Figure C4.4   Directions for the Islands Activity

The purpose of the Islands Activity is to make participants aware of the potential for positive change by recognizing positive aspects of any situation, ignoring intuitive (negative) responses to complicated situations, and deciding to proceed in a manner that is often counterintuitive (positive), creating the possibility for change.

A challenging, conscious effort to *name* the islands, and to forcefully stop participants from returning to descriptions of the "rough water," can yield a dozen or more "islands" of sane, healthy, aspects that—once identified and named—can be the "dry land" onto which you scamper when you feel like you're about to drown in the rough water.

Begin the activity by drawing a circle or oblong shape on a large piece of chart paper. This circle, which should stretch almost to the edges of the paper, represents the rough water of problems for the team members around a specific goal. (For an example of how this could look, see the accompanying Islands Activity Worksheet Diagram)

1. **Identify a goal.** Decide on one rough watery area that needs landfill (the sooner the better). What do you want to accomplish? Visualize the end result of this activity. The goal of the Islands Activity is to project into the future with the goal of "selling hope" and helping participants visualize what it would look like to actually solve a problem.

2. **Identify positive and useful specific elements** that are unique to this situation (the islands: people, structures, or artifacts that are key to finding a solution to the problem). Place the names of these elements in smaller circles within the large circle.

3. **Do not debate** whether something or someone is or isn't a "real" island. If there might be some dry land, the task is to name it and locate it now for possible use later.

4. **Remind** the participants that the frequent intuitive response is to describe endlessly all the negative aspects of the rough water. ("You think that's bad, let me tell you what happened yesterday"). The Islands Activity is explicitly *counter*intuitive. It begins by agreeing that there is toxicity and difficulty in every problem, but we are intentionally *not* talking about all the bad aspects of the rough water.

5. **Identify the bridges or landfill that can be created in order to connect the islands.** Recognize that bridges can be built to improve the island-to-rough water ratio so that the dry land-to-rough water ratio becomes progressively more positive. How do these islands move the group forward on the assigned task?

6. **Decide how you can connect the islands.** Cluster the individuals who could create a positive island. This cluster can then become a subgroup that can work to improve whatever situation the participants have identified. As the participants add the most obvious islands and create bridges between them, they will have proven that every situation is *not* 100 percent rough water. As the group finds a dozen or more identified islands, additional islands will naturally emerge**.**

7. **Make a list of the tasks that must be completed** for the Island Activity and its goals to be accomplished.

8. **Be sure to end the exercise** with the group of participants in agreement on the plan and the particular tasks that each person will accomplish in order to be ready to implement the results of the Islands Activity.

9. **Establish two monitors** who will hold the participants accountable for the tasks they have developed: one to look at the product, the other to keep track of the process of the group as it progresses through the tasks.

10. **Review and adjust.** At one team/department meeting each month, reassess the list of tasks as well as the progress the group has made toward the set goal. Revise and improve plans.

NOTE: Throughout the islands process it is important to cultivate allies and advocates outside of the team itself. Acquiring the support of the department head and, if possible, the principal should enhance the effectiveness of the team's work.