



LESSON 2. "Leading NFL activities"

SETTING THE STAGE

First of all, consider the space where the activities will take place. If you have the luxury of choosing your space, look for something spacious and comfortable. Usually, that means with comfortable furniture that can be moved around (so that, for instance, the group can form a circle, allowing everyone to see and hear everyone else easily) or with the possibility of forming smaller groups around the room. Also, if participants will have to frequently write notes, then you might want to ensure that there are enough tables for this purpose. Also, remember to look around and take advantage of other spaces around. Is there a nice park or forest nearby? What are other facilities available to you? Switching up the space can do wonders for refreshing your participants and giving them a boost of energy and engagement.

Secondly, you want to set up an environment that has optimal conditions for working. That would translate into ensuring sufficient light in the room and clean air before you begin the session. Depending on the time of the year, you may also want to consider the temperature and adjust it accordingly.

Furthermore, you should prepare all materials that you will need for the sessions at the start of the day so you also can save time in-between activities. Those could be markers, flipcharts, A4 papers, pens, pencils, a projector and much more. You can certainly get creative and use materials to drive discussions along, such as newspaper clippings, online articles, and YouTube videos, or gamify the learning process with board games or digital quizzes.

Lastly, think about the structure of the day and each session. Some researchers recommend that after every 52 minutes of work, a person should take a 15-minute break. You don't have to stick religiously to this rule, but it is essential to provide sufficient breaks throughout the day and to also think about the overall duration of the day – it would be hard to keep participants' attention after more than 6 hours of sessions in a day. Also, at the beginning of each day, give an overview to the participants about the programme of the day and what themes you will be covering.

THE LEAD-UP

As a trainer, you probably want to provide as much help and value in each session as possible, and often your first instinct might be to dive into the materials and sessions you want to cover as quickly as possible.

However, it's important to give yourself and the participants time to get comfortable and settle into the situation. At the beginning of a training session, participants might feel a bit tense or distracted, so you can use different kinds of name games, icebreakers and energisers to get people better acquainted with each other or to bring energy to the room.

Moreover, be sure to make a short introduction to each activity by mentioning the topic of the activity, its purpose and what competencies and skills it aims to develop. This way, participants will have a clearer idea of what to focus on throughout the session.

Leadership





While you might certainly participate in the session, you must remember you are leading first. Offer your insights, stories, and suggestions and contribute to the conversation. However, don't participate to the extent that others in the room feel as if they have nothing to contribute or feel shut out from the conversation.

It's important to acknowledge the contributions offered up by participants to keep them engaged and energised. Capture ideas yourself on flip charts or have a note taker in the room who is responsible for documenting the information presented.

What is more, ensure that everyone understands a point that was just made or the two sides of an argument. You can do so by summarising or clarifying important points and ideas or restating a conclusion the group has reached.

It should go without saying that you have to be an active listener throughout the activity to be able to respond to comments, ideas, and inputs from the participants.

In addition, be aware of people's reactions and feelings. If a group member is hurt by others' comments, seems puzzled or confused, is becoming angry or defensive, it's up to you as leader to deal with the situation. You might choose to do so by pointing that out and discussing how to state your opinion without getting personal. Being aware of the reactions of individuals and the group as a whole can make it possible to expose conflict or head off unnecessary emotional situations and misunderstandings.

Discussions

Don't fall into the trap of feeling that you have to prove or showcase your expertise on a given subject or make lengthy presentations. But rather encourage a spirit of inquiry in the participants, allow them to come up with their own answers to certain questions, and experience knowledge breakthroughs through discussions with each other.

Nonetheless, you should actively lead the learning process by for example, using open-ended questions to stimulate further reflections on problems and supporting participants in analysing and coming up with arguments. You can provide your input to clear up any confusions or questions where necessary, thereby distilling your knowledge and concentrating on the learning outcomes that the participants find most valuable.

Argumentation

Control your own biases. While you should point out factual errors or ideas that are inaccurate and disrespectful of others, an open process demands that you not impose your views on the group, and that you keep others from doing the same. Group members should be asked to make rational decisions about the positions or views they want to agree with. Pointing out bias – including your own – and discussing it helps both you and group members try to be objective.

The Takeaway

Often, throughout longer learning sessions you will cover a lot of information and bring in a lot of new facts which might feel slightly overwhelming for the learners. This is why it is important to take the time to capture and summarize key insights.

It's the part where you review what you talked about, structure the information they received into a more actionable format and lay out the next steps they should take to build on the new information they now have.