

Maximizing/Minimizing

the value of a learning experience

A specific kind of discovery list. The facilitator first asks "How, in your experience, do you maximize the value of a learning experience? For example, maybe a friend offers to show you how to use a new computer program, or you go to an evening class to learn a new skill. How have you found that in your life you're able to maximize the value of a learning experience?"

Note that you are *not* asking them how the teacher can be more effective, or how the environment can be more supportive. The teacher may be terrible and the environment worse. The point of this exercise is empowerment. How can *you* maximize the value of a learning experience? Be very clear about this in your own mind, and when a participant offers an idea which is not about what they have the power to do, explain again the intention of your question: what do *you* do to maximize

List the ideas, and interact, ask for an example or two, ask for hands on how many others have found that a way of maximizing the value, ask for surprising ideas that might not already be Conventional Wisdom in the group.

When they are with you (no need to make this an exhaustive list), switch to "How, in your experience, do you *minimize* the value of . . . ?" Smile, assure them this is honesty time, give permission for them to do self-disclosure. Interact a lot with them after the first one or two (not at the outset). Ask them for examples at first, then ask them how that way of minimizing might show up in this workshop. "Ah, you get sleepy after lunch and zone out? How many others sometimes do that (hands)?"

"What have you found works when you zone out, to bring yourself back to the present?" Get some options from participants -- no need to write those up. Another way to ask this question is: "If this shows up in this training, how will we know?"

You have options after this list is up, like forming buddies to talk about how to handle these discoveries ("What support do you need?) or small groups to take different ones of the Minimizing list and do problem-solving.

Note: While this write-up is applied to your learning, it could easily be applied to how do you maximize or minimize your staff meetings, your demonstrations, your fundraising dinners, your board meetings, your lobbying visits with legislators.