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A Tool You Can Use Today: Rotating Dialogue Closing Activity

You've often heard that people tend to recall what was said first and what was said last during a presentation. That's one of the reasons why effective introductions and conclusions are so important. Unfortunately, too often effective closings are sacrificed as facilitators are rushing through final topics and an array of activities such as post-tests, course evaluations and the dreaded action planning.

Consider the last time you formally ended a training class. Did it end with a bang or a whimper? I've had classes that have ended both ways but always had success with the **rotating dialogue close**. The purpose of a rotating dialogue is to allow participants to share with one another at the close of the class in order to review the material, reinforce important lessons, and even apply some of the learning objects – all while engaging with others. Here's how it works:

Transition to the formal closing of the course by asking participants to work together to reposition their chairs in two parallel rows facing each other. If this appears to be a bit cumbersome based on the size of your group and/or space constraints, there are alternatives*.

The dialogue rotates two positions to the left every 90 seconds or so (with the presentation of a new topic or question by the facilitator) in order to allow participants the opportunity to speak with as many other participants as possible. Ideally, you have an even number of participants but, if not, simply assign one end of the row as a trio position. Participants will then rotate into and out of the trio position as they pass through the end of the row. In this case, the trio would engage in the rotating dialogue and simply share the response time.

Note: This can be an extremely engaging and energizing activity or it can drag from one discussion topic or question to the next. Its success depends on the enthusiasm of the facilitator and the timing of the rotations. Keep a close eye on time during this activity and adjust as the group's energy dictates. 90 seconds is a good guideline, but the dynamics differ from group to group - so adjust accordingly.

The Questions:

The questions to be posed are up to you and, naturally, can be adapted to suit your audience and subject matter. Begin the rotating dialogue with the following discussion topic:

- "Thank each other for fully participating in today's class." Allow about 90 seconds total for discussion, informing participants to switch (to enable their partner to share) after about 45 seconds.

Next, instruct participants to shift two seats to their left and share responses with their new "partner" to the next statement:

- "Tell the other person how you're going to apply _____."

Repeat these instructions (i.e., shifting two seats to the left in order to share with a new “partner”) prior to releasing each new discussion topic or question.

- “Talk about an insight you gained from _____.”
- “How will you use _____ to increase your effectiveness?”
- “Discuss what you will do to improve _____.”
- “Name two people with whom you plan to share your insights gained from today’s session.”

Note: You may, as the presenter, choose to pause here briefly in order to say goodbye, show your appreciation to the participants for their time and attention, etc. Afterwards, pose the final statement:

- “Congratulate each other on successfully completing _____!”

After posing this statement, you will find that participants will shake hands, embrace one another, smile and laugh. It’s the perfect time to cue the music, open the doors and enjoy the moment knowing that you’ve ended with a bang!

* If your meeting room is set up as an open U (or horseshoe), have participants place half of the chairs along the interior perimeter of the open U shape meeting room set. The interior chairs should be positioned facing the table and directly opposite (i.e., facing) the chair on the other side. The end in mind is to have half the chairs on the inside of the U and the other half where they were originally so that participants can sit in the chairs, facing one another for the rotating dialogue.

If your group is too large or the space too small, you can modify the activity by eliminating the chairs and simply have folks stand in two rows facing each other.



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