

CREATIVE PARTICIPANT GROUP AND ROLE ASSIGNMENT

©Copyright by Robert (Bob) W. Lucas

Separating participants into groups and selecting group leaders and scribes (note takers) can be a challenge for some facilitators. Yet, to encourage maximum involvement and networking, it is something that I strongly encourage. By moving people around and putting them into a variety of locations, you stimulate the exchange of ideas. This enhances their learning experience and taps into one of the basic principles of adult learning -- recognizing that adults have knowledge and then giving them an opportunity to use it by letting them build on it.

An added benefit is that by breaking up groups of co-workers and friends who tend to initially sit together in a session or meeting, you help cross-pollinate through the sharing of best practices.

Here are some of the creative ways that I have used over the years to assign randomly participants to groups and designate leaders/scribes.

Assigning Participants to Groups

There's always the old standby of "count off from 1-__," however, this is rather boring. To add variety, try these:

Using Props

- Determine the number of participants scheduled to attend, then select some type of prop that comes in a variety of colors (e.g. erasers in a shape that ties into the program theme, such as, telephones for customer service, sales or telephone skills; computers, for PC training; good work stars for motivation, or whatever). You can also use toys in various shapes (e.g. cars, boats, animals, etc.).
- Make sure you have enough props to designate equally numbered teams. For example, if you have twenty participants and wanted to divide them into four equal teams, you would need five each of four different prop shapes.
- Group all like props together, then randomly place one prop (in sequence) at each participant's table location. For example suppose you have red, green, yellow and blue props. Start with red, then green, and so forth, repeating the sequence until you have all props distributed.
- When ready to start an activity, have people with like items or colors; go to designated areas to meet with their group.

A variation of the above idea is to use different colored adhesive dots or stars (available at most office or teacher supply stores).

- Select enough different colors to match the number of groups you will have.
- Place one sticker in the corner of each person's name tent or nametag.

Use Flip Chart Pages

- Tape blank flip chart pages at different locations around the room.
- On each page, write the name of anything you prefer (e.g. flowers, sports teams, color, numbers, cars, animals, or whatever).
- Starting with the person to your immediate left or right, have the first person go to the first chart, the next to the second, and so on until all you have someone in front of reach page. Repeat this process with participants until all of them are in front of a page.
- You now have teams and can begin your activity.

USE strips of paper

- Cut enough strips of paper, two inches wide and six inches long, so that each participant will have one. You can use colored paper to add variety and visual stimulation.
- Write the name of something (similar to the flip chart idea) on the strips. Make sure you end up with equal numbers of strips with each named object.
- Give each participant a slip as they enter for the session.
- Tell participants that this will be the group for their first activity or throughout the day.
- When ready for grouping, have all participants with like colored or named strips report to a designated area.

Use Playing Cards

- Determine the number of people attending the program.
- Select that number of cards from a standard deck of playing cards or one of the jumbo type decks (5X7"). For example, if you have twenty-four people in the class and you wanted four groups of six people, you would take all the 1s, 2s, 3s, 4s, 5s, and 6s from the deck, then set the rest aside. Since there are

four suits in a deck, you now have enough cards to assign six people to four groups.

- When ready for an activity, walk around the room and have each person select a card. Their number is their group designation.

Selecting Leaders and Scribes

As in designating groups, selecting leaders and scribes in humorous or creative ways adds a bit of change of pace and pizzazz to your programs. It also helps get involvement from people who might not otherwise volunteer.

A word of caution, think before selecting a category to designate people. Don't use a characteristic or item that could embarrass or offend someone. I suggest avoid personal body features (e.g. size of nose/ears, biggest shoes size, eye color, tallest/shortest, height/weight, etc., since there could be issues of self-consciousness or disabilities involved).

Here are some quick ways to designate leaders/scribes. The person:

- Who got up earliest/latest that morning
 - With the oldest/youngest child
 - With the most pets
 - With the birthday closest to the date of the session
 - Who drove farthest/least distance to the session
 - Who has the most/least siblings
 - Who has been married the longest/shortest period of time
 - Who has visited the most states/countries
 - Who has been with their organization longest/shortest period of time
 - Who flew on a plane closest to the date of the session
 - Who has read a non-job related book/article in the past month
 - Who has been to a theater to see a movie closest to the date of the session
 - Who has the oldest/newest car
 - Who's school had the smallest high school senior class
 - Who has on the most dark/light colored clothing
 - Who exercised most in the past week
 - Who has on the most jewelry
 - Who has the shortest/longest last names
 - Who lives closest to another family member (other than in the same house)
 - With the longest/shortest hair
 - Who has moved their residence most recently
 - Who has lived in their current apartment/house longest
- No matter what method you use, I suggest rewarding these "volunteers" after you have selected them. You can give candy bars, buttons with quotes tied to the program theme, small toys or whatever. I often give out pennies or other items. The person with the most at the end of the session gets a prize.

Another technique for rewarding is to pass out raffle type tickets (the kind that comes on a roll where you keep one and they get one with a corresponding number) for a prize drawing later.

Be creative -- there are lots of other options.

Bob Lucas B.S., M.A., M.A, CPLP is an internationally-known author and learning and performance professional. He has written and contributed to thirty-one books and compilations. He regularly conducts creative training, train-the-trainer, customer service, interpersonal communication and management and supervisory skills workshops. Bob can be reached at blucas@robertwlucas.com or through his website www.robertwlucas.com. Follow his blog at www.robertwlucas.com/wordpress and like him at www.facebook.com/robertwlucasenterprises