

What's in the Box?

OVERVIEW

This improvisation exercise helps participants practice reciprocity, creativity, and acceptance of new ideas. During this activity, they will need to be in the moment, listen to their partner, and adjust their own ideas.

STEPS

This game is played in pairs. Each pair takes turns being the gift giver and receiver. You can play more than one round, switching pairs each time.

Find a partner. Stand up and face each other. Agree on one person to be the gift giver and one person to be the receiver.

The gift giver presents an imaginary box to their partner, saying “This is for you.” Use your body language to suggest if the “gift” is big or small, heavy or light.

The recipient accepts the box, pretends to open it, and announces what is inside. You can make up anything, silly or serious. For example, “Oh, it’s a gardening trowel!”

The gift giver explains why they chose that gift. Make up something that fits with the object that the recipient has imagined and mime an appropriate action. For example, “Yes, I know you like to go to the beach so I thought you would enjoy making sandcastles” (miming the motion of digging sand).

The recipient says “Thank you” and explains why they will enjoy the gift. For example, “Thank you. I can also use it to turn my compost” (miming the motion of digging).

The giver says “You’re welcome” and adds a final comment to end the round. For example, “I’m glad you like it and can use it all year.”

Switch roles and play again.

FACILITATION NOTES

You can use this game in a variety of settings. For example, you can use it at a team meeting to build listening skills and introduce the concepts of reciprocity, or at a community meeting as an icebreaker.

This game can be played with any number of participants. If you have an odd number of people, you can create one group of three, or the facilitator can play with the extra person.



Introduce the game by going over the basic procedure. It is helpful to have two people that know the game demonstrate how it is played for the others. Players should mimic the motions of giving, receiving, and using the imaginary gift. Encourage them to be as specific as possible as they give reasons for their responses. They can be silly, but they should keep their reactions and reasons positive.

DEBRIEF

After you have played a few rounds, ask some questions to debrief the experience, such as:

- Were you surprised by something your partner said? How did you figure out how to respond?
- What techniques did you use to come up with your reasons for appreciating and giving the gifts?
- How would you describe your experience in this exercise? What helped you be successful?
- How could you apply what you learned in this activity?

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