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15.277 Special Seminar in Communications: Leadership and Personal Effectiveness Coaching
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Activity Overview - IMPROMPTU

We are all challenged by the unexpected question, whether in a job interview, a discussion with our managers, cold calls in class or in an impromptu in 15.280 class. This lab gives students a primer on structuring the impromptu and opportunity to practice putting one together.

Typical Activity Outcomes	Potential “Core Connections”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realization of how much life experience they have to draw on to answer almost any question. • Playing with the possibilities can challenge them, be fun and memorable. • Responding spontaneously will create the best answer and the strongest interaction with the audience. • Structure can be a creative support as well as a constraint. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15.280 impromptu • Job Interviews • Meetings • Case discussion • Class discussion • Team brainstorming • Any Q & A

Activity Materials

- Facilitator Guide
- A session envelope with questions for team members to draw
- Impromptu guide
- Watch

Activity Time Frame

Total Time: 50 minutes

Activity Schedule:

- 3 min: Activity Introduction
- 5 min: “Yes, And”
- 5 min: Individual Review of Impromptu structure
- 21 min. Initial run-through
- 15 min: Second chance
- 3 min: Summary

Setting Up The Activity

Select a comfortable and quiet place to sit with your team. Be sure that the group has room to present.

Safety Considerations

There are no physical safety concerns for this activity. Create a sense of possibility and non-judgmental play.

Facilitation Instructions

Step 1: Introducing the Activity

Say the following (in your own words):

We all have the experience of walking away from a class or an interaction wishing we had said something different. This is to practice for such moments, to remind you how much your work and life experience is relevant, even within unusual contexts, and to learn a tool-- a basic structure--to support you. The tools we will practice today to help you:

*Learn to pause, to take time,
Think through a structure before answering,
Listen carefully for assumptions, yours and others,
Go with your instinct*

Step 2: Overview the Activity Schedule

Review the goals and schedule with the team (in your own words):

1. *The purpose of this activity is to permit you really to **slow down** and practice impromptu speaking*
2. *To learn a structured approach to impromptus*
3. *To draw on your life material to support idea generation*
4. *To work through a speech to help us slow down and think when feeling confronted by a question*

Step 2: Lead a warm-up exercise

The key to impromptu is saying "YES!" Embrace it!

Just as the key to any interaction is to embrace it.

Let's do an activity that encourages taking the risk of saying whatever comes to mind.

We will all create a story.

Someone will say a first line, then we will each in turn contribute to the story, beginning with the word, 'Yes' and ending with 'And', inviting others to continue the story.

So, for example, if I say “Goldilocks took her picnic basket into the forest”, you would say '**Yes**', "she ran into a woodsman" 'And'... The next person would pick up the story there repeating, '**Yes**', "he asked directions to grandma’s house" 'And'...and so on.

Continue the story until you are satisfied they are ready and then ask someone to begin. Tell them it works best when everyone listens intently to the story. Don’t let them think too long—just ask someone to start.

Step 3: Debrief story

1. What did you notice about waiting for your turn?
2. (They should note that if they listen to the story instead of making up a line they will be more relaxed and come up with a better line)
3. What does this tell you about rules for impromptus?
 - a. Don’t rush!
 - b. Visual and concrete language is best
 - c. Be positive (accept what someone tells you)
 - d. Trust the story, trust ourselves
 - e. We all know the “answer”
 - f. Don’t rush!
 - g. We have a sense of narrative structure
 - h. They may not catch this, but Stories are the most memorable aspect of an impromptu speech

Lead the Preparation of impromptus

Give each person a hand out and review it. Give them a few minutes to review the handout on their own.

When it is their time, each person will draw a question and prepare an answer. They can reject their first question, but they have to accept the second one they draw.

Do not permit them to read the question out loud. If they reject it, put it back without showing it to others. Do not let them read the question before they speak either. If they want, they can incorporate the question in their “position” statement.

[Facilitators note: Many of these questions are job-interview related. Although many of them are used in behavioral interviews—I have collected them from recruiters—many are more general. However, these were designed to practice

the structure first, rather than making complicated answers. In their own interviewing practice, the students will have a chance to write out answers to all questions they can find related to their particular job search. The structure will remind them of what they need to do. Also, such questions as these will apply to any casual conversation with job recruiters or informational interviews.]

Ask participants to select an order so the team knows who will go first, second, etc.

The first person begins.

Facilitation Notes:

1. You will only have approximately 3 minutes per participant (assuming 7 team members) for the first time through. At first it will take longer, but they will catch on and the exercise will move along much faster.
2. Do begin by telling them to take time!
3. You will want to interrupt them if they get lost and point out where they are in the structure. If they struggle with it, have them think a minute and start again.
4. Encourage them to have a strong starting idea—that will help them follow up with the story.
5. Remind them to “manage” the question. They don’t have to answer the question asked. They can “bridge” into a question they want to answer.
6. After everyone has run through the exercise once, you may have time to give each a second chance.
7. At the end, ask what they learned from the activity.

Step 4: Lead a second round as time permits

Step 5: Lead a Debrief of the Activity

Ask one or more of the following questions to bring closure to the activity:

1. What is the hardest part of doing the impromptu?
2. What is the easier part?
3. What works best of the speeches they heard?
4. How were they affected by the structure?
5. Did it get easier after hearing others participating?

6. Do they recognize that their stories are the meat of the impromptu and any experience they may have had is a potential story?

Step 6: Summarize the Activity and Explain What Happens “Next”

Keep practicing. How? Toastmasters. CDO will give them information on kinds of questions they will expect in the job interviews. (They should keep a list and write out answers to each one.) 15.280—their own and others’ practice will help. Keep in mind that stories and visual, concrete information is most memorable. Everyone should have a fund of stories to draw from, for any Q & A or interview or impromptu experience. Read and keep up with current affairs, especially related to their areas of interest, but also of world events.

Step 7: Next Week: Come prepare to tell an intense story about leadership—their own or someone they observed doing something that they saw as leadership. Make it a 2 – 3 minute story and we will video-tape them. Do not memorize a story, but have one in mind.

IMPROMPTU WORKSHEET

Take a position on the question.

Create a “big idea”, a memorable phrase, use a quote, or paint a picture to reinforce your position and to support recall

For example, to the question, “why did you choose Sloan?” you might say, “Sloan has been my first choice ever since I learned their emphasis on the pragmatic and the practical.”

Frame your position.

Set context, define terms, explore words and meaning to you.

For example, “Sloan actualizes the institute motto, *mens et manos*, mind and hand: it offers practice, as well as theory and education for managers. Sloan’s capacity to teach business and entrepreneurship is unparalleled.” (Or, “Business theory and practice...”)

Establish your credibility.

Tell why you are the one to speak on this.

For example, speak from personal experience “I started my first business when I was” , Or, “I began in a large organization. Having learned about organizations from that experience, I want to test myself in a start-up”.

Discuss 2-4 ideas, evidence, issues, facts that support your position.

What are the 2-4 things we have to know to understand your position? For example, “The three reasons I chose Sloan were to learn practical applications, the theory of entrepreneurship and to get an outstanding management education. I have all three...”

Give a concrete example. Tell a story. Tell a story about a class project where all three come together.

Create a solid close—Return to your “big idea”, rephrase it, change it, --surprise us.