

Story Swap

A 99-Word Story Activity from *Say It Quick!*

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Summary

Individuals get different stories and move around the room sharing their story with others one-on-one. Trade stories when you wish, to get a story you really like.

Purpose

To clarify personal values and refine ideas related to leadership

Number of Participants

Minimum six people. Best group size is fifteen to thirty.

Supplies

- One 99-Word Story related to the topic for each participant. It's alright if several people have the same story as long as there are several different stories in circulation.
- Print pages 3 and 4 of this document onto sheets of heavy card stock. Print page 5 on the back of these sheets and cut them into fourths. If you plan to have more than eight people, print several sheets of card stock.

Discussion Questions

- What were some new insights you gained about leadership?
- Which ideas about leadership do you question or disagree with?
- Which leadership concepts would you like to try for yourself?
- What are the three most important characteristics of a great leader?

Faultless Facilitation

To get the most value from this 99-Word Story activity, consider how you might influence the tone of the learning environment. Think about your role and your responsibility to challenge people to stretch their understanding of the topic. Sometimes having the opportunity for a significant conversation is more important than reaching a consensus agreement about the topic.

Here are some suggestions:

- ◆ Avoid either-or thinking by modeling an open interpretation of the 99-Word Stories.
- ◆ Encourage people to share their own stories that relate to those selected.
- ◆ Ask people to keep their personal stories short. Share the air time.
- ◆ Promote multiple ideas for a rich conversation.
- ◆ Give people a moment of silence to identify central concepts that summarize or connect stories in their own mind.
- ◆ Be comfortable with ambiguity. Trust that the time spent will be meaningful even if people don't bring up each and every one of your own brilliant insights.
- ◆ Leave 'em hungry. As facilitator, you don't have to tie up every loose end. Trust people to continue important conversations off line, at the water cooler, and after the workshop.

What To Do

Activity	Facilitator	Participants
Preparation	Prepare a set of six to eight 99-Word Story cards related to the teaching topic. Print one per participant repeating stories if needed.	--
Distribute stories	Randomly give one story to each person from the set of stories.	Read your story and think about how it relates to concepts of leadership.
Compare stories	Encourage people to meet another person and read their story. Ask them to read as many different stories as they can in the given time (ten to fifteen minutes). Watch for people who may be talking too long with the same person or who cannot find a new partner.	Read your partner's story. If you think it is a better illustration of leadership and you like it better than yours, try to negotiate a trade. Otherwise, move on to another person and a new story.
Group sharing	Announce an end to the story sharing. Lead a discussion about the various stories and the topic of leadership by asking for representative input from individuals.	Summarize your final story and describe why you like it as a good example of leadership.
Wrap up	Ask the group to share how their views about leadership have changed as a result of reading and sharing the different stories.	Share opinions.

The Accidental Leader

Through the corridor, down the stairs, around the corner and into the copy room, all the way I was just a few paces behind Nancy. The coincidental similarity of our travels through the office caused her to tease, “Are you following me?”

“No,” I quipped, “Are you leading me?” We laughed together but it made me think. If people have the same goal and objectives, there is really very little difference between leading and following. The distinctions, the status, the recognition, the responsibility all blur as we all work together.

We can play both roles, simultaneously.

Empowerment Dance

Linda was a great boss. More like a coach than a supervisor, she helped me strive for my potential and offered me opportunities to learn and grow professionally and personally. Acutely aware of power differences, she didn't discriminate between me and her office assistant, Isabel.

One day, Isabel confided, “Linda's always trying to get me to go to these fancy retreats but I just want to stay here and type.”

Wow! You can offer to empower but people have to be ready and want to make changes for themselves. It's a complex dance. Who leads, who follows?

Great Groups

Andy is a wonderful musician, teacher, and storyteller. He teaches in schools, calls at square dances, leads choral groups, and plays a mean accordion. What Andy doesn't realize is that he's an expert at fostering teamwork. He has the ability to lead without being in charge – even though he's the “director.”

One comment while leading a choir of novice singers summarizes his philosophy. He said, “Here's how you harmonize. Listen to the person next to you and sing something a little different.” One objective but each contributes uniquely.

Whether musicians, teams, families, or communities, great ones harmonize.

Trash or Treasure

“Used bicycle parts – Some junk”

That's the label on a typical cardboard box in Ralph's garage. This barn beside his home where he has lived (and accumulated) for over fifty years used to have space for three cars. Today there is barely room for one. The building is stuffed with treasures only Ralph would value. Bent yard tools, charred clothes from a house fire, a child's kindergarten craft projects, boxed and labeled fill the space from floor to ceiling. You can find anything.

Unfortunately, it's not enough to be organized if you're still surrounded by junk.

Seeing the Big Picture

I needed to find my way through a large, unfamiliar metro area. Fortunately I was able to borrow my sister's car equipped with a GPS navigation system. With this handy device I sliced through city traffic during rush hour with ease. I just kept one eye on the readout and listened for the prompts.

But the trip wasn't without anxiety. Several times, the gentle metallic voice gave instructions that were counter intuitive. At 65 mph it was very disconcerting!

I realized that discrete instructions don't always make sense if you don't know the whole picture.

Itching to Succeed

I've been driven mad with the prickling under my collar, like tiny, sharp clawed insects, after a haircut. Ready to scream, I immediately jump into a hot shower!

But at my last barber visit, I wore a white T-shirt. When the smock was removed, the fine dusting of dark shavings was obvious. The barber grabbed a horsehair brush and gave my clothing several extra whisks to do away with all the clippings. Immediate relief!

Make it easy for people to succeed. Set up the environment so they can take control of the outcome of their efforts.

What's Your Contribution?

Bob hated meetings. You could witness it in his tone of voice, his body language, his demeanor, and his droll, sarcastic comments. He was famous for his opinion about meetings. Yet as head of his department, attending and leading meetings was a big part of his responsibility.

Surprisingly, Bob taught me the secret to having a great meeting. He would often leave a meeting grumbling that he hadn't gotten anything out of it. But I noticed that he hadn't put anything into the meeting either!

If you want a great meeting, plan to make a contribution!

Open for Business?

Savoring early morning coffee and the ocean view from my booth in Breakers Restaurant at the Ashworth Hotel, I was startled by a loud tapping on the front door. Someone wanted to get in for breakfast. Looking around the deserted restaurant, I called for the cook to open the door.

Here it was thirty minutes after "opening" and the front door was still locked. You'd think someone would have checked – especially since they'd had to unlock the side door from the hotel for me earlier!

Oh, the things we do that unintentionally thwart our own progress!



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