mobile as a facilitator - Facilitators work best when able to align themselves with a number of belief systems/realities/client interpretations and not as well when their perspective in aligned with one group member's opinion. Maintaining a sense of neutrality and mobility, without being distance from the client group, tends to serve the facilitator best.

One way to maintain neutrality and mobility is to remember a old Keith King statement of "As a facilitator, I am responsible to you but not for you." This places group members "in charge" of what they obtain from an experience and the facilitator in a flexible role that permits the group to direct experience the benefits of their efforts

4. Implanting circular feedback loops in the group - One prevalent feature of groups is the recursiveness that can occur between group members (i.e., what one group member does enhances the ability/efforts of other group members). Facilitators who proactively encourage such interaction may further the development of the group.

One method that illustrates this is the use of asking individuals to be "secret feedback" partners for each other. At the beginning of the day/course, have participants draw names of one another out of a hat. It is their assignment, without telling her/him, to watch this person's interaction throughout the day/course and notice what they do well in the pursuit of her/his goal or the team's objective. At an appropriate ending time, each person shares their observations to the group on how well they did. Not only does this tend to heighten the amount of feedback a person receives and the direct "tie-in" to specific actions, it also places the group "on-alert" that some one watching them for what they do well and that such positive contributions will be shared with the group.

5. Foster the development and expectation for success - posing the"miracle" question - Many groups come to experiences not knowing what can happen and sometimes dreading the worst (e.g., "Will I look foolish in front of my colleagues?, How are we going to be able to solve the huge problems confronting us?, How are what we're doing today going to help us in the future?). Re-directing such apprehensions/ negative focuses by implanting positive expectations can often be the most important task a facilitator can accomplish.

Based on the "miracle question" format first developed by de Shazer (1985), asking the group to respond out loud to a question that focuses energy toward being successful may work toward solutions rather than dwelling on problems. One format of such a question could go as follows: "Say at the end of this course you're driving home with another participant. This person turns to you and asks 'What did you think of that experience?' We would like to hear from you what would have to happen in this course for you to truly respond 'That was incredibly valuable -- it couldn't have gone any better." Such information, when done at the beginning of a session, can help you assess the value system of the group and what is important to each individual.

6. Assessment through "tracking" - Based on the work of Gass & Gillis (1995a), facilitators should always be working on creating & revising tentative "hypotheses" on why groups/individuals are acting in a certain manner. One method of obtaining information for developing such hypotheses is through the process of "tracking" a group's/individual's behavior. Such processes allows the facilitator to comprehend clients' patterns of behavior, thoughts, and feelings in a systemic context. One way to track clients is to observe the content of what they are saying, such as:

• What is important to them?

• Are there analogous concepts that might match an experiential technique?

• How do clients describe their issue? If tracking the content of what clients are saying becomes too complex, focus on the processes of client interactions, such as:

• Who interacts with who in what way?

• What type of behavior leads to success?

• What type of behavior leads to failure?

Once a facilitator begins to understand client processes better, content may become clearer.

7. Dealing with resistance - Every facilitator encounters some form of client resistance from time to time. Resistance can occur for a wide variety of reasons, and while "blocking" such attempts might prove fruitful at some times, it often fails to address the reason of "why" such resistance occurred in the first place.

One method of dealing with resistance is to view it differently than being in "opposition" with the client. De Shazer (1984) probably best represented such a belief, suggesting when clients "resist" it is their effort to try help the facilitator find better ways to help them. Two techniques that follow such a belief system include:

(a) Confusion technique - Here the facilitator literally states the fact to the client(s) that he/she is confused with what is occurring. Appropriately presenting confusion can allow clients to offer interpretations of what's occurring and their expectations of what should be happening. The facilitator's lack of clarity or "confusion" as to why someone is acting in a certain manner may allow the client to become clearer in these issues. An example of may look something like this: "Y'know, I've probably done over 100 Spider's Webs before in my life as a professional, and I must admit that I've never seen anyone/group really act in this way. I don't know if it's me or the day, but I can't get over how incredibly different this Spider's Web is...usually groups come and do (going through a typical Spider's Web sequence)...but I just don't see this happening with this group...did I say the directions wrong? did I forget to tell you something in the beginning?" Obviously this technique works well when honest in intent and fails miserably when it is offered in a manipulative manner. Working from those resistant "pieces" that are truly confusing to the facilitator tends to achieve the best results.

(b) Reframing - While serving a number of functions, reframing consists of offering up "new" or alternative reasons for behaviors than are previously presented. With reframing, the facilitator looks for reasons why resistance is occurring (e.g., What is the function of the client's resistance?) and why it might be viewed in the client's reality as beneficial. Offering up a new interpretation, or helping the client construct one, can redirect resistance and efforts for change may be enhanced. One example that recently occurred with one of our clients was the idea of "not participating." As the client's explained her actions, her "not participating" was reframed more accurately as "harboring a respect" for two other people's interactions. After presenting this frame, the discussion of the group changed from pointing a finger at her lack of participation to a discussion of how the person's respect both assisted and limited the group, as well as what the group needed to do to maintain respect but attain the full investment of all group members.

8. Listen for action words - Listening for action words, particularly through the use of gerund (i.e., -ing) verbs? Does a group member describe a process s/he is dealing with in action images? Are they releasing, growing, letting go, trusting, falling, taking on? In William Glasser's reality therapy he asks clients to turn their complaints into action words. Instead of "being depressed," clients are "depressing." Such an action orientation can aid clients in taking some responsibility for what they might be doing to themselves. In adventure programs, such language can bring to mind the image of an activity that can be modified for use in your plan with the group.

For instance, a single mom and son in a family enrichment group talked of the struggle at home. They described a push-pull relationship. I had the image of the "Goldline jousting" activity. Since we were inside, we took webbing and had each pair try and pull the other off balance. The mom exclaimed "this is exactly what goes on in our house" in referring to being upended by her son. I encouraged her to go with is resistance (i.e., let go of her end of the webbing). In so doing she was able to image some new strategies that helped her parenting skills.

(9) Tailor facilitation efforts to fit by avoiding "canned programs" - It has become increasing obvious to us that using approaches that see "one type of program fitting all individuals" fails to reach the true potential that exists with adventure experiences. "Tailoring" programs to meet the specific needs of particular client groups provides facilitators with a greater ability reach client goals.

Such tailoring demands a certain level of proactive as well as ongoing assessment. Knowing general information about a group (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity) as well as specific sources of information (e.g., previous history, diagnostic category) allows professionals to appropriately design programs.

While one may need to utilize a similar set of activities with groups (sometimes due to the physical limitation of the working environment), professionals can custom fit the framing of activities to fit the particular characteristics of the client group. One easy yet sometimes quite meaningful adaptation is changing the name of the activity to mirror one of the client goals. What we're advocating here is to question yourself if you always introduce a Nitro Crossing activity the same way and utilize a story involving poison peanut butter.

Another example of learning to tailor the names, rules, and regulations of adventure experiences to meet client needs is with belay commands (i.e., on belay, off belay). Changing the actual words in the command sequence (e.g., Am I safe? I'm ready to take a risk, I'm here to support you) engages clients in a way that helps the experience fit the objectives they are seeking to accomplish.

(10) Look for exceptions to problems - Solution-focused therapists (e.g., de Shazer, 1988; Walter & Peller, 1992) have stated that answers to client problems can often be found in exceptions to their issues. One example of this is when the facilitator asks the group to identify "when the problem is not happening, what is happening instead?"

One example of this can be found in a situation outlined by Gass & Gillis (1995b). During the middle of an experience, cooperation between group members became quite unproductive. During this time, one participant asked to "stop" the experience to discuss why things were going so badly.

During this discussion, instead of centering clients' attention on discussing those problematic elements that led the group to be uncooperative, the facilitator took a different approach. The facilitator asked the group to identify, analyze, and discuss times during the experience when they were "exceptions" the problem (e.g., those times when the group actually was cooperating).

If the group states there weren't any such times, the facilitator would ask the group to consider and discuss what it might look like if they were cooperating (i.e., a "hypothetical" exception). To center the clients' "mind set" around such solutions, facilitators can also ask clients to highlight and concentrate on:

(a) What they would look like if they were cooperating better?

(b) What they would be doing differently if they were doing a better job of cooperating?

(c) How they would know they were cooperating better?

Conclusion

Presented here are ten "seeds of change" that we find particularly helpful in our adventure programming work. These seeds can be arranged in a sequential fashion, but they are not presented them that way. We also don't suggest that these are the only ten seeds available to do good adventure programming work; we have just found these ten to work for us. We encourage you to experiment with these seeds (assuming you will approach them with a professional sense of competence and responsibility) as well as to come up with your own list of seeds of change that can serve as a guide to your work in adventure programming.

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