

TRAINING FOR CHANGE *HANDOUT*

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Find a Metaphor

Lately I've noticed more participants get hung up in trainings where the trainer is trying to teach them a concept, by referencing other abstract concepts. I watched one group go glassy-eyed when the speaker told them nonprofit lobbying was like advocacy, but within a legal framework. *Huh?* Kudos to that facilitator for not simply offering them a definition of lobbying, but my guess is that with a little more preparation he could have found a metaphor to help explain it.

Long ago I learned from fantastic mentors that metaphors and stories are especially essential for learners without a college or high school education, and after lots of experimentation I'm confident metaphors work just as well for us middle class learners, too.

Here are some of my favorites:

Order a Pizza to Learn About Budgeting

NDLON teaches day laborers about budgeting by having them order pizzas – they have to decide how to spend a certain amount on different toppings, spread across many pizzas.

Persuading Politicians – Like Moving a Balloon That's Tied to a Rock

TFC trainer Daniel Hunter says instead of trying to move politicians by going after them directly, try to shift public opinion (the “rock”) – politicians can sway only so far. His campaign, Casino-Free Philadelphia, used public actions to expose corruption between casinos and state officials, pulling public opinion towards them and prompting local politicians – who had been pro-casino or on the fence – to follow.

Leadership Development in “The Walking Dead”

Organizer Cara Shufelt compares the evolution of the character Rick Grimes – gradually taking on more responsibility for his community during a zombie apocalypse – to the process of leadership development in community organizing.

Learning About Leading Trainings is Like Learning About Making Soup

When I teach trainers about training, or community organizers about organizing, I talk about us being a group of cooks comparing notes on the art of meal-making, or gardeners from different climate zones talking shop.

Campaigns Are Like Baking a Cake

Direct action campaigns need to have the right ingredients, in the right order, to achieve “liftoff” and build momentum – similar to mixing the wet ingredients together first, then the dry, to make sure your cake rises (and to make sure it's delicious!).

Strategic Planning “Road Trip”

Past lessons are in your “rearview mirror,” “speedbumps” are potential challenges, “gas pumps” are your resources, you may need to plan for separate strategies following a “fork in the road,” and it's important to plan for taking breaks at “rest stops” along the way.

KINDS OF METAPHORS

Many metaphors work because they're familiar to us. Others, like Daniel's politicians-as-balloons metaphor offer a simple (and visual) explanation for a complex theory. What's important is to use a metaphor that you think will support your (specific) audience into a better understanding of the concept you're teaching.

Here are some categories I use when trying to think of metaphors:

Daily Life

Household (*shopping, gardening, cooking, caring for kids or elderly relatives, laundry*)

Work (*farming, installing molding, cleaning a house, fishing, negotiating a price*)

Life Challenges (*moving out of your parents' house, dealing with your boss or landlord*)

Taking Risks (*trying a new recipe, singing in public, going on a date*)

Food Preparation (*baking, making a stew, fermenting yogurt, pickling*)

Event Planning (*a party, a ceremony, a concert*)

Making Something (*painting a portrait, writing a song, building a house*)

Sports (*setting up a play, playing by the rules, physical conditioning*)

Teamwork (*joining a band, working on an assembly line, singing karaoke, ordering food*)

Nature

Natural Cycles (*germination, harvest season, low tide, full moon, eclipse, puberty*)

Weather (*seasonal change, weather patterns, an avalanche*)

Habitats (*lakes, mountains, desserts, hermit crab shells*)

Bodies of Water (*rivers, creeks, waves, tides, currents, eddies, shoals, frozen-over lakes*)

Living Systems (*forests, coral reefs, beehives, the human body*)

Relationships (*pollinators & flowering plants, symbiotic organisms, parent & child*)

Culturally-Specific

Children's Stories (*Little Red Riding Hood, la llorona*)

Cultural Milestones (*age 15 or 16, your first job, first day of school, migration*)

Cultural Rituals (*birthday parties, religious holidays, visiting family*)

Societal Rituals (*voting, paying taxes, official holidays*)

Myths & Cultural Archetypes (*Romeo & Juliet, sword and shield, indigenous origin stories*)

Religious Parables (*David & Goliath*)

Historical (*Rosa Parks not giving up her seat, Emiliano Zapata's betrayal*)

Games (*Red Rover, Duck Duck Goose*)

Movies & Cartoons (*Pokémon, Finding Nemo, Titanic*)

Television Shows (*novelas in Spanish*)

Pop Culture Drama (*celebrity romance, dramatic news stories, political scandals*)

Find a Metaphor Work Sheet

(or conversation guide – we're often more creative working with others!)

Write what you're trying to turn into a metaphor:

If this were an image, what would it be? _____

If it were a single scene, like a diorama, what would it look like? _____

What element in nature does that remind you of? _____

What activity in daily life does it most resemble? _____

Think about your audience. **If this were an activity** they'd be familiar with, what would it be?
(could be a household activity, cultural ritual, making an object, cooking a meal...)

If it could be enacted as a play, who would be the characters, and what would be the plot, tension or conflict they're engaged in?

What movie or TV show is that similar to? Or other kind of pop culture drama.

How is that like a family relationship? Or a relationship in the natural world?

What religious or cultural parable does it remind you of? _____

- *written by Andrew Willis Garcés*