

## BEGINNINGS: HOW WE START THE SEMESTER AND INDIVIDUAL CLASSES : A Roundtable Discussion

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### ABSTRACT

*In this roundtable discussion, the facilitators will first provide information on the importance of getting started on the right foot (“first impressions”) with a new class each semester as well as setting the tone for each class session. Students need to be connected to each other, to the other class members, and to the instructor to form a productive and safe learning community for the remainder of the term. They also need to be engaged and focused each time the class meets in order to fully participate in the class. Each facilitator will share one of her own preferred start-up activities with the roundtable participants. Next, each participant will share his/her ideas, experience, and questions about the topic. A final wrap-up will provide useful strategies and activities as take-home outcomes.*

Key words: *start-up activities, music, sandwich boards, learning community*

### DESCRIPTION OF THE FOCAL TOPIC

Over the years, articles in *Simulation and Gaming* (Gosen & Washbush, 2004), books (Gentry, 1990; Roland, Wagner, Weigand, 1995) and ABSEL presentations/proceedings (Sugges, 1981; Patton, Davis & Govahi, 1998; Wheatley, 1995) have often addressed the topics of experiential education and activities as well as providing rationale and details for using specific activities (especially in the section of *Simulation and Gaming* entitled “Simulation/Game”), but rarely have focused on targeting a specific exercise for a specific time in the semester. Nor has there been a focus on getting students connected and engaged at the beginning of each class session. This roundtable uses an appreciative inquiry approach (Hammond, 1996) to share participants’ strategies for successful “start-up” classes, both at the start of a semester and at the start of each class.

First, the facilitators will briefly introduce the topic of start-up activities for semesters and classes. Next, they will each share a preferred start-up activity with the roundtable participants. Then the participants will share their ideas,

experiences, and questions about the topic. A final wrap-up will provide participants with strategies and activities they can employ back home in their courses and individual class sessions.

### SANDWICH BOARDS ACTIVITY-FOR BEGINNING THE SEMESTER

#### **Sandwich Boards, An Ice-Breaker for the Start-up Class**

**Objective:** To help a class get connected and set the tone for a focus on active learning

**Group Size:** Any size (from 10-80)

**Time Required:** Minimum of 10 minutes to prepare and 15 minutes to mix and mingle; could be longer with a large class

**Materials Needed:** An easel sheet, marker and 2 pieces of masking tape for each participant; an easel sheet or transparency with instructions (optional: a sample easel sheet prepared ahead of time by leader)

**Space Needed:** Enough room for group to move around and meet with others; as the exercise can get noisy, it may be better to do this in isolation from other classes that could be disturbed

**Process:** Instructor explains the purpose of the activity (can be tailored to undergrads, grad students or workshop participants in the workplace); tells the class what a sandwich board is if they seem not to know; shares instructions and sample (optional; may also point out that the exercise may be a little uncomfortable for “I’s” (MBTI) or shy people, but to try it out anyway—everyone will feel a little silly.)

**Instructions:** Tear a neck hole crescent in the top of the easel sheet/sandwich board. (Demonstrate.) On the top third of the paper, write your name (what you want to be called, first name...), your major (or job/organization), and something you like about your major; on the bottom 2/3 of the sheet, you must **DRAW** (no words!) three things: 1) something no one would know/guess about you (e.g., twin, astrological sign, musical instrument, ride a motorcycle, grew up Illinois), 2) what you do for leisure, and 3) what animal you are most like. (It helps to have your own

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example to share with stick figures and a poorly drawn animal—then you can say to the class, “You don’t have to be an artist—see mine!”)

When your sandwich board is ready, tape it on your shoulders and go to the area where people are mingling. Try to speak with at least 10 others for one minute each. It is better to do this in pairs so everyone gets more air time. (I always put my sheet on too and go mingle, but occasionally have to intervene when a group of 4 keeps talking together.) The goal is to get to know (at least 1/2, 1/3, all of) your classmates.

**Processing:** After the 15 minutes is done, have the class return to seats and process the exercise. I usually ask how many can name 3 others, 5 others, 10 others, everyone. Sometimes I share my observations (e.g., 3 sets of twins, someone who plays in a band, three “Dana’s”) to break the ice. And also I ask what surprised them about the exercise? What did they find they had in common? What was fun about it? What was difficult? How can this help them feel more comfortable throughout the semester?

### CONNECTING THROUGH MUSIC ACTIVITY—FOR BEGINNING EACH CLASS

As students are entering the classroom (maybe 5-7 minutes before class), the instructor plays music that has a connection to the day’s topic. Some examples of music choices include:

- Beatle’s “We Can Work it Out” for class on communication
- Aretha Franklin’s “Respect” for class on interpersonal dynamics/group dynamics
- “Think” for the exam class
- 5 for Fighting’s “100 years” for studying different life stages
- Janis Ian’s “Society’s Child” to introduce diversity

When the class begins, the instructor ask “What does this song tell us about what you’ve read for today?” The music relaxes the students and the discussion engages them in the topic of the day. At the start of the term, the music is just playing as students enter. Several weeks into the term (or when students ask why there is music), the instructor begins to discuss why she is playing it.

Music is currently used in a variety of classes: Managerial Skills, Introduction to Management, Managing Organizational Behavior, and Leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Why does it work to help build community and engage the students? Music taps into emotional components that are not usually part of classroom activities; it is a right brain phenomenon. So the music helps students fire up parts of the brain that otherwise might remain dormant in the classroom, specifically emotional intelligence (Boyatzis, 2005) and holistic thinking. Students also comment that it is important. One adult male student said, “I come here early because I want to listen to the music. I am curious

about what you’ll play. The music is soothing, relaxing and motivating.”

### NEEDS AND GOALS OF THE TARGET AUDIENCE

Many faculty members would like to have a set of guidelines for choosing an activity or exercise for a specific time in the semester, especially for the “start-up” or first class of a term. In this roundtable, facilitators and participants will share their experience and wisdom about activities that are geared to connect the students and faculty in a productive and positive learning community. Participants will leave the roundtable with a variety of new and refined ideas for selecting a perfect start-up activity.

### HOSTS OF THE ROUNDTABLE

**Sandra Morgan** has used experiential methods in her teaching since beginning her teaching career with a fourth grade class almost 40 years ago. Since then she has used experiential activities with corporate, governmental and non-profit clients as well as with her organizational behavior, leadership, and organization development students. Most of her research publications are pedagogical, with a number specifically focused on experiential exercises, their content, process and assessment. Two of her exercises have been finalists in the ELA (Experiential Learning Association) Track of the Eastern Academy of Management “best exercise” competition, and one of these won the title in 2002. Sandy is a Past President and Fellow of ABSEL and currently serves as a Board Member. A selection of these appears below:

Morgan, Sandra and Dennehy, Robert F. (2004). “Using Stories to Reframe the Social Construction of Reality: A Trio of Activities,” *Journal of Management Education*, 28(3), 372-389.

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Harel, Gedaliahu and Morgan, Sandra (1994), "SHALOM/SALAAM: A Simulation of the Middle East Peace Negotiations," *Simulation and Gaming*, 25(2), 285-292.

**Kathleen H. Wall** Kate is a life-long learner. She has a BS in Physical Education, Master's of Business Administration (MBA) and a Master's of Science in Organizational Behavior (MSOB). In addition, she holds advanced graduate management certificates in leadership and teams, and organizational behavior. She has attended numerous workshops and seminars ranging from guest services (Blanchard Training & Development, Disney Approach to Guest Service) to leadership (Enlightened Leadership, Disney Approach to People Management, Dale Carnegie), to IAAPA's Cornell Industry Institute to name a few. Kate is adjunct faculty at the University of Hartford (West Hartford, CT) Barney School of Business as well as a fulltime instructor at Central Connecticut State University in the Department of Management and Organization. She is a doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University in the Department of Organization and Leadership, where she is concentrating on organizational learning. Her dissertation topic is the emotional triggers to learning in organizations. Kate worked for 26 years at the former Riverside Park (Agawam, MA) and Lake Compounce (CT) Amusement Park in a variety of roles, including a number of years training young amusement park workers. Her teaching is creative and innovative and students respond positively to her energy, expertise, enthusiasm, and ability to relate well to them.

*Park World* named Kate as "Woman in the Industry" in 1993. Her peers also honored her when she received IAAPA's Best Program Award in 1988 for a workshop on training, orientation, and motivating teenaged employees. Her most recent industry presentations are a June 3, 2002 NEAAPA workshop titled: *Building a Vision for*

*Supervisory Success* (co-presented with Alan E. Ramsay), November 21, 2002 IAAPA workshop titled: *Basic Building Blocks for an Effective Ride Operator Training Program*, a March 30, 2004 NEAAPA workshop titled: *The Seduction of Risky Behavior: Understanding and Managing the Adolescent Employee*, two IAAPA workshops in 2004 titled, *Understanding and Managing Adolescent Employees* and *Building a Team of Effective Supervisors*.

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