



What's Your Angle?

Conduct this exercise at the end of the final senior-level competency session, that is, at the end of the program. The goal is to allow students to reflect back on *all* nine of the sessions at all three of the levels and pull the competencies all together.

Divide the students into groups by number of years of HR experience, by the month of their birth or by another method. A limited number of students may have actual HR experience, but if a few do, be sure to separate them so no group has an advantage of having each member with practical experience. If dividing by years of HR experience, at the end it could be fun to compare and contrast—what fresh, new, bold suggestions came out of the more- or less-experienced groups? What tried-and-true and “guaranteed results” suggestions came out of either group?

Once groups are established, ask participants to identify the potential HR “angles” (i.e., relevant issues) in the following common business challenges. As they do, they should determine which of the competencies would address the challenge.

Have handouts of the Competency Model “wheel” graphic available, or display it on a screen.

Challenge List

1. Client satisfaction scores slipping.
2. Declining sales/donations.
3. Preparing to open new sites, expand into new market(s) or introduce a major, game-changing product.
4. Divestiture of a line of business.
5. Recent acquisition of a competitor in your market.
6. Recent acquisition by, or merger with, a competitor in your market.
7. Too many open positions or positions open for too long.
8. Showing appreciation to staff members after a successful year.
9. New competitor (national, well-known industry brand) in your market.
10. One division of your firm experiencing a recent high turnover rate.
11. Slipping employee engagement survey scores and many “burned out” survey responses.
12. Student-selected challenge: Ask for submissions from the students about challenges they have observed in their work experience and which of the competencies they could have used to address those challenges.

You do not have to cover all of these challenges. How many you cover depends on available time, speed of students' responses, class capabilities and other factors.

Possible Approaches

Option 1

Distribute all the challenges according to the number of groups, and then let each group focus on one or two.

Option 2

Have *all* groups analyze *all* the challenges.

Preparations for either option

- Before class, place flip charts around the room (three or four would be the ideal number) with enough space in front of each chart for a small group to stand.
- Find a timer.
- Allow enough time to conduct each segment of the challenge, including delivery of instructions, initial clarifying questions and answers, time at each station, and time for rotations. Total time will be approximately one hour, but you have the flexibility to adjust this time based on your class.

The challenge (Options 1 and 2)

At the start of class:

Depending on whether you have selected option 1 or 2, prepare each station accordingly.

For option 1, write the one or two assigned challenges at the top of pages of the flipchart at each station, or print them out on paper placed next to the flip chart

For option 2 print out all challenges on paper placed next to the flip chart or display all of them in a PowerPoint slide (in other words, have them somehow readily available).

Give the group members five minutes (use your timer) for each challenge to:

1. Determine questions they would want to ask to learn more about the challenge.
2. Identify the potential root(s) of the problem.
3. Identify potential solutions for the problem.
4. Identify the applicable competency(ies).

This is a think-fast/think-on-your-feet exercise; the intent is to not give a lot of time to dissect and then propose solutions.

Keep track of the total number of responses the class comes up with for each challenge. Anecdotally observe the quality of the replies. These will be comparison points later.

At the conclusion of this initial part, tell students we will revisit their work later in the day, and ask them to mull over the exercise.

Later in class:

Ask the groups to repeat the exercise from earlier in the day. Repeating the activity allows different personality types (the “thinkers”) to have a chance to reflect and then elicit thoughtful answers that may have been more difficult for them to deliver in a fast paced five-minutes-per-challenge exercise.

Recap:

Ask students the following questions:

1. How did you feel having such a short time to respond to the challenges earlier in class?
2. Did you find that you wanted to know more information before proposing potential solutions?
3. How confident were you in the quality of your proposed solutions the first time? The second time?
4. How satisfied were you with the quantity of your questions posed and your alternatives presented the first time? The second time?

Keep track of the total number of responses the class came up with for each challenge. Compare to the number from earlier in the day. Also anecdotally observe the quality of these replies. Compare with the morning. Discuss with the class.

Remind students that sometimes HR professionals do not have a lot of time to respond to issues and that they must think on their feet. You need knowledge and analytical and collaboration skills, and you need to decide who will be involved. However, sometimes people demand a hurry-up response, and you have to push back in an appropriate way so that you can devise better solutions than you would in a hurry. Here, you can compare the responses from the start of the class with those at the end.