

10 TIME-SAVERS FOR FACILITATORS OF LEARNING

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http://reviewing.co.uk/archives/art/14_3_ten_time-savers_for_facilitators.htm

In this article a 'Byway' is an old slow way to facilitate, and a 'Highway' is generally a better route choice because it saves time. Byways may still have some merits - but usually only when the main highway is blocked.

Timesaver 1

Are you on the Byway working on weaknesses?

Then join the Highway: **build on strengths**

Because: (according to Gallup) "People progress more rapidly in their areas of greatest talent than in their areas of weakness. Yet too many training and development approaches focus on making improvements in areas of weakness." ... "The strengths philosophy is the assertion that individuals are able to gain far more when they expend effort to build on their greatest talents than when they spend a comparable amount of effort to remediate their weaknesses." (Clifton & Harter, 2003). [strengths.gallup....](#)

How to apply the strengths-based approach when reviewing.

'Back to the Future' gets people off to a sprint start because they are first asked to say what they already have that will help them on their journey towards their goal. This audit of strengths and resources helps people make good use of what they already have - offering much potential for huge time-savings. http://reviewing.co.uk/archives/art/11_1.htm#5

For more strengths-based methods see 'Reviewing Success' @

<http://reviewing.co.uk/success/index.htm>

But ... look out for exceptions. The Case Against Positive Thinking and Strengths-Based 'Fads': <http://reviewing.co.uk/success/too-much-success.htm>

Estimate of time saved: 50%

Timesaver 2

Are you on the Byway asking people to describe in words?

Then join the Highway: **ask people to use pictures as well as words.**

Because: "A picture is worth a thousand words" (according to an old saying)

How to apply this principle when reviewing. See 'Reviewing with Pictures' @ <http://reviewing.co.uk/pictures/intro.htm>

But ... it can sometimes take a long time to find or create the right picture.

Estimate of time saved: 10%

Timesaver 3

Are you still on the Byway asking people to describe in words?

Then join the Highway: **ask people to demonstrate through action.**

Because: "Actions speak louder than words" (according to another old saying)

How to apply this principle when reviewing.

See 'Action Replay' @ <http://reviewing.co.uk/stories/replay.htm>

For more methods see 'Active Reviewing' @ <http://reviewing.co.uk/actrev.htm>

But ... not every review topic relates to action and performance.

Even though some internal processes can be explored through action - using 'inner team' players or 'constellation' methods.

Estimate of time saved: 25%

Timesaver 4

On the Byway facilitating a reflective group discussion?

Then join the Highway: **provide time out with a learning buddy**

Because: (compared to group discussion) sharing reflection time with a conversation partner results in:

- higher levels of participation
- more 'me time'
- greater personalisation and relevance of learning
- more confidentiality (if needed and agreed)

And you can always ask for a succinct summary afterwards if the paired work is of real interest for the whole group.

How to apply this principle when reviewing:

See Reviewing for Two @

<http://reviewing.co.uk/articles/reviewing-by-numbers.htm#2>

But ... It is good to provide a variety of opportunities for reflection eg alone, in pairs, and in groups - so do not depend too much on any one strategy, whichever is your favourite one.

Estimate of time saved: 50% (less if it is a small reflective group)

Timesaver 5

On the Byway talking with any partner?

Then join the Highway: **help people find the most suitable conversation partner.**

Because: random pairings of people may not be well matched for learning together. So ensure there is a sound and deliberate basis for any two people coming together for learning.

How to apply this principle when reviewing.

- Allow participants to choose learning partners.
- Allow participants to change learning partners.
- Suggest a rationale for choosing: eg the person you were working with most closely during the previous activity, or the person who has expressed a similar point of view or preference.
- If the conversation is about transfer of learning, it makes sense for participants to pair up with someone they can readily maintain contact with back in the workplace.

But ... The random and frequent changing of partners (as happens in 'Brief Encounters', for example) can be a good group building strategy.

Estimate of time saved: from **5%** to **95%** depending on how dysfunctional a random pairing would have been.

Timesaver 6

On the Byway providing feedback that is not wanted?

Then join the Highway: **provide feedback that is asked for.**

Because: people are more interested, more receptive and less defensive when they are clear about the kind of feedback they want.

How to apply this principle when reviewing:

<http://reviewing.co.uk/feedback.htm#warmseat>

But ... People do not always know what they want and they could miss out on valuable feedback if they only get what they ask for. So your overall purpose might be to build a learning climate in which participants are generally more open to giving and receiving feedback.

<http://reviewing.co.uk/learning-cycle/feedback-methods.htm>

Estimate of time saved: up to **50%**, but as little as **0%** where people already welcome any kind of well-intentioned feedback.

Timesaver 7

On the Byway allowing a few people to dominate a review discussion?

Then join the Highway: **create subgroups on review topics they wish to discuss.**

Because: when people do not participate the value of the learning process is much reduced for everyone - especially for the non-participants.

How to apply this principle when reviewing.

Find out what people want to talk about and create smaller groups around those topics. If a topic would benefit from hearing everyone's views, then the people who have chosen to specialise in that topic can conduct a survey at a time when members of the original (bigger) group are free to participate. This is most easily managed if every subgroup wishes to carry

out a survey - for which the Simultaneous Survey process is useful. See reviewing.co.uk/a...
But ... There are other good ways to respond to the dominance of a few, but if you find yourself forever coaxing responses from the quieter participants, this is a strong sign that you need to change the structure rather than over-coax. Other solutions are described in 'Encouraging Participation' @ http://reviewing.co.uk/archives/art/3_2.htm

Estimate of time saved: divide the number of group members (say 10) by the number of non-participants (say 7) and multiply by 100 = **70%**.

Timesaver 8

On the Byway imposing a pre-planned linear sequence?

Then join the Highway: **play the Joker - skip a stage or follow the energy.**

Because: the planned sequence was your best guess about what would be most suitable, but while you are implementing your plan you (or the participants) may come up with much better ideas as new problems or new opportunities arise. Some of these opportunities might take the form of short cuts that speed up the learning process for some or all participants.

How to apply this principle when reviewing.

Start with a sequence in mind, but above all keep the purpose in mind. Remember that the sequence was a means to an end. Do not start a session with only one plan - always have a few alternatives and choices ready. If you are giving a lecture you can just stick to your script, but if your session focuses on participants, their experiences and their reflections, then you are operating in the domain of emergent learning for which there is no predetermined pathway for either content or process.

But ... I did recently write a series of three articles about designing reviews: there is always a balance to strike between design and flexibility. See Designs for Reviewing @ reviewing.co.uk/a...

& The Art of Reviewing: intuition and creativity in facilitation
<http://reviewing.co.uk/articles/the.art.of.reviewing.htm>

Estimate of time saved: **20% - 80%** depending on the degree to which the original plan happens to fit with the emerging situation and opportunities.

Timesaver 9

On the Byway asking everyone for their thoughts on an issue?

Then join the Highway: **create a large spectrum or diagram and ask each person to show their position by where they stand.**

Because: this gives a quick snapshot of everyone's position and the pattern this reveals guides the rest of the process. For example, if everyone is huddled together there may not be a lot to talk about. Whereas if everyone is scattered there would be a wide range of interesting views on the topic. Once the facilitator can see the pattern, there is plenty of scope for making this a more efficient and interesting process

How to apply this principle when reviewing.

Horseshoe:

<http://reviewing.co.uk/articles/ropes.htm#HORSESHOE>

Activity Map

http://reviewing.co.uk/articles/ropes.htm#ACTIVITY_MAP

But ... Some issues are more complex than can be represented on a single spectrum (Horseshoe) or in a 2x2 grid (Activity Map) - so there is scope for experimenting with different kinds of mapping processes to discover (and work with) the range of views in a group.

Estimate of time saved: subtract 1 minute from the time it would otherwise have taken for everyone to declare their position and work out the percentage of time saved - perhaps **90%** or higher.

Timesaver 10

On the Byway every group/subgroup reporting back in the big group?

Then join the Highway: **ask for an exhibition of learning with headlines on display.**

Because: reporting back in the big group can be very repetitive. An exhibition changes the dynamics and allows learners to visit the exhibits of greatest interest and engage in conversations about them.

How to apply this principle when reviewing.

Think through the purpose of any sharing session. If you expect the small group learning process to be more valuable for participants than the large group sharing process, then ensure that this is consistent with the time allocated to each. Also consider the possibility of missing out any large group process - or concluding with an exhibition.

But ... Sometimes you need large group events to create a sense of community and common purpose. If this is the case, then this should be your starting point rather than trying to create a sense of community by everyone sitting for a long time listening to a series of repetitive presentations.

Estimate of time saved: the difference between touring an exhibition (maybe 5 minutes) and listening to several presentations (maybe 20 minutes) = **75%**.

The 19th century Scots poet Walter Wingate, in 'Highways and Byways' expressed a strong preference for the happiness of the byways: "But aye it's frae the byways comes hame the happy sang."

In the 21st century bypasses are more popular than byways. We like short-cuts and the quickest way from A to B. I hope this article will help you to help your participants achieve their goals sooner.

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