

Professional Development Activity on Leadership

This activity develops teams' questioning and listening skills and creates an environment of truthful disclosure. It allows teams to build on the power of questioning to bring the team closer together.

Time Frame

This exercise should take approximately thirty minutes.

Materials

This exercise calls for a facilitator, a recorder, a chalkboard or whiteboard (or other publicly viewable screen), chalk or markers, pens or pencils, and paper.

Process

After identifying a facilitator and a recorder, consider the following.

1. The group reviews the following eight questions as a team. It plans to respond to the first and second questions, and one additional question of its own choice, as a team. Note that the team can select as many questions as it would like but should allow for ten to fifteen additional minutes per question. The recorder should list responses from team members on a chalkboard, whiteboard, or other publicly viewable screen.
 - a. Why did you run for the school board? or Why did you become an administrator?
 - b. Think of an effective team you have worked with. What made it effective?
 - c. What is your biggest hope for the board-administrative team?
 - d. How do you learn best?
 - e. What will you need to be the best board-administrative team member?
 - f. What are two great things or points of pride about your district?
 - g. What are the most important issues facing the board-administrative team?
 - h. What might cause the board-administrative team to not accomplish its vision, mission, or both?
2. Each team member takes five minutes to individually respond to the questions, noting responses he or she would be comfortable sharing with the entire team.
3. The team facilitator should now bring the team back together and invite responses to the first question, "Why did you run for the school board?" or "Why did you become an administrator?" Open dialogue should guide the responses. The facilitator may want to ask questions for clarity, but should not judge the responses. For example, if someone states, "I did this because I care about kids in our community," a follow-up question might be, "What about your service to the board did you hope would benefit kids in our community?" The goal is to better understand why members committed to governance or administration.

4. The team facilitator now addresses the second and third questions individually, using a similar format for sharing among team members as with the first question. The recorder should list responses to the second and third questions so that the collection of responses is viewable to all. Regarding the second question (“Think of an effective team you have worked with. What made it effective?”), discuss the combined responses in terms of how they align with the team’s current work. Consider the following clarifying questions—
 - ◆ Is the brainstormed list of best-practice ideas already being used for our team?
 - ◆ Were there any ideas we should consider adopting?
 - ◆ Is there anything about our team that might be considered ineffective? Would any of the brainstormed ideas improve the ineffective aspects?
5. Conclude the activity by asking if there is anything else to discuss about the overall questions and responses that team members did not have the opportunity to share.
6. The facilitator, at his or her earliest convenience, should type and distribute the suggestions about best-practice ideas that were considered for adoption. This will serve as an important reminder of the commitments that can be easily utilized to strengthen team effectiveness.

Results

Participating in this activity hones questioning and listening skills and creates a climate of truthful disclosure. These benefits serve to bring the team closer together with agreed-on best-practice ideas.