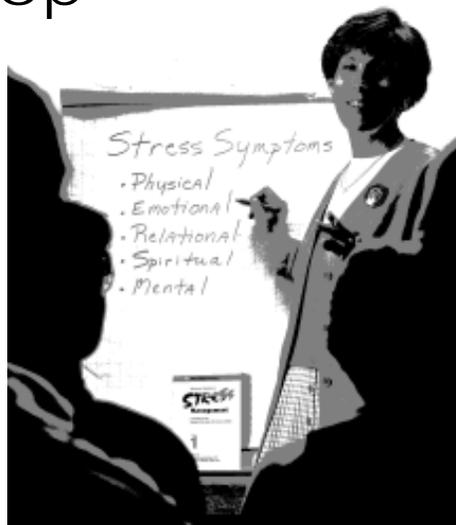


Creative Compromise

A Ready-to-Run
Conflict Management
Workshop



Whole Person Associates
The Stress & Wellness Specialists

Introduction

Creative Compromise, a Ready-to-Run Conflict Management Workshop, will help you prepare quickly and efficiently for presentations on interpersonal conflicts. The multi-part session is flexible, so you can select the activities most appropriate for your group. They include:

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We have arranged the exercises in the order we think would work well for a three-hour workshop. If your time is limited, it is tempting to present the chaltalks from each exercise and eliminate the interaction. In our experience, however, people learn best when they are actively involved, not simply listening. The participants in your groups will absorb more and are more likely to act on what they learn if they have plenty of time for discussion. We recommend presenting one or two exercises if you have only an hour rather than trying to squeeze in the content from all of them. Participants will feel satisfied and challenged rather than overwhelmed and will be eager to return for another session.

Ready-to-Run Workshop Series

The AAAbc's of Stress	Life — It's Worth Living
Coping with Loss	On the Job Stress
Creative Compromise	Spiritual Journeys
Go for the Gold	Spend Time Where it Counts
Keep Your Cool	Whole Person Wellness

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The activities in this book were selected from 360 exercises contained in the ten volumes of Structured Exercises in Stress Management and Structured Exercises in Wellness Promotion, edited by Nancy Loving Tubesing and Donald A. Tubesing. Call for a catalog describing hundreds of resources or visit our Web site, www.wholeperson.com.



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Tug of War

In this game of strategy, participants pair up to explore alternative approaches to conflict.

Goals

To assist individuals in obtaining a glimpse of their personal style at approaching conflict.

Time frame

5–10 minutes

Process

1. Define conflict and announce that during the next 5 minutes participants will join in an experiment to discover/rediscover how they typically approach conflict situations. Then ask everyone to stand up and find a partner.
2. Once everyone has a partner, give each pair a piece of paper and describe the Tug of War.
 - Decide who should hold the paper.
 - ☞ *“Playfair” techniques could be substituted here. Instead of asking partners to decide who should hold the paper, ask them to decide who is the zucchini and who is the artichoke (or who is the penguin and who is the flamingo, etc). You can then announce that the zucchinis (or penguins) will hold the paper first.*
 - The person holding the paper should hold on to it and not let go under any circumstances.
 - Those of you NOT holding the paper should attempt to get the paper from your partner, using any strategy you can imagine.
 - You will have exactly one minute to accomplish this task.
 - ☞ *During the exercise observe closely and note interactions that illustrate different styles of resolving conflict situations (eg, some people will grab, others will wheedle or sweet talk and some may even offer cash).*
3. After one minute, call time and ask participants to switch roles and repeat the exercise.
4. At the end of one minute, call time again and invite participants to describe what they noticed about their style of approaching a conflict situation.

Conflict Management

In this thought-provoking learning experience participants explore four conflict-prevention skills and experiment with applying them to specific conflict situations.

Goals

To identify conflict situations that cause stress.

To discover and practice alternative approaches for preventing or managing conflict.

Time frame

60 minutes

Materials needed

Conflict Alternatives worksheets for all participants; blackboard or flip chart.

Process

1. Begin by asking participants for examples of conflict and typical conflict situations that they experience (eg, misunderstanding, personality clash, poor performance, difference of opinion or values, lack of cooperation, authority issues, differing goals, competition, etc). As examples are suggested, record them on the board.
2. After a lengthy and comprehensive list of conflicts has been generated, introduce the concept of conflict management and describe what participants can expect from this session. Some or all of the following points could be included:
 - It's not what you know, but what you do with what you know that counts in conflict management.
 - This session doesn't promise that you will be able to control conflicts in your life—after all, people are unpredictable. Nor will taking this course assure that you will win in all conflict situations.
 - Managing conflict does not guarantee the outcome, but it may take away the power of the other person or the situation to stress you.
 - Most of our attitudes toward conflict are shaped early in life by messages we learn from our environment—eg, “Button your lip!” “Turn the other cheek!” “Fighting never solved anything!” etc. Most people learn to dislike, avoid, or clam up in conflict situations. We believe that it's wrong, or at least not “nice” to have conflicts.

3. Continue by offering an alternative understanding of the nature of conflict—that it is natural, inevitable and desirable—and challenges participants to begin changing their attitudes:
 - Conflict is an inevitable part of life. It is inherent in our differentness—our varying motivations, backgrounds, perspectives, values, needs, goals, feelings, expectations, opinions.
 - Conflict is desirable because opposition is a way to think through all the alternatives. Conflict is a valuable tool to make sure that all major aspects of important matters are carefully considered.
 - Conflict becomes stressful when reality doesn't coincide with our expectations. If we “believe” (expect) that conflict is unnatural—then the reality of conflict is likely to be upsetting!
 - To manage conflict successfully, we need to change our expectations. If we accept conflict as a natural part of life, we can free our energy to focus attention on how to cope with it.
4. Distribute Conflict Alternatives and ask participants to reflect on conflict in their lives.
 - List several conflict situations that you have experienced recently, including at least a few that were especially difficult or are still needing to be resolved.
 - Write each conflict in a separate box at the left of the worksheet.
5. Explain that the worksheet will be used during the remainder of the session to record insights as participants explore four conflict management strategies that are useful in a wide variety of settings.
 - Cultivate a positive mental attitude.
 - Focus on the issue, not the person.
 - Increase your tolerance level.
 - Keep conflict in perspective.
6. Ask for volunteers to describe how they typically feel in conflict situations, such as being called on the carpet, a family argument, or just disagreeing about what movie to attend.

After several people have given examples (eg, defensive, scared, anxious, angry, upset, etc) note that such negative feelings often accompany conflict situations, which is why the first conflict management skill, Positive Mental Attitude is so important.

 - Often we perceive conflict as a challenge to our personal beliefs, opinions,

actions, authority. Even when the conflict is minor we experience an implied criticism of our own position.

- We usually respond in one of two ways—we kick ourselves for being inadequate or we strike out to protect our position or self-esteem. Neither response helps resolve the conflict.
 - To deal creatively with conflict, we need to feel powerful and competent. Instead of generating a stream of mental putdowns—such as “I failed again,” or “I don’t measure up,” or “This is terrible,” or “He’s right and I’m wrong,” or “It’s awful to be caught,” etc—we need to focus on positive messages such as, “My worth doesn’t depend on being perfect,” or “I can learn from this,” or “This is upsetting, but I know how to deal with it,” or “I have the same rights as others,” or “I am valuable and capable,” or “This could be hairy, but I believe in myself,” etc.
7. Invite participants to reflect on each of the conflict situations identified on their Conflict Alternatives worksheet and decide whether a more positive mental attitude would be helpful in managing that particular conflict.
- For each situation ask yourself:

What positive messages could I tell myself in the midst of this conflict that would help raise my self-esteem and therefore my capacity to resolve the conflict?
 - Jot down your answers in the column labeled Raise Self Esteem.
8. After most participants have completed the self-esteem portion of the worksheet, outline the second strategy for managing conflict: Focus on the Issue, Not the Person.
- Conflict is often attributed to negative personality characteristics or behaviors of people (eg, “I have a slave-driver for a boss,” “She’s a lazy typist,” etc).
 - In fact, most conflicts can be redefined as an issue resulting from circumstances that affect both parties. This opens the door to resolution because these circumstances can potentially be changed when both parties search together for a solution (eg, “The office is understaffed,” “The workload is erratic,” “We need to set priorities,” etc).
 - Although there are instances when a person’s personality is the problem—and must be honestly dealt with—it is almost always more constructive to state the conflict as an issue and not attack or blame the persons involved.
9. Ask for examples of conflict situations and demonstrate stating each conflict in both a person-focused and an issue-focused manner. After modeling

- one or two examples, ask the group to try redefining a few more conflicts as person and issue-focused.
10. Once the group seems to understand the process, help participants articulate their potential use of this skill.
 - Look again at your worksheets and apply the issue/person principle in each situation.
 - For each conflict answer the question:
 - How could focusing on the issue rather than the person be helpful in resolving or preventing this conflict?
 - Write your responses in the column marked Focus On The Issue.
 11. After most people have finished recording their observations, invite participants to consider the third strategy for conflict management—Increase Your Tolerance Level. Describe the rationale and process for implementing this approach:
 - In general most people have unrealistic expectations for other people. We expect them to act just the way we want them to, and we expect them to be perfect! How outrageous! People are human beings—not gods!
 - It is impossible to control other people—even though sometimes we would like to. People will be frustrating, difficult, angry, selfish, incompetent—no matter what we prefer. We can prevent or minimize the stress of conflict if we raise our tolerance level toward other people’s behavior. How do we become more tolerant? The first step is to change the way we talk to ourselves.
 - When faced with a conflict people tend to “awfulize” about the situation, saying things to themselves like, “I can’t stand him another minute!” Well, you can stand him another minute . . . and you will! Such common self-talk is comical when actually spoken outloud.
 12. Solicit from participants examples of self-talk that reinforces our stance of intolerance (eg, “I’m going to die if this doesn’t get decided soon!” “I hate working with her!” “He drives me crazy!”). For each negative statement, challenge the group to suggest more tolerant alternatives (eg, “This person’s behavior is frustrating to me. However, I cannot expect her to be perfect—and she is not likely to change. I’d better accept it and go on,” etc.).
 13. Invite participants to apply the increased tolerance level strategy to their conflicts.
 - Look over your list of conflicts. In the column marked Increase Tolerance for each conflict, write your answers to these four questions.

- How might this situation benefit from increased tolerance on my part?
 - What unrealistic expectations do I have here?
 - What intolerant messages am I telling myself?
 - What more tolerant messages could I use instead?
14. Invite participants to consider the final strategy for managing conflict—Keeping It In Perspective.
- Pretend that you have just been awarded \$25. This sum represents the total investment of energy and stress you are currently making in the conflicts listed on your worksheet.
 - Distribute the \$25 among the conflicts according how much energy or worry you are spending (or usually spend) on each one. Record the amounts in the Perspective column of your worksheet.
-  *Pause long enough for everyone to spend their \$25.*
- Now review your list of conflicts again and reallocate the money, this time based on how much each conflict is really worth. What is its true value and importance in the long run?
15. Solicit insights and reactions from the group, prompting them with questions like these.
- Where are you spending the most? Is the conflict worth it?
 - What is the relationship between your expenditure and the importance of the conflict?
16. Conclude by citing the “Law of Creeping Importance”:
- If you rate the importance of conflicts on a scale of 1 to 10, all conflicts will creep up to become 10s. The only counterbalance to this law is to be vigilant about keeping conflicts in perspective.
17. Invite participants to practice a conflict management skill.
- Look over your worksheet and choose one conflict situation you would like to work on—and one of the four management skill/strategies you would like to practice applying to that situation.
 - Pair up with a neighbor and take turns role playing your conflict situation, experimenting with the new skill.
-  *Adjust the structure, style and length of the role play to your group. One person begins by explaining his conflict situation and describing the skill he wants to try. His partner can take either role in the conflict. The pairs role play the*

situation for 2–3 minutes or until the original person is satisfied. He then notes any good ideas generated during the role play before going on to practice the other person's situation.

18. Reconvene the large group and ask for insights and observations on any aspect of conflict management. In conclusion, summarize the key points from the session and encourage participants to continue experimenting with these four strategies in a variety of conflict situations.

Variations

- If time permits, the role plays in *Step 17* could be expanded by having partners practice all four management strategies.

CONFLICT ALTERNATIVES

Conflict Situations	Raise Self-Esteem	Focus on the Issue	Increase Tolerance	Keep in Perspective

Hand Dancing

Even those who hate to dance will love this playful, easy process for mimicking a partner's hand movements to music.

Goals

To get energized.

To feel connected to other group members.

Time frame

10 minutes

Materials needed

Lively music to play during the dancing exercise.

Process

1. Introduce the exercise by asking participants to indicate by a show of hands how many people enjoy dancing. Affirm those who responded positively, and then reassure those who did not raise their hands that this is a dance that they might enjoy, since they can perform it without moving their feet.
2. Ask participants to stand up and find a partner (or trio, if there are odd numbers of group members) who is wearing shoes similar to their own.
 - 👉 *If some people can't find a match, tell them to pair up with someone else who has uncommon shoes.*
3. When everyone has a partner, explain how the dance works.
 - Face your partner, standing about two feet apart.
 - Decide who will be Fred Astaire and who will be Ginger Rogers.
 - 👉 *Groups with three people will have two Gingers or two Freds.*
 - Fred Astaire will take the lead role for the first dance.
 - Ginger Rogers will follow the moves of Fred Astaire.
 - When the music starts, Fred Astaires, use your hands to create a dance, which Ginger Rogers will follow.
 - Gingers, imitate Fred's movements exactly as if you were a mirror image.

- Be as creative and lively as you can, using your hands to express your feelings.
4. When participants understand the instructions, start the music and tell them to start their dance.
 5. After about two minutes, signal that it's time to switch roles so Ginger Rogers become the leaders of the dance and Fred Astaires are the followers.
 6. When the second dance is finished, ask dancing partners to discuss two questions. (2 minutes)
 - What was it like to be the leader and have someone watching and following your every move?
 - What was it like to the follower and to allow another person to control your movements?
 7. In conclusion, invite general comments from the group about their comfort level with the roles of leader and follower, summarize their responses, and compliment people on their willingness to try out both roles.

Stop, Look and Listen

Using a do-it-yourself study guide, trios of participants experiment with techniques to improve listening skills and explore applications of empathy as a stress management strategy.

Goals

To explore the value of listening as a coping skill in stressful situations.

To practice listening skills.

Time frame

60 minutes

Materials needed

Newsprint easel or blackboard; Stop, Look and Listen flip guides for each participant (to be photocopied, cut, assembled and stapled before the meeting).

Process

 *The unusual feature of this listening exercise is the self-directed booklet that triads of participants use to work their way through the process. After your introductory chaltalk, all you as a trainer need to do is turn people loose, keep time, periodically announce when to move to the next page, and then sit back and see what happens!*

1. Introduce the exercise by announcing that the next hour or so will be spent in developing an unusual but powerful coping skill—listening.

Ask the group for ideas on why listening might be a useful skill for managing stress, and list the suggestions on the blackboard or newsprint. As people contribute, weave their responses into a brief chaltalk on communication, stress and listening:

- Most people are good listeners when they want to be, but many simply don't choose to use this skill as frequently as they might—especially in stressful situations.
- Breakdowns in our communication is a common cause of stress. Misunderstanding, misinterpretation, hidden agendas, unresolved conflicts and disagreements may trigger our stress response.
- One way to handle such breakdowns and unstress ourselves in the process is to respond with empathy rather than anger or defensiveness. This

response forces us to acknowledge the other person's point of view which broadens our perspective at the same time it affirms the other's experience.

2) Briefly describe empathy and the Stop, Look and Listen paradigm.

- Empathy is a special kind of listening that literally means to “feel in,” or to stand in another's shoes for a moment—to get inside that person's experience, to soak it up, and try to view it from his or her perspective.
- This is not a passive process. Being a good listener means more than just allowing the other person to talk—although that's a good start. Empathy involves a three-step process—Stop, Look and Listen.
 - **Stop.** Stop competing for attention. Stop worrying about your own feelings. Be quiet. Put aside your judgments and expectations about the person or the topic. Try to approach this with an open mind. Stop and take a deep breath. As you exhale, let go of your own agenda. Choose to focus on the other person.
 - **Look.** Look at the other person, eyeball to eyeball. Pay attention and show your interest. Get involved. Notice verbals and non-verbals. Observe, but don't interpret. Explore, don't judge. Look for this person's unique viewpoint. Put on his or her glasses and look at the world through those lenses.
 - **Listen.** Listen to what the person says. Listen to the words and the body language. Listen to the meanings behind the message. Listen to the feelings. Listen to the silence and reflect on what you've heard. Now respond—let the other person know what you've heard. Paraphrase. Comment on what you noticed—without interpreting. Feed back your perceptions and check them out (eg, “Is this what you meant? thought? felt?”). If you've misunderstood, reach out and try again to understand.

3. Divide participants into groups of three people each, and instruct them to decide—for the purpose of this exercise—who will be “A,” who will be “B,” and who will be “C.”

While groups are deciding, distribute a copy of the Stop, Look and Listen flip guide to all participants, requesting that they not look at the booklet until directed.

4. Outline the process of the exercise:

- Most of the remaining time will be spent in your trios, completing the process described in this do-it-yourself flip guide. You will practice the skill of listening to each other by dialoguing about various topics assigned by the flip guides.

- In most of the 5–10 minute segments, two people in the trio will dialogue while the other remains silent—observing the listening process. These roles switch for each segment.
 - The flip guide gives complete instructions, including questions to be discussed and roles to be taken by each person. When there is more than one question on a page, the two people “in dialogue” take turns listening to each other’s answers to one question before moving on to the next.
 - While dialoguing, you are to listen intently to each other and try to fully understand what the other is saying. This will take time—and you may not be able to answer all the questions in the time allotted. That’s great! The purpose is to listen to each other, not to race through to the end!
 - I will keep time. Follow the instructions in the booklet and unless it specifically says to turn to the next page, wait for my signal before moving on.
5. Instruct participants to introduce themselves and look at the first three pages of the flip guide, which are a self-paced introduction. Remind everyone to follow the directions in the guide, stating that you will keep track of time and announce when to move on. (5–6 minutes)
-  *You may want to use a bell, harmonica or whistle to indicate the time. Be sure you are familiar with the timetable and instructions on each flip guide page so that you can keep time correctly and answer any questions. When you announce the time, remind people to use their empathic skills (eg, “Remember to paraphrase and check out your perceptions!” or “Take your time—listen with empathy!” etc.)*
6. When the last page is finished, the ask the sextets to spend 3 more minutes brainstorming a list of stressful situations in which empathy would be an effective stress management strategy.
7. Reconvene the entire group and ask for insights and observations about the experience of listening and the value of listening as a coping skill. After several people have shared, solicit examples of situations where the skill might be useful, listing them on the board and using the data generated to summarize learnings from the session.
8. In closing, issue a final challenge:
- I can teach you the skill of listening, but I can’t decide for you when you will use it. It’s your choice when you implement it. Practice it so you’ll be ready! Then choose to use it in some unlikely situations—and see what happens!

Variations

- If time is limited, some of the listening processes from the flip guides may be shortened or skipped entirely. Be aware, however, that when the process is shortened the intensity and benefit of the experience will also be lessened.

STOP, LOOK AND LISTEN dialogue instructions

1

Read this section silently. Do not look ahead in this booklet.

When we're under pressure, one of the first things that is likely to buckle is our ability to listen. Too bad! Empathy—the process of active, care-full listening—is one of the best stress management techniques available.

This exercise is designed to help you and your partners explore the value of listening when under stress. So, during the next hour, give yourself permission to STOP, LOOK and LISTEN.

STOP Take a deep breath, exhale, and get ready to pay attention.

LOOK Put on your partner's perceptual glasses and try to see his or her viewpoint rather than concentrating on your own.

LISTEN Tune in to the meaning behind the words, the person behind the pitter-patter.

Go on to the next page.

2

All information shared here is strictly confidential!

You will be engaging in a series of conversations, alternating roles as observer, sharer, and listener. Follow the instructions and take turns as indicated—both partners respond to each question before moving on.

When it is your turn to speak, respond to the questions at whatever level of disclosure feels comfortable. You may also decline to answer any question.

When you are listening, be sure to practice all the empathic listening skills.

SHOW INTEREST: with eye contact, nods, “uh-huhs.”

REACH OUT: to pick up on both the verbal and non-verbal message.

FOCUS ON YOUR PARTNER: set aside your own agenda.

RESPOND: summarize periodically, check your perceptions.

When you are observing, pay attention to the process and impact of listening. At the end of the hour you will have a chance to share your insights.

*Check to make sure everyone in your group understands these guidelines.
Then turn the page.*

3

*A observes; B and C dialogue; B shares first
5 minutes*

In this first 5-minute segment, B and C will practice good listening skills as they take turns responding to three topics. A acts as observer.

TOPIC 1: One stress I've experienced today is . . .

B shares first.

C responds empathically.

Pause to digest the answer, reflect on it, and paraphrase what your partner has said.

Ask if your perception is accurate. If not, try again.

When B feels that you have understood her response, switch roles and repeat the process, with C sharing and B listening.

A should observe without commenting.

Use the same process with the next two topics:

I coped with it (the stress you just shared) by . . .

When I'm under stress, my body lets me know by . . .

*Wait for instructions before turning the page.
Feel free to review the listening guidelines on page 2 at any time.*

4

*B observes; A and C dialogue; C shares first
5 minutes*

In this segment, you will practice listening as you discuss your own experience with listening.

Tell your partner about an instance when someone listened to you empathically and wholeheartedly. What do you remember about how it felt?

C answers first while A listens empathically.

When C feels fully understood, switch roles: A answers the question and C listens.

B observes without comment, making mental notes on the listening process.

Use the same format in responding to the next question.

When do you especially want to be listened to and heard?

*The trainer will tell you when to go on.
If you have extra time, B and C can answer the last question again.*

5

*C observes; A and B dialogue; A shares first
10 minutes*

Now C gets to observe the listening process while A and B dialogue on the following three topics.

Don't forget to practice the good listening guidelines:

show interest, reach out to understand, focus on your partner, and respond by periodically checking your perceptions.

Situations where I find it hard to listen . . .

People I have trouble listening to . . .

Describe a recent situation when you had difficulty listening or didn't want to listen (eg, argument, criticism, assignment, challenge, request, instructions, angry outburst, whining, etc).

What did you want to hear?

What did you hear at the time?

In retrospect, what did THE OTHER PERSON really want to communicate?

Wait for the signal to move ahead.

6

*A observes; B and C dialogue; C shares first
5 minutes each; 10 minutes total*

Practice supportive listening by paraphrasing and responding with understanding. Take your time. C shares first while B listens empathically. Switch roles after about 5 minutes.

SHARER: Describe a situation at home or work that upsets you.

LISTENER: Listen and respond empathically.

Show interest. Try to get inside your partner's shoes and understand the situation from his perspective.

Don't give advice. Don't make judgments—not even positive ones. Don't ask questions that would throw your partner off. Don't problem-solve or reassure.

DO reach out for the feelings and the meanings behind the words. DO summarize what you've heard and check out your perceptions. If they are inaccurate, try again until you've heard your partner fully.

Wait for the signal to move ahead.

*C observes; A and B dialogue; B shares first
5 minutes*

*C observes; A and B dialogue; A shares first
10 minutes*

7

Paraphrase techniques also work well in conflict situations!
With your partner, A and B:

Find a topic about which you DISAGREE
(eg, age for toilet training, men with pierced ears, nuclear disarmament, politics, best brand of detergent, who will win the Super Bowl, etc).

Dialogue about this topic for 5 minutes, using the paraphrase rule:

Each of you must restate your partner's position to her satisfaction before you can air your own views.

Use this rule throughout the discussion.

If your viewpoint has not been heard, ask your partner to listen again until you really feel your partner understands your position.

When listening, remember to suspend your judgment and biases. Stay open to hearing the other person's perspective.

Wait for the signal to go on.

- STOP Take a deep breath.
- LOOK Around the room and find another trio you'd like to talk with. Join with them to make a sextet.
- LISTEN To each other as you take 5 minutes to share insights and reactions to this experience.

8

As observers, what did you notice about listening?

When sharing, how did it feel to be heard? How accurately did your partner listen and understand?

How difficult was it to listen? When?

Was there any difference in empathy with a supportive versus a conflict situation?

Were there any surprises?

This was a stressful situation. How did listening work as a copier for you?

Wait for further instructions.

Affirmative Action Plan

In this attitude-changing exercise participants draw up a plan for using affirmation to manage a workplace stressor.

Goals

To explore the potential of affirmation as a stress management skill.

To increase participants' repertoire of affirming behaviors.

To develop on-the-job applications for affirmation skills.

Time frame

40–50 minutes

Materials needed

Blackboard or flipchart; Affirmative Action Plan worksheets for all participants.

Process

1. Give some background information on affirmation as a stress reducer, covering some or all of the following points:
 - Affirmation is a basic human need. Everyone needs to be recognized, appreciated and touched by other people. Eric Berne popularized this concept by calling it “stroke hunger.”
 - Many work settings are characterized by a highly competitive system where excellence is expected and compliments are few and far between. The need for affirmation or appreciation may be seen as a sign of weakness. Interactions may be calculated to put each other down rather than build each other up. What a pity! There's no substitute for the glow that comes from hearing directly, person-to-person, that you are liked, valued and appreciated by your co-workers.
 - Appreciation is often a more influential motivator than pay. Most of us will really “put out” just in order to hear someone say, “thank you.” The phenomenal success of *The One Minute Manager* is based in part on a simple challenge to managers: “Sneak around and catch people doing something good, then tell them about it!”
 - Hans Selye, the pioneer stress researcher contends that revenge is the most stressful emotion—and gratitude is the healthiest. His personal prescription for managing stress includes cultivating a positive attitude and making every day a thanksgiving day.

- Cultivating the attitude of gratitude is a double-duty stress management strategy. Your positive attitude will reduce the stress for the people around you—and probably will reduce your stress as well. As an added bonus, appreciation seems to be contagious—once we start giving it freely, it often comes back to us full circle.
2. Distribute Affirmative Action Plan worksheets to everyone and invite participants to think of someone in their work setting who could benefit from some additional affirmation (eg, someone you have difficulty relating to; someone you don't particularly like; someone who is under a lot of stress or creates a lot of stress).
 - Write down the name of your chosen coworker at the top of the worksheet.

Invite the group to follow along as you lead them through a process designed to help them put a little sunshine in that person's life.
 3. Introduce the first aspect of the plan, acknowledgment, asking the group for ideas about how they might simply acknowledge a person's presence or existence. List all suggestions on the blackboard or newsprint. Elaborate as necessary, categorizing the responses into three strategies, and challenging participants to imagine how they could apply them.
 - Make non-verbal contact (eg, eye contact, smile, sit nearby, touch, etc).
 - Make verbal contact (eg, say "hello," initiate a conversation, tell a joke, ask a question, etc).
 - Pay attention (eg, listen respectfully, ask for input, respond to his verbal/non-verbal offerings, etc).
 - Now apply these techniques to your situation and write down in the Acknowledge section of your worksheet all the potential ways to acknowledge your chosen person.
 - 👉 *This should be a time for idea-generating, not making commitments. Encourage participants to list all actions they could take, not just those options they want to or are willing to carry out. Remind the group to be specific about how, where, when and how often they could acknowledge this person.*
 4. Invite participants to consider the next aspect of their plan—affirmation, which according to Webster means "responding to in a positive manner" or "to confirm." Go on to suggest some basic affirmation techniques.
 - Everyone has some redeeming qualities—so spend enough time interacting with this person to discover his strengths.

- Focus on the positive, find something to like about this person.
- Reinforce what you like, however insignificant—then disregard everything else.

Challenge the group to think of appropriate phrases that could communicate affirmation (eg, “I see what you mean,” “That’s a good idea,” “What an interesting viewpoint,” “Tell me more about that!”). After several suggestions are generated, participants apply them to their situation.

- Now complete the Affirm section on your worksheet, answering the questions and identifying specific ways you could *affirm* your co-worker.

5. Invites participants to explore yet another type of affirmative action—encouragement, which literally means “to give courage,” but more often is interpreted as “giving support.” Request illustrations of how group members like to be supported by asking:

- What can other people do for/to you that builds you up, strengthens you, gives you hope, courage or support?

Participants give examples of ways they like to be encouraged and the phrases that might accompany such gestures of support (eg, “You did so well last time, this will be a breeze,” “I know you can do it!” “You’re such a kind soul!” “You’ve learned a lot about how to handle this,” etc).

- Turn the tables, now and apply what you know about your own need for encouragement to the person you’ve chosen to affirm. Write your responses and potential plans in the Encourage section of the worksheet.

6. Introduce the next dimension of affirmative action, appreciation, by giving several honest compliments to the group or individual participants (eg, “I’ve appreciated your willingness to share,” “This is one of the liveliest groups I’ve worked with,” “I’ve noticed that John has helped us stay on track when we wander—I appreciate your clarity, John.”)

Point out some tips for showing appreciation:

- Compliments or praise can show appreciation for another person’s strengths, appearance, accomplishments, behavior, special gifts.
- To be most effective, such positive feedback should be stated directly to the recipient (eg, “Stuart, your report was excellent!”).
- The best messages of appreciation are also specific, giving details about the quality, behavior or accomplishment you’re praising (eg, not only “Your report was excellent,” but also “it was concise, clearly organized, and well-documented—your choice of words got the point across without offending anyone”).

- The impact of a compliment is increased by including a statement about how the behavior affected you (eg, “I felt proud of our whole team when you were done—your presentation reminded me how well we cooperated together”).
 - Nobody ever really gets tired of hearing honest compliments, so feel free to show your appreciation frequently.
 - Again consider your chosen co-worker and write down in the Appreciation section several ways you could show your *appreciation* openly to that person.
7. Direct participants’ attention to the fifth method of affirmation, thanks-giving. Note that all of us have much to be thankful for and ask participants to give examples of things in their work setting for which they are grateful (eg, coffee pot, flexible hours, secretary who can spell, camaraderie of staff, Christmas party, electric pencil sharpener, etc).
- Note that even the office ogre makes some contributions that are deserving of thanks.
- As with appreciation, gratitude is most effective when it is direct, specific and frequent. People love to be thanked over and over again for big favors and small kindnesses.
 - Contrary to popular belief, there’s nothing wrong with buttering up the boss—or the errand boy. In fact, it’s likely to be healthy for both of you!
 - List the various reasons for saying “*thank you*” to your chosen co-worker.
8. Instruct participants to look over their list of “coulds” and circle (or mark with a star) those affirmative actions they are actually willing to implement. These commitments are revised and rewritten as statements, “I will . . .”
9. Invite participants to share with the group one or more of their affirmation commitments. Reinforce all suggestions, modeling affirmative action and using these contributions to summarize important points of the session.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PLAN

My plan for affirming _____

ACKNOWLEDGE

In what ways could you let this person know more clearly that you know he or she exists, etc? What little things could you do to pay attention to this person? *I could . . .*

AFFIRM

How and when could you respond in a positive manner to this person? What thoughts, opinions, beliefs, does she/he hold that you could confirm as true? What positive phrases could you use more often? *I could . . .*

ENCOURAGE

In what ways could you give this person support even if you're in disagreement? What might enhance this person's self-confidence? What does she/he need to hear to feel strengthened to tackle the day? *I could . . .*

APPRECIATE

What are some of this person's strengths that you value? When could you honestly praise him/her? What compliments could you give? *I could . . .*

GIVE THANKS

What contributions does this person make for which you are grateful? When could you say "thank you"? *I could . . .*

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PLAN

I will . . .