

Managing Prisoners

Written by Administrator

Friday, 03 February 2012 21:13 - Last Updated Tuesday, 14 February 2012 17:21

In the blog “Who Comes to Your Workshops” I identified three kinds of workshop attendees; participants, passives and prisoners. I left the reader with two questions, one of which we’ll address in this blog. How do you manage the prisoners?

Prisoners



A chief attribute of a workshop prisoner is their negative energy. There are many reasons for this negativity, some justifiable while others may include a lack of maturity. Whatever the reason, the reality is that the trainer must put the group, not the prisoner, as their top concern. Is the prisoner’s behavior impacting the group – if so, you’re asked to intervene indirectly or directly to maintain group health and growth.

In our coping comments below, keep in mind the ‘bushfire’ concept. Responding early to disruptive prisoner allows you to keep the status of behavior at a bushfire level. Letting the prisoner behavior go may well exacerbate the situation and soon you have a forest fire on your hands. It’s much easier to be proactive in a bushfire than reactive in a forest fire.

And secondly, your strategies to manage and lead the prisoner can be seen at two levels; diffuse and depersonalize.

Diffuse strategies

Move from indirect to direct

Move from a preventive to a more corrective approach, from a responsive to an assertive style. The responsive approach usually allows the trainer to make a connection with the learner.

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Avoid arguments – acknowledge problems

Avoid getting caught up in opposing positions. Instead, hear the problem. Get to the bottom of things by asking. You validate the person and allow yourself the opportunity to gain an empathetic attitude. Be hard on the problem but soft on the personalities involved. Acknowledgement does not imply agreement, rather validity of what a person is experiencing. Acknowledgement also reduces the risk of making false assumptions.

Work one on one

Do not give the prisoner a stage. Diffuse any tendency to upstage by removing yourself and the prisoner from the room to talk in private or to speak during breaks. The one on one approach allows the prisoner the freedom to respond without reprisal from other learners.

Refer to ground rules

During a workshop opening ensure you provide or generate workshop guidelines. Then when speaking with a prisoner, you're being proactive, not reactive, when reference is made to group standards. Sometimes, that is all that is needed.

4 on 1

In some cases, linking a prisoner with participants in a subgroup setting may diffuse the resistance or resentment the prisoner is feeling. Be careful that the linking is not done at the expense of the participants. Monitor subgroups with prisoners and intervene as needed.

Seek a partnership

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When working with prisoners, be collaborative, not competitive. Seek a learning partnership. Model the very action you want from them such as cooperation, a positive attitude, lots of patience and good listening ability. To seek a partnership sets up conditions for a prisoner to save face while looking for more constructive ways to behave.

Challenges are Gifts too

Sometimes the workshop experience can be the best thing for a prisoner. You're your patience and perseverance, prisoners may park their luggage and become more engaged with other participants and the learning.

But whether or not you're able to help a prisoner, don't forget that the challenges you've faced are ultimately gifts in disguise. As you look back on difficult training moments, as yourself, "So what did I do well and what would I change?" A question like this helps you frame the experience in a way that promotes insight into yourself and develops your coping strategies.

HUGHism:

**Trainers are much more than subject matter experts.
They are also people-matter specialists.**