

Book Review

Team-Building Activities for the Digital Age: Using Technology to Develop Effective Groups

by Brent Wolfe and Colbey Sparkman
Human Kinetics (2011)

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Wolfe and Sparkman's book appeals to this reviewer on several different levels. Having just completed teaching a new inquiry focused course for freshmen in the Honors Program, titled Adventure Based Programs, this book was filled with information that supported several of this reviewer's related interests: technology, contact theory, facilitator skills, the experiential learning cycle, and of course, team building. In the freshmen course, the students and instructor together learned a new technologically based activity, geocaching. Activities from this book were also used to support the purposes of the course. For example, in getting to know each other at the start of the semester, the class engaged in a variation of the activity from the Audio and Video chapter of the book, *What's on Your Playlist*. It is quite surprising what group members can learn about each other by exploring personal musical selections on individual devices (MP3 player or phone).

The book is organized with five distinct chapters; four chapters describe the activities and a very helpful introductory chapter provides useful information on facilitating the activities. Facilitation techniques using digital or technology related activities employ much the same wisdom as activities using such props as ropes or beach balls. However, the leader or facilitator needs to be very familiar with the equipment or possibilities for surprises from the activities. The authors have given very clear guidelines on what is needed for carrying out each activity. For example, the activity might specify when an activity needs Internet connection or when participants need to bring photos on a device to a session. Knowing

this type of information in the planning stage supports successful implementation of the activity. Beyond preparation of materials, supplies, or environment for the activity, suggestions for processing questions for each activity are provided. Another helpful tip provided for each activity is a variation on the original directions.

Organization of the chapters with the activities is set up in a very practical and easy-to-follow format. Included for each activity are debriefing questions, directions, explanation of the primary purpose, equipment and preparation needs as well as other information for effective use of the activity. Beyond the 50 activities described in the book, skillful facilitation as vital to successful use of the activities is stressed. Explanation of "Five things a facilitator should know" is information that can be applied to many more activities than those in the book. Other useful materials in the first chapter are the discussions of risk, especially the focus on emotional risk, and the connections made with the experiential learning cycle. In combination with experiential learning is an explanation of skillful debriefing techniques. Review of five techniques for debriefing and three categories for questions to pose for groups are helpful for students and practitioners as well as educators. The information in the introductory chapter can be useful in several therapeutic recreation (TR) courses, such as a Facilitation Techniques in TR, Processes in TR, or TR Practices and Procedures class.

Additionally, the activities themselves can support various aspects of courses within a TR curriculum or as part of a continuing education session. As the authors stress, it is important to promote interpersonal communication and encourage young people to express their individuality as they build face-to-face relationships. Encouraging use of technology to learn and put into practice critical communication skills can be useful for students as well as the practitioner who works with young people. Discussion of professional behavior regarding use of technology can result from several of the activities.

The four activity chapters are labeled Photo, Internet, Texting, and Audio and Video. Most of the activities encourage the use of small groups of four to six participants. In the Photo chapter, the activity called Caption Action, asks the facilitator to provide the small groups with several captions (example, Man Eating Plant) then directs each group to create images to illustrate the caption. One purpose of this activity is to stress different interpretations from the same information, i.e., the caption. Quotable Quotes is an activity from the Internet chapter with a dual purpose of self expression and practice in consensus building. The small groups work together to search social networking sites for favored quotes then rank the top five. These are shared with the larger group. A favorite activity from most anyone's past is the game of Gossip. Texting Gossip from the Texting chapter uses text on cell phones to digitize the game. Participants pass along a message as in the original game but every other person uses a text message to convey the message. Alternating whispers with texting creates some new twists to the game. In the Audio and Video chapter, First Impressions explores stereotypes based on the activity of interviewing strangers. The small groups use videotaping to capture responses to predetermined brief close ended questions, such as Do You Have a College Degree? The small groups share their video clips with the larger group and

the discussion may lead in many directions with a skillful facilitator. All of the activities are supported with tips for facilitation and many debriefing suggestions.

The authors set the stage in the first chapter for effective execution of the activities described in the rest of the book. A primary purpose for the activities is team building. They explain that one premise basic to building teams is strengthening relationships through positive interactions. It is at this point where the link to contact theory is made. Subtle suggestions to create positive contact through the various activities are made throughout the entire book. The foundation of using activities to create positive group interactions and to discourage unfavorable experiences is supported by the authors in how they present the activities.

A final connection to appeal for this reviewer in using the book is the format which was used to provide this review: digital. This book is available as an eBook (\$23) as well as a handy paperback (\$25). Both can be tucked into a backpack or carry on.