

SAMPLE



Play  
**FACILITATOR'S GUIDE**



Play..... p. 6

Leading This Program..... p. 8

Introducing the Video..... p. 9

Conversation Starters..... p. 10

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Activities:

- Playstorm ..... p. 11
- Define Your Playing Field..... p. 14
- What If We Couldn't Fail? ..... p. 16

Follow-Up..... p. 19



Play can be one of the most compelling yet worrisome parts of The FISH! Philosophy. Having fun is a basic psychological need. Many leaders acknowledge that people should have fun at work, yet they believe that Play and work are separate activities: If you're playing you can't possibly be working.

In such environments, having fun requires a memo. "We'd send out formal communications," Lori Lockhart, director of Sprint Global Connection Services, recalls in the book *FISH! Tales*: "We're gonna have Fun Friday at 1 p.m." Any activity that brings colleagues together for camaraderie is a good thing. But when we limit Play to a specific time slot, the unspoken message is that work is not fun the rest of the time. This reduces Play to an antacid.

Others take the Play and work connection to a second level. They find ways to blend fun into their work, such as the clerk who engages you with humor, the HR director who dresses in the style of the applicant's position (security guard, construction worker) or the high-tech company that flies a miniature blimp around the office.

This form of Play builds relationships with customers, makes you more memorable, relieves stress and lifts spirits. It also improves performance, as demonstrated by the hospital quality staff that posts funny quizzes in unexpected places (the bathroom, the break-room refrigerator, stairwells) that remind employees what they need to know to meet credentialing standards.

In these cases, Play is more of an attitude than an activity. If work is a word to describe what you're doing, Play describes how you do it.

There is a third, often untapped level of Play: creativity. Play is the spirit that fuels a curious mind, as in "Let's play with that idea!" It activates the right side of the brain, the side that is unlimited in its ability to make previously unrecognized connections.



Humans are wired to be creative. They want to be creative. As one worker explained, “They hired my hands. They could have had my brain for free.” But to be creative, people have to know it’s safe to “Play” with ideas—how to do their jobs better, handle unique situations, improve the business. If people are afraid to make a mistake, a leader can kill an idea with as little as a raised eyebrow, or a dismissive shake of their head. People will start to play it safe and any new idea is seen as a risk.

As a leader, you can’t install or demand creativity. You can, however, nurture an environment of trust, respect and collaboration. Focus on creating an environment in which people are free of fear—of criticism, of reprisal, of looking dumb—and productive, creative Play emerges naturally to fill the vacuum.

*“Necessity may be the mother of invention, but play is certainly the father.”*

—ROGER VON OECH

## Activity #1: Playstorm



Years ago, when Pike Place Fish employees made a sale, they walked 15 steps around the counter to get the fish and 15 steps back to ring up the purchase. One day, tired of the commute, a fishmonger threw the fish over the counter to a fellow employee. Eureka! A more efficient delivery method was created. It felt great and customers loved it.

It's fun taking a challenge and figuring out how to solve it. For example, every two hours from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., switchboard operators at Providence Health Center select from a list of "turn" songs and play twenty seconds of the lyrics to remind staff to turn patients. The play list includes "Turn, Turn, Turn", "Shake, Rattle and Roll" and "Roll Out The Barrel." It's a simple idea that has significantly reduced bedsores.

An American Indian elder observed that the Creator put fun on earth to show us where the solutions are. If what you are doing is not fun, he explained, you should reconsider it. Southwest Airlines agrees: "People rarely succeed at anything unless they are having fun doing it."

### Instructions

Brainstorming is a rapid, energizing way to generate solutions. It leads people to explore ideas they would not typically consider. Brainstorming is also a great way to practice skills that make it safe for people to be creative.

In this exercise, the group will come up with a number of ways to bring more Play into work; call it a Playstorm. If you have a large group, divide into groups of four to six. Provide flip chart paper and markers to each group.

Tell each group to Playstorm as many ideas as possible in 10 minutes, following these rules:

- Encourage wild ideas (Food Fight Friday? Cocktails at all meetings?).
- Sometimes the most offbeat ideas develop into workable solutions.
- Defer judgment on these ideas until after the brainstorm. Resist the urge to make critical comments or faces. Only one person speaks at a time.
- Don't stop to discuss the ideas, just get them on the table. Write down all ideas.
- Stay on topic and move quickly, building on other people's ideas.
- Laughter good. Frowns bad.

## Activity #2: Define Your Playing Field



To create a fun and memorable experience for customers, the employees of Aspen Skiing Company and Southwest Airlines bring a playful approach to their interactions. But when you are playing, it's important to know the boundaries of the field on which you are playing. "I started with a relatively tight, structured playing field," Aspen CEO Pat O'Donnell explains. "Those are the rules. They [the staff] said, 'No, to be motivated to come to work every day, we need an expanded playing field—a little more latitude, a little more trust.'"

That's why knowing your values is so important. Values not only help to define your playing field; they guide you in situations that don't fit neatly into "the rules." Southwest Airlines has rules and procedures, but its employees are mainly guided by values such as caring, friendliness and respect as they serve people. Because they are not paralyzed by fear, Southwest employees develop the judgment and creativity to make good calls in situations unforeseen by the rules.

### Instructions

This exercise helps you become clear on your values and the behaviors that bring them to life.

1. Pass a sheet of paper to each participant.
2. Each person, working alone, writes out five values the organization stands for.  
*(If using Participant Workbook, see Workbook page 9.)*
3. As a group, discuss the commonalities and differences between their individual lists.
4. By secret ballot or raising hands, have the group select the four most important values.  
*(If using Participant Workbook, see Workbook page 9.)*
5. Write them on the top third of a piece of flip-chart paper. On the bottom third, draw a playing field, like a soccer or football field.
6. Ask the group to think of workplace behaviors that are in line with the four values they selected, as well as behaviors that *are not* in line. Assign one person to write these behaviors on the chart paper, writing "in line" behaviors inside the playing field and the "out of bounds" behaviors outside the playing field. Give the group 5-7 minutes to complete this.  
*(If using Participant Workbook, see Workbook page 10.)*