

PEER-LED TEAM LEARNING LEADER TRAINING

TRICKS OF THE TRADE: STUDENTS AND LEADERS ARE WINNERS!

MARVEN LAMARRE

Leaders gather from all around the world to participate in the playoffs for Global Workshop, pitting the Peer Leader Dream Team against various groups of students. But before the event begins, their fearless coach, a former experienced leader, briefs the squad.

Coach: Alright team, you've all been training for this day and now it's time to see if you've got what it takes to be great peer leaders.

Holly: But Coach, I'm nervous and I don't know how to start off this workshop. What am I going to do?

Marvin: Yeah, and the students may not know each other and not want to work as a team like they are supposed to, so we're all going to have a hard time.

Coach: Come on, you two, what was the first thing we learned and did in peer leader training when we were introduced to a new group of people?

Ingrid: Oh yeah, the icebreaker, right!

Coach: That's correct; you can use an icebreaker to get total strangers to introduce themselves to other people and to the group as a whole. It gets the bonding process started. This also allows you the opportunity to stress the idea of teamwork and working together as a group.

Holly: That's great advice, Coach, I'm not so nervous anymore. I can't believe I forgot that!

Coach: Alright team, now get out there and show those students who you are. Don't forget, you're there to promote teamwork, not to be a teacher's assistant, and it's okay to not know all the answers. Get the students comfortable and take it from there.

Team members: LET'S GO!!!!

After the first period, the Peer Leader Dream Team returns to the sideline for a break. Their coach can see a little concern on some of their faces. The game is scoreless.

Coach: How is everyone feeling?

Scotty: This is harder than we trained for. I'm not sure if I can do it, Captain; I mean Coach. My students don't seem to be getting the information presented in workshop so far.

Coach: Hmm, seems like a problem. Anyone have the same problem and tried solving it?

Jen: Well, I had the same problem, then I remembered that not all students learn the same way. You know, they have their own style. So I actually gave the students some index cards to write down key concepts that they learned in workshop.

Coach: That's a good suggestion. Anyone do something different?

Oaks: I drew an empty flowchart for the students after we finished a problem and had them fill it in. I also taught them a mnemonic device that I used when I was having trouble with that topic.

Coach: That's also a great idea. Flowcharts and concept maps, as well as anything visual helps students remember ideas. And yes, mnemonic devices are also useful learning tools for students. Any other problems we can address?

Marvin: I have one. My group was doing the problem on the "Iridium Q-36 Explosive Space Modulator" and its use in nuclear reactors, and they got stuck on part (b). What should I do when we have problems getting through some questions?

Coach: Yes, problem-solving can indeed be tricky sometimes. Personally, I like to break a complicated problem into tiny steps to lead the students through it. Does anyone have any other thoughts?

Jen: Yeah, you know I do. I take all the students and break them into small groups so they can work on the problem together.

Ingrid: I do that too, you know, and I usually like a lot of debate sometimes, so we can get everything about the question "out on the table," so to speak.

Coach: All great comments. Now go use those ideas in workshop. Back to the game!

The second quarter went as quickly as the first one and the weary team of leaders heads to the sidelines for a half-time break. The score is Leaders 2, Students 3.

Coach: So what's the good word, my team? Are we ready for the big "Come From Behind Win?"

Holly: Is it Christmas vacation yet, because I need a break! I have to make so many decisions in workshop: who to assign what problem to, making sure they are working together, getting them to present the problem when they are done. It's enough to make you turn bright red.

Coach: I see. Well, why not let them choose themselves? When I was a leader I would pick at random the first presenter and let them choose the next person to come up and give their answer.

Jen: Oh, and there's that "round robin" technique we learned in class where we go around and have each student answer part of a question. That one is cool because you don't have to know the whole answer, just a part.

Oaks: I have a different problem. I'm having difficulties getting through the behavioral problems of some of my students. I feel like a woodpecker on a petrified tree, I just can't get through.

Team Members: Same here.

Coach: Getting through your opponents' defense is not an easy task. What kinds of problems are we having specifically?

Jen: Well, I have two students who just never stop talking. I can't stand people who just talk and talk and talk. Do you know what that's like?

Cammy: Umm, no.

Scotty: Oh, I dealt with that once. You just take away their power, by splitting them up. Or if that doesn't work, just have them do more work: that takes away their talking time. If push comes to shove, you can address them in private and make them aware of the problem.

Cammy: I wasn't going to say anything, but I have a group of different-paced students who are really at different levels.

Coach: Maybe you should try pairing some of the higher level students with the lower-level students so they can balance each other out. This can also work if you have students who are frequently unprepared for workshop.

A voice from afar...

Stranger: How did that technique of pairing higher-level with lower-level students work out for you?

Coach: It worked fine, thank you. Wait, who said that?

The stranger walks into view.

Stranger: Come now, surely you remember your old friend and leader, the notorious kingpin of chemistry, Koo.

Coach: It's been a long time, Miss. Team, this is a former leader in chemistry and biology who went on to graduate school in neurobiology. What are you doing back here?

Koo: I came to see the game and saw the Dream Team was down, so I thought I'd come lend some support. Looks like I'm just in time too. Now, who knows what pair problem-solving is?

Ingrid: I know! It's when students work in pairs and one student talks through solving the problem while the other one listens or asks questions.

Koo: I see you've been keeping these students on their toes. Guess you don't need my direct help after all, but I'll be around to lend moral support. Keep at it.

Coach: Time to get back to the game, Team. Drink some water and get back out there and make me proud.

The rejuvenated leaders return to the field of the classroom and strike hard. The game ends with a score of leaders 10, students 10 in double overtime. A tie.

Marvin: I can't believe we gave it our all and it's still a tie. We must have done something wrong or our minds were somewhere else, like Mars or something.

Coach: The important thing is that you gave it your all?

Cammy: Yeah, but how will anyone ever know that, if the score says that we are equal to our students? I want a rematch.

Coach: The score may say you're equal, but the important thing is what the students learned in workshop as a group. Also, they will now have a certain understanding about the importance of workshop since you gave it your all.

Koo: And don't forget, at all your campuses you will continue to be the great leaders you were trained to be, and expect from the students the same competitiveness you experienced here.

Coach: This may have only been one game, but teams evolve slowly, in phases over time. Just like in real life on the job, different people get things done by working together towards a common goal.

Scotty: How did you get so wise, Coach?

Coach: Well, let's just say, in my line of work I wear many hats.

Reporter: Peer Leader Team, you just had a great match. What are you going to do now?

Team: We're going to.... WORKSHOP!

Adapted by Marven Lamarre, Peer Leader at the City College of New York, based on a presentation on tips and techniques for peer leaders developed and presented by a group of leaders at the 2003 PLTL National Conference, held at the City College of New York.

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