

Leadership Initiatives

**PKAL 2000 Summer Institute
Keystone Resort and Conference Center
Keystone, Colorado**

July 16 – 29, 2000

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Introduction

A Leadership Initiative is an experiential learning activity designed to help participants explore various aspects of leadership. Experiential learning occurs as a person engages in an activity, looks back at the activity critically, abstracts some useful insight from the analysis, and puts the result to work in another situation. It is an inductive process, proceeding from observation rather than from a priori “truth.” The effectiveness of experiential learning is based on the fact that nothing is more relevant to us than our own reactions to, observations about, and understanding of an activity or idea. Further, as research has shown that people learn best by “doing,” leadership initiatives are “hands on” experiences.

Using the experiential learning cycle described below, you will explore some dimensions of leadership, including the importance of having:

- A big picture orientation
- A vision and clearly defined goals
- Regular feedback on progress toward achieving those goals trust

Further dimensions of leadership to be explored include considering:

- Shared leadership (followership)
- Differences in leadership styles (directing, coaching, supporting, delegating)

And finally, you will explore the importance of:

- Communicating clearly
- Collaborating effectively
- Listening well
- Thinking through problems toward solutions
- Being able to deal with ambiguity
- Performing under pressure
- Being able to perform under pressure

It is our hope that you will enjoy participating in the Leadership Initiatives and will perhaps want to use such initiatives and the Experiential Learning Cycle in your own spheres of leadership.

The Experiential Learning Cycle

A. Premise

- To design a structured experience/exercise that engages participants in activities related to specific leadership skills and concepts, and to provide a common base for dialogue and for learning those skills and concepts

B. Process

1. Have participants engage in the experience.
2. Ask participants to reflect upon and share their experience, looking for lessons learned that could be applied in other circumstances and settings.
 - a. Use questions that personalize the experience, such as:
 - What happened to me?
 - What thoughts or feelings did I have during the exercise?
 - What were my reactions to/my observations about the activity
 - b. Use questions that normalize the experience, to discover common patterns in what members of the group felt and observed, such as:
 - Did any of you have the same thoughts/feelings/reactions
 - How many of us agree on our observations on the experience?
3. Ask participants to extrapolate from the structured experience some general principles that will transfer to and be applicable in experiences in the real world, asking them:
 - 'So what' . . .does this mean in the bigger picture
 - What generalizations about leadership could you draw from this experience? (For example . . .in some exercises, participants are frustrated because they cannot see the big picture. From this, they might be able to generalize toward the importance of this dimension of leadership.)
4. Ask participants to begin to apply what they've learned to other situations, considering questions such as:
 - What are the situations on my campus/in my organizations in which I might apply this leadership skill
 - What kind of action plan should I think about developing?
5. Remind participants that this model is a cycle, and that when they come to applying what they've learned, a new experience has been created and that experience then also needs to be vetted with the 'what,' 'so what,' and 'now what?' questions set forth above.

Leading Change: What You Can Count On

The world hates change; yet it is the only thing that has brought progress.

- Charles Franklin Kettering

- People will feel self-conscious, uncomfortable, and ill at ease.
- People will be concerned about what they have to give up.
- Feelings of loneliness are common even though many other people are going through similar changes.
- People will be reluctant to change when they don't see the relevancy in changing.
- People can only deal with so much change.
- People are at different points of readiness for change.
- People will be concerned that they don't have enough resources.
- People return to old behaviors as soon as the pressure is taken off.
- People change at different paces.

Debriefing and Processing

At the conclusion of each experience/initiative, time should be taken to look back at the entire experience and reflect on what learning took place. This time for debriefing allows the facilitator/teacher to ask direct questions of the participants which causes them to process their individual experiences as well as the team's experience.

In his work, "Designing Processing Questions to Meet Specific Objectives," Clifford E. Knapp lays out specific program objectives designed to assist leaders in more effectively processing experiential activities for personal and group growth.

Below are Knapp's categories with selected questions from each category. To view this work in its entirety contact Dr. Clifford E. Knapp, Associate Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at the Lorado Taft Field Campus---Northern Illinois University.

Communicating Effectively

1. How many different ways were used to communicate messages?
2. How did you know that what you communicated was understood?

Expressing Appropriate Feelings.

1. Can you name a feeling you had at any point in completing the activity?
2. Does expressing appropriate feelings help or hinder completing the initiative?

Deferring Judgment of Others

1. Is it difficult for you to avoid judging other? Explain.
2. Can you think of examples of when you judged others in the group today? When you didn't judge others?

Listening

1. Who made suggestions for completing the activity?
2. Were all of these suggestions heard? Explain.

Leading Others

1. Who assumed leadership roles during the activity?
2. What were the behaviors that you described as showing leadership?

Following Others

1. Who assumed a follower role a number of times throughout the activity? How did it feel?
2. How did it feel to follow different leaders?

Making Group Decisions

1. How were group decisions made in completing the activity?
2. What is the best way for this group to make decisions? Explain.

Cooperating

1. Can you think of specific examples of when the group cooperated in completing the activity? Explain.
2. How did it feel to cooperate?

Respecting Human Differences

1. How are you different from some of the others in the group?
2. How do these differences strengthen the group as a whole?

Respecting Human Commonalities

1. How are you like some of the others in the group?
2. Were these commonalities a help to the group in completing their task? Explain.

Trusting the Group

1. Can you give examples of when you trusted someone in the group? Explain.
2. How do you increase your level of trust for someone?

Closure Questions

1. What did you learn about yourself?
2. How can you use what you learned in other life situations?

References and Sources

References:

Rohnke, Karl. Silver Bullets: A Guide to Initiative Problems, Adventure Games and Trust Activities. Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company. 1984.

Rohnke, Karl. Cowstails and Cobras II: A Guide to Games, Initiatives, Ropes Courses, and Adventure Curriculum. Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company. 1989.

Rohnke, Karl and Butler, Steve. Quicksilver: Adventure Games, Initiative Problems, Trust Activities and a Guide to Effective Leadership. 1995.

Web site for Project Adventure, Inc.

<http://www.pa.org>

Knapp, Clifford E. "Designing Processing Questions to Meet Specific Objectives." *To view this work contact Dr. Clifford E. Knapp, Associate Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at the Lorado Taft Field Campus---Northern Illinois University.*

Equipment:

Kevin Shaffstall of TeamArts, Inc. has equipment for each of the activities we presented, plus many more, pre-assembled and for sale. Contact him at: **teamarts@aol.com**

Custom designed experiences:

Kevin Shaffstall of TeamArts, Inc. custom designs experiences/initiatives and equipment to help you accomplish a particular learning objective. Contact him at: **teamarts@aol.com**

(For those of you who participated in the Adventure Woods experience at the National Assembly in Kansas City, you should know that Mr. Shaffstall designed the Adventure Woods course and created the various initiatives in which we participated.)

”CAN DO”

SITUATION:

Our College will be shut down immediately unless a team of individuals is willing to remove some hazardous waste material that was accidentally dumped near the entrance to the campus. This is a dangerous assignment, yet, because of your backgrounds and expertise, I feel that you are the best-qualified individuals we have to complete this task successfully. I appreciate your willingness to help. The US Can Do Association has furnished us a special transport system that will enable you to move the waste material to a special vault without becoming contaminated. The waste’s fumes are particularly irritating to the eyes so participants will wear eye protectors. It is essential that no one come direct contact with this waste material. As soon as I define the special conditions and boundaries, I will delegate responsibility for this task to the Deans of your four divisions. I am asking them to share the leadership role and to assume responsibility for the safety of the group.

EQUIPMENT:

- Hazardous waste—beach ball
- Transport system---rope apparatus
- Vault---tarp
- Eye protectors---blindfolds

SPECIAL RULES AND BOUNDARIES:

1. All team members except for four are blindfolded and cannot see.
2. No team member may reach beyond 12 inches from the end of the transport system.
3. No team member may touch the hazardous waste.
4. If the hazardous waste is dropped the group must retrieve the dropped item with the transport system and resume its task.
5. You may have no longer than 30 minutes to complete the task.

“CAN DO” LEARNING POINTS:

- Big picture orientation
- Vision and effective communication of a vision
- The importance of clearly defined goals
- Feedback on progress as relevant to accomplishing a goal
- Shared leadership---leadership/followership
- Differences in leadership styles---directing, coaching, supporting, delegating
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Trust
- Listening
- Problem solving
- Dealing with ambiguity
- Performing under pressure
- Leading change

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS:

1. Be aware of the potential for participants walking into things while blindfolded.

Be aware of the anxiety and stress that some experience as a result of being blindfolded. May use “honor system” and let them close their eyes.

“CAN DO” DEBRIEF

“What?” What happened? Help participants to both personalize and normalize the experience.

1. What were your reactions to the activity?
2. How many of the rest of you had a similar reaction? Other reactions?
3. What were your observations about the activity?
 - What did the leader(s) do well? (Direction—support)
 - What did the followers do well? (Listen—ask clarifying questions)
4. Did anyone else make a similar observation? Other observations?
 - How many of you agree?

“So what?” What does this all mean in term of the learning points?

- Generalize—Ask participants to extrapolate from the structured experience general principles that will transfer to the real world. Use questions like:
 1. What generalizations about leadership can you draw from this experience?
Note: participants are often frustrated because they cannot “see the big picture.” From this, they could generalize that it is very important for leaders to be able to clearly articulate the vision and the goals.
 2. What other generalizations can you formulate?
 - Can’t complete tasks as leaders without followers—one person couldn’t complete this task. Ben Franklin---we will hang together or we will hang separately. Must pull together. Every participant must do his/her part.
 - Feedback on progress as relevant to accomplishing the goal
 - Dealing with ambiguity
 - Performing under time pressure.

“Now what?” How can I apply what I have learned from this experience to other situations?

- Apply—Ask participants to apply the generalizations to actual situations in which they are involved. Use questions like:
 1. Can you think of ways in which any of these generalizations apply to your responsibilities at _____?
 2. Can your followers see the big picture? Are you communicating the vision effectively?
 3. In your organizations, are you giving/receiving appropriate direction and support? What kind of direction and support are you providing your students?
 4. Are you giving/receiving appropriate feedback?

Change Initiative

(Have some “process observers” watch and document the reactions that participants have to the exercise or you will need to be sure to do this yourself.)

1. Find a partner. Face partner. I want you to be totally silent for one minute and study your partner. (Should note giggling, avoidance of eye contact, talking, uncomfortable, looking around at other partners, moving further apart, etc.—“connect” this during the debrief to point #1.)
2. Turn back to back. Each of you makes 5 changes to your appearance. (One minute—be flexible, but don’t let this take too long.) Turn back around and see if you can identify the changes. Leave changes---don’t allow reverting back. (Note: For most this is fairly easy and they seem to have fun at this) (Note: some will probably try to revert back.) (Connect tendency to revert back to #7.)
3. Turn back around. Make five more changes. Can’t be same five. Turn back around and identify. Leave changes---don’t allow reverting back. (Document reactions that you see.) (Students may grumble—connect to #2)
4. Turn back around. Make five more changes. Can’t be same five. Turn back around and identify. Leave changes---don’t allow reverting back. (Document reactions.) (Students may start to share resources. Connect to #6.)
5. Turn back around. Make five more changes. Can’t be same five. Turn back around and identify. Leave changes---don’t allow reverting back. (Document reactions.) (Students start looking around to see what other groups are doing---connect to #3.)
6. Turn back around. Make five more changes. Can’t be same five. Turn back around and identify. Now allow participants to reorganize themselves. (Document reactions.) (Some students may give you the “go to” look---connect to # 4.)

You will need to judge how long to carry this on. You need to carry it on long enough to cause the seven predictable factors to become evident.

If you use process observers, this gives you a good opportunity at the end to discuss the importance of using process observers in leadership settings.

Debrief Suggestions

Did you see this/these point (s) play out in the activity? (Assist the discussion if necessary.) Have you seen this/these play out in your personal/professional life? Examples? How can being aware of this/these point(s) help you as a person/leader?

1. People will feel self-conscious, uncomfortable, and ill at ease. During that first minute, participants will often giggle, talk, look away, look around at others, and increase the distance from their partner. All are indications that they are uncomfortable. Might want to discuss how the exercise makes us “change” from our normal culture expectations not to stare, not to get in another person’s space, etc. Ask, “Have you seen . . .?”

2. People will be concerned about what they have to give up. Observers will probably hear participants grumbling, e.g., “I don’t have enough clothes.” Connect to life—policy change—first reaction was “How will this affect me?” It is usually, “What am I going to lose,” not “How will I benefit?” Ask, “When have you seen . . .?”
3. Feelings of loneliness are common even though many other people are going through similar changes. Many participants will be looking around the room to see what the others are doing and experiencing. Questions to ask: “How many of you were pretty self-conscious even if everyone else was going through the same process?” – “When have you seen . . .?”
4. People will be reluctant to change when they don’t see the relevancy in changing. Observers may hear comments like: “I’m not doing this anymore---this is silly.” Leadership application: Be sure to make the rationale for change very clear to your followers.
5. People can only deal with so much change. Observers should have picked up “looks that could kill.” Questions: “The exercise forces you to make about 20 (25) changes. How many more sets of 5 could you handle?” “Have you seen . . .?” Leadership application----don’t try to make too many major changes at once. (Leaders must be very sensitive to this.) Be aware of this personally.
6. People are at different points of readiness for change. Observers should have noted that some participants were more tolerant of change than others Young people are usually more flexible that older people. Question: “Have you seen people who embrace change much more readily than others?” Thought: Often it’s others around you who won’t let you change. They’ve normed you out and are uncomfortable if you change.
7. People will be concerned that they don’t have enough resources. Observers will probably hear students grumbling--- “I don’t have enough clothes,” i.e., resources. Observers will possibly note a few examples of sharing of resources. There were a lot more resources available than were used. Ask, “Have you seen . . .?” Application: Great thing to remember in college or at a new job. If you don’t have the resources you need, look to others for help. One benefit of the Keystone Institute is that it gives you the example of sharing resources
8. People return to old behaviors as soon as the pressure is taken off. At the beginning of the exercise, before you even give the second set of instructions, many of the participants will be righting their appearance, i.e., reverting back. Ask them to provide a personal/professional example. Leadership application: Time of crisis/stress people revert back to old behaviors. Leaders must keep “tapping.”
9. People change at different paces. Observers will note that some people could come up with changes very quickly. Others will struggle to get the appropriate number in the allotted time. Ask them to provide life example and/or personal/professional example. Leadership application: If the situation is not time critical or a crisis, provide opportunity for people to “buy-in” over time and at their own pace.

Systems Initiative

Objective:

To make a 4 x 4 human grid where 16 different items (which the people are wearing) are organized in four rows of four so that the same shape item or same color item does not appear in any row going vertically or horizontally.

Equipment:

- Blue lei with object (e.g., zebra or football) hanging from it
- Blue lei with object (e.g., elephant or soccer ball) hanging from it
- Blue lei with object (e.g., giraffe or basketball) hanging from it
- Blue lei with object (e.g., lion or baseball) hanging from it
- 4 red leis with same four objects
- 4 yellow leis with same four objects
- 4 orange leis with same four objects

Rules:

- The colored leis with attached objects must be worn by the participants for the first 10 to 15 minutes of the initiative. After this period the leis maybe taken off and placed on the ground.
- Participants may not use pencil and paper (at least not during the first 15 minutes).
- If anyone has done this activity before and knows the solution, ask them to be mute or to serve as a process observer.

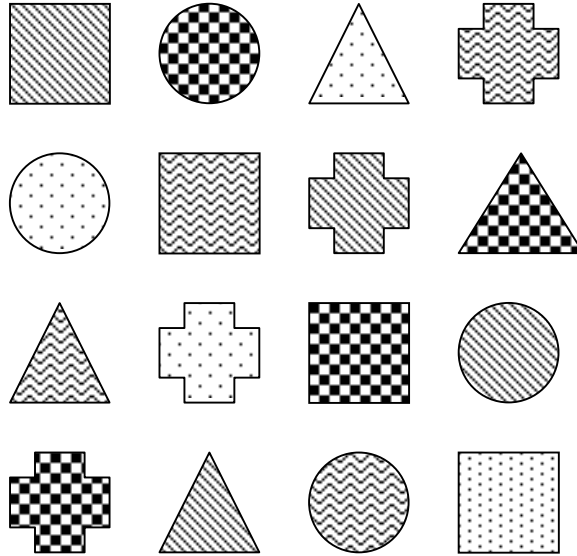
Variations:

If there are more that 16 participants, create shared positions or use the extra participants as process observers. Both individuals of a shared position must remain in contact with the lei. Do not let process observers offer solutions. During the second 15 minutes, you might allow them to ask questions but do not allow them to offer solutions.

Heads up tips:

- This initiative is an excellent challenge but is abstract and can be very frustrating. After 15 minutes of struggle, you may want to step in as a coach and start asking some probing questions. Do not give them the answer but challenge them to think systematically and to begin solving the problem a bit at a time.
- If the frustration gets too high allow them to take a break and to step away from it for 5 to 10 minutes; you would be amazed at what this short break will do for the group.
- Before you start this initiative with a group, make sure you know one of the solutions!

Solution:



Processing Suggestions:

- What?
 - What were participants most concerned about when they were wearing the leis?
 - What changed after they took the leis off?
 - Who assumed a leadership role? When?
 - Who checked-out when the problem became frustrating? Why?
 - How did the group communicate? Over-communicate? Under-communicate?
 - Who maintained the emotional climate of the team?
- So What?
 - What did the group learn about systems thinking and solving systems problems?
 - What did the group learn about leadership? Followership? Roles?
- Now What?
 - Can you apply what you learned to your personal/professional life?

Zin Obelisk

Task Instructions

In the ancient city of Atlantis, a solid, rectangular obelisk, called a zin, was built in honor of the goddess Elvira. The structure took less than two weeks to complete.

The task of your team is to determine on which day of the week the obelisk was completed. You will have 20 minutes to complete this task.

Each team member will be given several information cards related to the task.

You may share this information *verbally* with your teammates, but you may not show your cards to anyone.

Do not choose a formal leader.

One paper and pencil per table.

Zin Obelisk Answer and Rationale

The answer is Neptiminus.

Rationale:

1. The dimensions of the zin indicate that it contains 50,000 cubic feet of stone blocks.
2. The blocks are 1 cubic foot each; therefore, 50,000 blocks are required.
3. Each worker works seven schlibs in a day (2 schlibs are devoted to rest).
4. Each worker lays 150 blocks per schlib; therefore, each worker lays 1050 blocks per day.
5. There are eight workers working per day (the ninth is assigned religious duties), therefore, 8,400 blocks are laid per working day.
6. The 50,000th block, therefore, is laid on the sixth working day.
7. Since work begins at daybreak on Aquaday and does not take place on Daydoldrum, the sixth working day is Neptiminus.

Zin Processing Suggestions

Ask "what" questions.

- What types of thoughts/feelings did you have during the exercise?
 - Did anyone else have the same feelings? Other feelings?
- What were your reactions to the activity?
 - How many of the rest of you had a similar reaction? Other reactions?
- What were your observations about the activity?
 - Did anyone else make a similar observation? Other observations?

Ask "so what" questions.

- So what can we learn about leadership/collaboration from this exercise?

Learning points: (Hopefully they will come up with some but if they don't, you can use some of these or others that you might think of.)

- Must have a clearly defined goal.
- Must collaborate--work together---share the leadership---share knowledge.
- Must listen to each other.
- Must be able to articulate an idea.
- Must be able to deal with ambiguous tasks.
- Must overcome language of vocabulary problems.
- Must perform under pressure of time demands.

If they don't come up with points, your job is to ask questions that make them think of points. Examples:

- What made this initiative difficult/challenging?
- What had to be shared for the team to reach success? (Knowledge)
- Why is this important? (On complex tasks, very seldom does one person have all the answers or all of the knowledge needed to solve the problem.)
- How does this relate to leadership? (Today, problems are so complex that no one in any field can be completely up to date or know it all. Must be willing to work together in teams to solve complex problems.)
- Did anyone benefit from the strengths of other team members?
- Why is diversity important?
- What was the impact of not choosing a formal leader?
- Did someone assert himself or herself in a formal leadership role?
- Did others follow? Why? Why not?

End with "now what" questions (Note: Adjust these to your specific situation.)

- Now, as you go back to your institutions, what are ways in which you as leaders/teachers can apply the thing you have learned from this exercise?
- How well is information shared in your organization?
- Where do you go to get information in your field?
- How can PKAL be a resource to you?

Learning Points:

- Importance of cross sharing, teaming, and collaboration.
- Importance of diversity.
- The only way to be successful was to share information and resources/skillets.

Zin Obelisk Cards

- What is a Zin?
- The Zin is built of stone blocks.
- The width of the zin is 10 feet.
- The length of the zin is 50 feet.
- The height of the zin is 100 feet.
- Each block is 1 cubic foot.
- The basic measurement of time in Atlantis is a day.
- There are five days in an Atlantian week.
- Day 1 in the Atlantian week is called Aquaday.
- Day 2 in the Atlantian week is called Neptiminus.
- Day 3 in the Atlantian week is called Sharkday.
- Day 4 in the Atlantian week is called Mermaidday.
- Day 5 in the Atlantian week is called Dayoldrum.
- No work takes place on Dayoldrum.
- Work starts at daybreak on Aquaday.
- An Atlantian day is divided into schlibs and ponks.
- The working day has 9 schlibs.
- There are 8 ponks in a schlib.
- Each worker takes rest periods during the working day totaling 16 ponks.
- Workers each lay 150 blocks per schlib.
- At any time when work is taking place there is a gang of 9 people on site.
- One member of each gang has religious duties and does not lay blocks.
- Only one gang is working on the construction of the zin.
- Which way up does the zin stand?
- Green has special religious significance on Mermaidday.
- A cubitt is a cube, all sides of which measure 1 megalithic yard.
- What is a cubitt?
- The zin is made up of green blocks.
- Each block costs 2 gold fins.
- There are 31/2 feet in a megalithic yard.
- Each gang includes two women.
- There are eight gold scales in gold fin.
- Does work take place on Sunday?