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GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

Impacting training through Gamification

Steve Gillick

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01 APR 2013: There are usually two meanings for the expression “games people play”. One refers to the cynical head games that some people play in order to induce sympathy, feed their ego, confuse, obfuscate, humour and more.



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While there are several songs on the subject, perhaps the most direct was Joe South's 1968 composition with the words "Oh the games people play now/ Every night and every day now/ Never meaning what they say now/ never saying what they mean".

The second meaning of the term refers to fun and educational games that replicate life situations and experiences, solve problems, encourage interaction, or teach and review skills.

One of the buzz words in the industry these days is "Gamification", which may be defined as the use of games to encourage participation during a training meeting or conference and thereby make the event more meaningful, relevant and memorable. This is not a new concept. Take it from me, a former summer camp director, who used games to successfully train 100 staff every year, who in turn used games to teach everything from swimming to canoeing, to arts-and-crafts, drama and sports.

Today, one of the biggest challenges for event organizers is to ensure that the participants have a 'take home' of information that not only justifies their having attended the event in the first place, but has a lasting effect. By 'Gamifying' the event, there is an excellent chance that this objective can be reached and surpassed.

Know Thy Audience

A successful meeting or conference starts with knowing something about the audience. That's the reason why seasoned speakers introduce their topic by asking questions of the participants. How many of you are bricks and mortar travel agents? How many are home based? How many managers in attendance? How many agents have been in the industry for 5 years or more?

Now you thought the speaker was just killing time to arrive at their own comfort level before they begin their presentation. Not so. Actually, the speaker is 'gamifying' the conference from the very start by asking members of the audience to participate ♦ to interact if you will ♦ and provide some background on their careers or personal lives.

If the audience wholeheartedly raises their hands or shouts out answers, then this may indicate that the group is gregarious, sociable and extroverted; one where members of the audience enjoy getting up and speaking, participating in skits or being singled out. This is a group that will be engaged and contribute to brain-storming sessions without worrying about whether their ideas are silly or far-fetched. These are the high energy 'hams' that will bring out the fun in an event.

But even more so, an audience that includes extroverts has an interesting effect on the introverts in the group. Introverts are those whose comfort level naturally leans toward being more reserved or keeping their thoughts to themselves. These are the people who avert their gaze when the conference speaker asks for volunteers, or who mentally run for cover (or silently mouth expletives) when they are forced to interact during a meeting or conference.

The curious thing is that introverts often feed off the energy of the extroverts in the crowd. A rambunctious extroverted audience can gather in those who tend toward introversion and involve them in the spirit of the event: participation, interaction and fun. Everyone leaves the session in high spirits, feeling great about the experience and about themselves.

And that one audience game, sandwiched amongst the seminars, workshops, break outs, field trips and banquets may in fact be the only session that the participants buzz about for weeks and months afterward.

Conference games come in all shapes and sizes. I begin by suggesting that the very act of asking the audience questions is, in a sense, a game of involvement. If the group tends toward introversion (even the most successful travel agents may be personally introverted while at the same time being professional extroverted) then games might include:

- **A quiz** that asks some serious as well as fun questions. i.e. Do you like the GDS we are using? If you could change one thing about the GDS what

would that be? What is the most enjoyable destination you have ever visited? How many countries have you visited? Who is your favourite cartoon character? Somehow this should relate to the session being attended. The quiz can either be 'marked' by the person who completed it or handed to a seat-mate to mark.

- **A map.** This is useful at destination seminars (draw a map of Mexico and identify Cancun, Acapulco, Puerto Vallarta and Cabo San Lucas). But this can also be used in general travel skill seminars to drive home the importance of destination knowledge. (i.e. Draw a map of South East Asia and identify the following countries: China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia etc). It's a fun and challenging exercise that gets the audience involved, as well as making the point that they probably need some assistance with their geography skills. Those who score 100% can be acknowledged and given a small prize, which helps to establish an energy-field in the audience and encourages further participation.

A more extroverted group will enjoy exercises that are more socially interactive:

- **A structured Experience.** This is usually a team exercise in groups of 4-5. No chairs have to be moved. Some will opt to move to another area to complete the experience, others will sit where they are. But the entire room will be buzzing with discussion ♦ which is what organizers want. The actual 'game' consists of asking the group to list 10 things. It could be 10 reasons to send a client on a cruise; 10 selling skills; 10 customer service points you would want an entry level staff member to know; 10 reasons to buy travel from a real, live travel agent, etc. Or it could even be an exercise

where each group is tasked with the challenge to start their own travel agency and they must list 10 aspects of the new corporate culture, or 10 'codes of ethics' for the make-believe agency.

After a few minutes, when each group has their '10', you announce that a new law has been passed that says each group can have only '5' items on their list. Now the group has to discuss again what are the top 5 skills or reasons, out of the original 10. After a few minutes, you make a similar announcement that another law dictates that only '3' items can be on each group's list, and once again, the group must decide on the 3 most important skills or reasons or features.

The purpose of the game is to get the audience to interact, think, brain storm for ideas, argue their points, and ultimately arrive at a consensus. Then you can ask for a few volunteers to speak about the results they arrived at or the dynamics in arriving at those results. The exercise must be tied to the session they are attending, and now having participated in a game, they can fully relate to the topic. They will be more attentive, more engaged and more apt to remember the session days and weeks afterward.

Other games may include...

- **skits**, where audience members volunteer and are coached before acting out a scenario, or are provided with a simple script to read

- **game shows**, pre-planned with quiz questions and based on popular television shows such as Jeopardy, Deal or No Deal, Family Feud, Are you Smarter than a 5th Grader, Who Wants to be a Millionaire?, Let's Make a Deal, Truth or

Consequences, The Price is Right, The Dating Game etc.

· **Icebreakers:** human bingo, fact or fiction, mixed-up nametags etc.

Conference and meeting games simulate situations, problems, dilemmas and challenges and by doing so, encourage creative thinking, problem solving and involvement. And let's not forget some of the most important aspects of any event: fun, relevance, enthusiasm, energy and promoting a spirit of education that is memorable.

Steve, a former camp director, is the founder of Board of Life, that not only created the travel board game "Peregrinations" but also organizes the Conference Game "Are you Smarter than the Average Traveller" in both industry and consumer versions. Contact Steve@talkingtravel.ca for details.





Steve Gillick

A tireless promoter of "infectious enthusiasm about travel", Steve delivers his wisdom once a month in his column *The Travel Coach*.

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