

Learning with your team – The Awaydays Option

What are Awaydays?

One of the most overlooked tools in the learning and development toolbox used by managers is the Away-day. That's a pity because it has many benefits.

Not the "let's-build-a-boat/bridge-with-straws-and-sticky-tape-and-cross-the-river" kind. More like this "a day where colleagues come together, away from work, to explore, resolve and plan".

So, Away-days are for exploration, sharing, taking risks with ideas, resolving issues together, whether you need to build a new strategic plan for the school business post Covid-19, decide on a new ELT product or promotion campaign, or simply take stock together of the past academic year and look to the year ahead. It's also a time to get to know the team better, and ... have lots of fun.

Awaydays are also a powerful way to help bring about change in your organisation. At their best, they can create stronger bonds, stronger teams and better decisions.

What makes a good Awayday?

Working together – let the team set the agenda. Make sure *everyone* has a role and a job to do before, during and after the event. Make sure the purpose of the event is agreed and shared beforehand.

Facts, figures and funds – be open and give the group all they need to make the best of the day.

Real stuff – make everything real, tangible and usable. Provide tools and techniques the group can use afterwards in their back-at-work lives. Techniques for problem solving, brainstorming, decision making, conflict managing can all be showcased, practised and promoted during the Awayday.

How to set up your Awayday

1. Plan with your team and your (internal or external) facilitator the Awayday structure, agenda of topics, time-plan and set of specific objectives/outputs for *each* session of the day.
2. Now choose specific discussion and interaction tools, techniques, aids and frameworks that work best for each session.

You'll want a semi-structured approach for each session with some particular, pre-sequenced questions to work through to keep everyone focused on real outputs to agree on for the longer term outcomes you want to arrive at.

The facilitator will bring lots of facilitation options for you to choose from. Their role and commitment is crucial here: they'll help you develop a programme to suit the unique dynamics of your people and the what will bring out the best in them on the day.

What should the facilitator be doing on the day?

Apart from the basics of setting up the room with all the necessary tools and paraphernalia for the day, the facilitator can do all the *getting-you-started* bits: introductions, explanations, setting rules and protocols, reminders of your values and introduction to the facilitation techniques on show during the day.

The facilitator should ensure the group feels challenged, engaged and, above all, *included*. The facilitator will listen, question and aim to stretch everyone's thinking. Beyond that, the facilitator will stay focused on your aims and at the end of the day co-create an action plan so the outcomes are captured and responsibility shared by all.

Case Study Example

An Awayday for 12 colleagues representing a range of functions and roles in a mid-size commercial organisation – administration and front office staff, marketing and finance heads and the senior management team.

Purpose: explore new ideas, resolve issues and plan for the future.

You'll want to see a variety of frameworks and approaches to move the day through its phases. For example, you could use a simple ORID framework (also called the focused conversation method) to stage a series of questions designed to help a group have a shared understanding of the situation or problem.

ORID represents four levels of inquiry: objective, reflective, interpretive and decisional. Each is a different prism which will appeal to individuals differently. For example:

Objective questions work with facts, data, the known and observable.

Reflective questions focus on how we feel about those facts. They ask us to connect with an emotional response. Super important.

Interpretative questions are the sense checking questions digging into assumptions, implications and intuitions. It's about meaning and insights and tells us what's missing in our understanding. Lastly, we need to move to action.

Decisional questions narrow the field and focus on options, directions or decisions we may take and commitments we can align with.

You would, of course, expect to see other techniques used, to bring variety and movement to the day. Below are excellent sources of ideas and worked up examples that will work in all your Awayday contexts.

Bibliography

Lambe, P & Tan, E, KM Approaches Methods and Tools – a Guidebook, available from http://www.straitsknowledge.com/store_new/guidebook

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