

Decorations and Teaching Aids for Communications Workshop

by Pamela Fay

Room decorations set the tone for a positive workshop environment and promote a receptive frame of mind among the participants. Decorations need not be elaborate or time-consuming. You can even solicit participants to help create room decorations. Further, well-planned decorations can be used as props or teaching aids for workshop activities.

Colorful Pie Charts

Non-verbal communication is a critical topic to include in the workshop. There are many communication statistics regarding types, modes and methods of communication that can stimulate a lively discussion. UCLA professor, Albert Mehrabian, estimates that while 7% of face-to-face communication meaning is derived from verbal cues and 38% is vocal (tone), the majority, 55%, is nonverbal. Create a graph in PowerPoint and have it enlarged to poster size. Discuss these statistics at the beginning and again at the end of the workshop to determine how perceptions changed during the course.

Iceberg Collages

The iceberg analogy is frequently used to describe the visible and the invisible. Although 20% of an individual's makeup is observable, another 80% is below the waterline, or in other words, like the base of an iceberg—unseen by the naked eye. The communication challenge is to factor in the 80% even though it may not be immediately obvious. Prior to the workshop, ask participants to use magazines or other images to create collages that describe their values, beliefs, interests and avocations. They should not show these collages to other workshop participants. Collect the artwork at the start of the workshop and decorate the wall with them during the first break. When participants return, ask them to identify the creator of each collage. Write the name on the back. Then later, as the workshop winds down, ask the group to revisit their initial guesses.

Quotes on Communication

Find several thought-provoking quotes on communication. Good sources include Plato, Mark Twain, even Yogi Berra. Select profound, inspirational, ironic, even silly quotes. Cut large conversation balloons from poster board. String the quotes on fish line and suspend them as ceiling decoration. The quotes can be used later as gathering points to divide the group into breakout teams in the room.

Ambiguous Road Signs

Part of your communication workshop might focus on clear and unambiguous writing. Find examples of funny, conflicting or confusing road signs. Hotrods & Classics (<http://www.hotrodsandclassics.net/roadsigns/roadsigns1.htm>) is a good online source, but there are many others. Recreate the signs on colored poster board and stakes. Use colors like bright yellow and safety orange to make them as realistic as possible. Display

the signs as decoration and use them to launch a discussion on effective business communications.

Values Filter

Each of our communication attempts must survive the recipient's values filter. Values may include, for example, family, fitness, work-life balance and spirituality. These filters add a layer of complexity to communications and may distort the intended meaning. Hang a fishing net on the wall. Inflate colored balloons. Write a value on each balloon. Conduct a group discussion on the how individual values affect communications. The balloons provide a good visual representation of communication distortion.

References

“Silent Messages: Implicit Communication of Emotions and Attitudes”; Arthur Mehrabian; 1981

Road Signs; <http://www.hotrodsandclassics.net/roadsigns/roadsigns1.htm>