



How to plan a meeting that people won't dread— Part II

Role Plays. Skits. Improv. These words strike fear into my heart. I know these methods can be great ways to work through a tricky problem, and many people love the opportunity to actively engage with an idea or challenge by getting up and acting it out. Even *I* admit that I love the fun and energy in the room when my colleagues perform (I have many talented and hilarious colleagues). But I'll do just about anything to stay off the stage myself.

Last week I wrote about some ways that you can plan meetings and events that meet the needs of more Business Chemistry types more of the time. Check out our [blog page](#) to read part one. This week I'll continue that theme, starting with a discussion of these anxiety-producing (for me) kinds of activities.

When quieter types hesitate to get involved we sometimes implore them to “get out of their comfort zone” and “stretch” This kind of encouragement can be helpful if someone just needs a little push to get there. However, for others, improv and role plays are too far from comfort, and if someone's totally preoccupied by

performance anxiety, they're probably not focused on learning. On the flip-side, for others, sitting too long and listening or discussing is boring, boring, boring. And if someone is bored, they're not learning much either. For many of these folks, the chance to use their creativity and acting chops keeps them interested.

A key here is to make it okay for people to participate in different ways. While some people can't wait to get into the spotlight (ahem, [Pioneers](#)), others are more comfortable participating offstage, developing a script, suggesting an improv scenario, creating a prop, recording a video, cheering their colleagues on, or summarizing learning in a wrap-up conversation. So yes, let's all stretch a little, but not so far that we pull any muscles.

Compete. And Bond. Do you have a thirst to win? To crush the competition? To battle to the end? If you're [Driver](#), and in particular a [Commander](#), you might be surprised to know not everyone feels this way! A little friendly competition is a great way to engage some people, but others, not so much. [Integrators](#), and especially [Dreamers](#), tend to be less competitive, and framing things in this way may miss the mark with them. So consider creating competitions between small groups that also allow for extra bonding time within those groups. That way, each type can focus on the aspect of the experience that motivates them—strengthening relationships or besting rivals.

Take turns

Research has shown that teams are more effective when members share the airtime and make equal contributions to discussions.¹ That's all well and good, but how many teams have you been on where this happened? Particularly when you mix those more likely to jump in ([Pioneers](#), [Commanders](#), and [Teamers](#)) with those more likely to hang back ([Guardians](#), [Dreamers](#), and [Scientists](#)), how do you get the jumpers in to do so less frequently and the hangers back to take a step forward? I saved this one for last because it's perhaps one of the thorniest challenges, and more than a proven solution, I'll propose a few thought-starter ideas.

Suppose each person had a pile of poker chips displayed in front of them, and each time they spoke they cashed one in? Could this help to rein in those who usually dominate the conversation? The goal of the entire team would be for those piles of poker chips to stay relatively balanced throughout the meeting. If you notice one person seems to be stockpiling chips, the group could pause to ask if they'd like to cash one in. You might

even provide some “expert” chips in a different color, to acknowledge that sometimes a particular person dominates on a topic because it's their area of expertise, and the group wants them to share a little extra.

Or, maybe you could rank order team members in terms of how talkative they tend to be. Then, match people up in pairs—those who talk most with those who talk least. Or, if that seems too daunting, match both those who talk most and those who talk least with someone in the middle of the pack. Then, ask people to try and calibrate their speaking-time to their partner's. For some that would mean speaking less, to give their partner space to speak more. For others it would mean making an effort to speak up themselves, and maybe kicking their partner under the table when they're using too much airtime.

When trying out either of the suggestions above, it's important not to put undue pressure on people to speak if they're not prepared with something valuable to add. The idea is less about cold-calling those who tend to be more reserved, and more about developing norms and ways of working together that create space for those who sometimes contribute less. This brings us back to the idea of pre-work, which I wrote about last week. If people know they'll be expected to contribute in a significant way, and they're given the information they need to prepare for that in advance, those who process better alone will likely do so, and you'll be more likely to get their willing participation. Search our [blog page](#) to read part one.

To sum up—It's about options

You may be thinking that planning a lot of options into your meeting or event sounds like more effort. And it is. But ask yourself—why are you planning that meeting in the first place? What do you want or need from people? If it's their active participation, engagement, or ideas, you're more likely to get those if you consider people's needs and preferences in your planning. You certainly can't please all of the people all of the time, but considering Business Chemistry can get you a bit closer, and if your goal is a successful meeting you're more likely to accomplish that as well.

Dr. Suz

Contact:

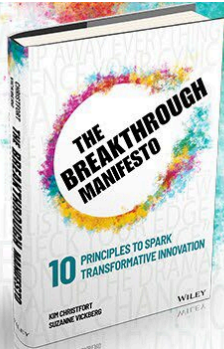
Suzanne Vickberg (aka Dr. Suz)

Research Lead | Deloitte Greenhouse®

svickberg@deloitte.com

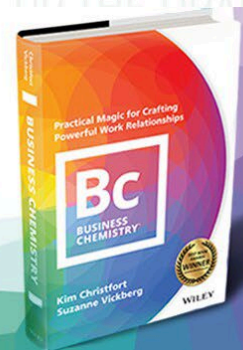
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