

## **The Problem is the Solution**

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(Revised: 2. June 2008 by Clinton Callahan)

### **FORMAT:**

Whole group exercise with 10 parts. From 2-30 people.

Duration: Requires 2-3 hours.

### **PURPOSE:**

This process uses individual diversity as a tool for changing an organization's worst problems into guidelines for improvement. Mistakes become intellectual property. Problems become instruction-manuals for better solutions. This process gives every person a voice, brings all factions together on the same team, efficiently produces 3 clear change initiatives with a multitude of linear and nonlinear solutions, and provides a huge lesson in responsibility.

To bring background conversations into the foreground as a new framework for change making. To produce staff "buy-in" for change. This is a very valuable process. Participants are quite relieved to be able to speak about what has been bothering them for a long time but which in their mind could not be spoken about in public. Trainer holds that we are all in this together and it will be for everyone's benefit to clean this up. Remember, your client is always the organization, never the individuals in the organization.

### **SETUP:**

Chairs in small circles of 6 to 8. One person in each group volunteers as the Scribe for writing down problems. They must have good clear printing. They are to write down EVERYTHING that people say. NO JUDGEMENT OR EDITING. Instruct them to print big and use as much paper as they want. They have an A4 sized pad and mark each page with a vertical line 5 cm from the left side. Scribe separates each problem they write down with a horizontal line across the page as they go along.

### **Precautions:**

Make certain that all power-players, invisibles and trouble-makers are present to participate in the process. It seems to work best if Top Management all sits in one circle together.

### **INTRO / BACKGROUND:**

There are different kinds of "talk" in an organization. Some of the talk is foreground conversation, news that everybody knows and everybody is talking about. For example: "Peter is getting married to Olga. We just bought a new forklift. Margret is being promoted to Manager." Some of the talk is background conversation, news

that everybody knows and NOBODY is talking about. For example: "We are losing ground to ABC Company's new product line. Norman is a cruel and unfair Project Leader. There is too much overtime - why don't they hire more staff? Olga's group has the best snacks."

## **INSTRUCTIONS / PROCEDURE:**

### **PART 1: (20 minutes)**

Trainer says, "This process is called The Problem Is The Solution. It changes background conversations into foreground conversations. We need your help. The process has 10 parts. This is Part 1. Please think of every problem that you know of in this organization, everything that is not working. Please describe the problem specifically to your scribe and make sure that they write it down exactly as you say it. Take a risk. Say what you know to be true. It is time to speak it out. Do not think about it anymore. Just say it."

Trainer asks: "What are the Low Dramas? What is the gossip? What is confusing? What is not working? Where are the blocks? Where is the energy going? What is being wasted? How? By who? (money, time, supplies...) Who is not listening? Who has secrets? What are they? What promises have not been kept? What is impeding the organization's success?"

### **PART 2: (10 minutes)**

Give every person in each group 5 stick-on dots. Each person votes with their dots for the 5 most important problems on their group's list. Put dots in box to left of each problem. (Important: only one dot per person per problem.) Count the dots by each problem. Find the five top problems from each group.

### **PART 3: (10 minutes)**

Scribe from each group writes their 5 top problems neatly onto a flip-chart paper.

### **PART 4: (10 minutes)**

Trainer asks Scribe to read their list to the whole group so the whole group understands the problem. Make clarifications if necessary. (Warning: Use your sword deftly!) After all flip-charts are read, write "DUPLICATE" across the duplicates, reserving the most articulate to be voted on.

### **PART 5: (10 minutes)**

Each person is given 3 stick-on dots. Everyone dots the 3 most important problems on all charts together. (Again, only one dot per person per problem!) Dots are counted. Top 3 problems are labeled in red ink: "1," "2," and "3" with circles around them. Trainer asks the question: "If these 3 problems were addressed, would it make a difference for the company/organization?" (Yes.) "Let us then address them."

### **PART 6: (10 minutes)**

Each person writes down at least one linear and one nonlinear solution for each of the top three problems.

### **PART 7: (varies, 10 – 30 minutes)**

People read their solutions, saying, "Number One, Linear: \_\_\_\_\_. Nonlinear: \_\_\_\_\_. Number Two, Linear: \_\_\_\_\_..." and so on. Precautions: Make sure people just read what they wrote and do not start politicizing for their solutions. Also, this can get tedious. After two or three people have read their solutions, duplicates can happen. If the group is big, invite random people to read out their solutions if they have not been said yet. These lists should be collected when reading is over, and can be combined and published later. Trainer asks, "Would these solutions work?" (Yes.)

**PART 8:** (10 minutes)

Trainer asks, "Who is responsible for making these changes?"

Trainer goes to new flip-chart paper. Writes:

RESPONSIBILITY

OLD:

NEW:

Typical answers: The bosses. The owners. The managers. Nobody. The problem makers. Finally they might say, "We are." This is a time for the 10 Euro demonstration. "We" cannot take responsibility.

Trainer writes in the OLD software section: "Waiting around for someone else to give us responsibility."

The only effective answer to the question about who is responsible is, "I am." Trainer writes in the NEW software section: "Taking responsibility."

**PART 9:** (10 minutes)

Trainer says, "If you took responsibility for making these changes NOW, write down what your first 10 action steps would be. Be simple, clear and specific. For example, 'I would write such and such a letter, make such and such a telephone call, have such and such a meeting with this and that person on such and such a day,' etc."

**PART 10:** (10 minutes, plus a 20 minute break)

Trainer says, "We are now going 10 years into the future." Trainer has everyone snap their fingers. "In this future, YOU took responsibility for making these changes. You DID the action steps on your list. Look back from 10 years in the future and write down what results taking responsibility created in your personal and professional life. Where you live, what you do each day, how much money you have, and so on. Now take a break for 20 minutes. On this break, find out from as many other people as you can what happened in THEIR lives from taking responsibility for making changes."

After the break, have people write down a few more things on their list. Then have everyone snap their fingers and come back from the future to the present.

**DEBRIEF** (10 minutes)

Trainer asks, "What did you learn? What did you see?" Takes sharing.