

Create connection and foster dialogue by using photos in your training.

Picture This

BY TAMMIE PLOUFFE

It's not exaggerating to say we're exposed to hundreds of images daily. Digital and print media both use images to attract—and keep—our attention.

Why? Smart marketers know that images engage us quickly and powerfully. Quickly, because the brain processes visuals faster than text. Powerfully, because visuals evoke emotion, communicating more content faster than words alone.

Imagine photos of children laughing, lovers kissing, or a person sitting by a tombstone. These images instantly ignite emotions, releasing connection hormones that trigger our imaginations. They create stories in our minds and cause us to react. This physiological process happens in just seconds, and we've all experienced it.

In addition to affecting us immediately, images stay with us longer. Research shows that after three days, we retain 10 percent of what we've heard and 60 percent of what we've seen. This physiological response



happens regardless of language or cultural norms, and is why a picture can tell a story as well as—if not better than—a thousand words.

This response also is what makes images effective in facilitation, where connection and retention are necessary for real learning and sustained behavior change to occur.

Age of the photograph

Effective speakers and educators know images aid in engagement and retention. This practice is called information visualization. If you Google “Periodic Table of Visualization Methods,” you’ll find a chart of 102 visualization methods graphically represented like elements. There’s V for Venn diagram, FI for flow chart, Dt for decision tree, Mi for mind map, and 98 more.

The table also includes Ri for rich picture. A rich picture can be a drawing, infographic, or photograph—which is important, given how prevalent photos are today. It’s estimated that 3.8 trillion photos were taken in all of human history through mid-2001, but 1 trillion photos were taken in 2015 alone. That number is projected to grow to 1.2 trillion in 2017. Clearly, we love taking, viewing, and sharing photos.

Photography is essential to the human interaction required to make the digital economy work, and marketers have taken note. Facilitators, who rely on human interaction for organizational and leadership development, should take note, too.

Harness the power of photographs

If you’re a successful facilitator, you’re undoubtedly an effective communicator. You probably use images in presentations, handouts, and other materials. But have you considered

photos as a tool for facilitation and training itself? It’s a concept that’s as effective as it is simple.

Remember the physiological effect of images? When emotions ignite, the connection-building hormones serotonin and oxytocin are released. Serotonin creates feelings of connection and allegiance. Oxytocin reinforces feelings of trust and safety. This potent hormonal brew works to

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quickly make people feel connected and safe, which is ideal for learning.

When there’s connection and trust, individuals open up, putting more of themselves in their responses. This is the difference between speaking

Using Images in Facilitation: A Four-Step Process

Learning Objective

Explore what effective leadership looks like; identify and define leadership qualities.

Resources

A deck of 200-plus photographs, displayed around the room, and a handout of insight-building questions, including:

- What does leadership mean to you?
- How does it feel to be led by an effective leader?
- Think of the most effective leader you have ever worked with. What did that person do that made her effective?
- What five things do you think are most important when leading people?

Process Steps

Focusing. Participants focus on the objective, ask themselves the insight-building questions, and individually reflect.

Resonating. Participants choose two images—one that depicts effective leadership and one that depicts how it feels to be led by an effective leader.

Insight building. Participants break into smaller groups and share their images, noting patterns and themes. The group writes down themes that surface and make a collage of everyone’s images.

Taking action. Each group shares its images and themes with the larger group, which explores all images selected, noting themes. The larger group creates a list of identified characteristics of effective leadership.

Result

This shared experience creates a common language and understanding around what effective leadership looks like and forms a connection for future learning.

in generalities, like “We need to improve morale,” and speaking in specifics, like “Employees want flexible scheduling.” As James Joyce wisely observed, “In the particular is contained the universal.” In other words, when people get specific, other people relate. People open up, are more expressive, and share more personal insights—all of which improve the quality of communication, which creates a richer dialogue.

Connection is essential to effective dialogue

Connection is the glue that binds a group together and creates the space for effective dialogue. Here, a group can work together to surface patterns, identify insights, imagine alternatives, and uncover original solutions—solutions that could result only from the integration of those people and their ideas in that moment.

Connection inspires people to do more than present their ideas (advocacy); it makes them more receptive to having their ideas questioned (inquiry) and integrated into new possibilities and solutions.

Using insight-building questions

While it’s clear how images can be a catalyst for connection, it takes insight-building questions—what, why, and how—to get a group into the rich dialogue necessary for real learning.

Because meaning is drawn from personal experience, two people can have different but relatable perspectives of the same situation. Asking insight-building questions gets participants out of advocacy mode, in which they’re promoting a single position, and into inquiry mode, in which they’re examining all positions to find the best one. When a group is

able to assimilate the insights of multiple ideas, the result is an integrated solution that’s better than any single idea on its own.

This is ideal for facilitators, who often are called upon to help groups grapple with complex issues for which there is no clear solution. To do this, they must get people to tap into their emotions and share personal, diverse perspectives. Not even the best facilitators can just snap their fingers and make this happen. But thanks to the physiological response they evoke, images can definitely help.

Connection + insight-building inquiry = learning

Understanding the physiology behind how images create connection and foster dialogue shows how this tool can quickly shift people out of advocacy and into inquiry, fostering a shared understanding and readiness to learn. Because the response is physiological, this occurs regardless of language or culture, which is especially valuable in a multicultural workplace.

Once you see this process in action, it’s easy to imagine how you could use images to facilitate the exploration of a variety of complex organization development topics involved in leadership development, building teamwork and collaboration, setting strategy and planning, leading change, and developing emotional intelligence.

The greatest ideas are indeed the simplest, and using photographs in facilitation is no exception.

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