



Play
FACILITATOR'S GUIDE



*The FISH! For Leaders Series is dedicated to John Gardner,
whose belief in human possibilities
inspired several generations to believe in themselves.*

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What is FISH! For Leaders?



Early in his career, Carl Rogers, the noted psychologist, thought his job was to fix people. He asked himself, “How can I cure or change this person?”

Despite his extensive training, it didn’t work. At times his tactics seemed to produce a change in people, but it was temporary at best.

So Rogers tried a different approach. Instead of trying to mold his patients into who he wanted *them* to be, he focused on how *he* “showed up” for them. The more people saw that he cared about and believed in them, they discovered within themselves the capacity to change, mature and develop.

Rogers’ experience speaks to the heart of leadership. Effective leaders don’t try to fix or control others. Instead, they ask themselves: “How can I develop relationships with the people I lead that help them grow in confidence, commitment, skill and purpose?”

We created The FISH! For Leaders Series—of which this program is a part—to help you develop more supportive relationships through The FISH! Philosophy. These relationships are the foundation that make you more effective in every other aspect of your leadership.

The FISH! Philosophy: Fundamentals For Leaders

The roots of The FISH! Philosophy go back to the day John Christensen first visited the Pike Place Fish Market in Seattle. Selling fish was cold and exhausting, yet the fishmongers brought so much energy, commitment, service, teamwork and fun to the job that people came from around the world just to watch them sell fish—a lot of fish.

John had always been fascinated by people who brought passion to their work, and saw the fish market as a metaphor to illustrate his belief that every workplace can be more alive and engaged. He made a film about the market to show everyone how to be more engaged in their work—and their lives. The film, FISH!, explores four simple practices that anyone, from frontline to CEO, can immediately apply:

Be There: Be physically and emotionally present for people, especially when they need you. It’s a powerful message of respect that strengthens relationships.

What is FISH! For Leaders?



Play: Play is a state of mind that you can apply to any task. It's the spirit that fuels creativity, as in "Let's Play with that idea!" You do your best work when you are having fun doing it.

Make Their Day: Find ways to make people feel special, letting them know how much you value and appreciate them. Celebrate others.

Choose Your Attitude: No matter what life throws in your path, you alone are responsible for how you respond to it.

We call these four practices The FISH! Philosophy. Just as a tree needs healthy roots to bear good fruit, these practices nourish the roots of trust, communication, commitment and accountability. Organizations around the world are using The FISH! Philosophy to improve business results and create a higher quality of life at work. We have learned that organizations are most likely to succeed when leaders don't simply expect their employees to live FISH!, but embrace these fundamental practices in their own lives first.

Using this program, you will take your team through conversations and activities through which they will explore their leadership beliefs and style, consider their impact and learn how to lead even more effectively. Thank you for guiding them on this important journey.

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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



The resources in this guide were designed to lead a session from one to two hours, but you can easily adapt them to create a session of any length.

1. Video

Play is 9 minutes in length. Key themes include:

- Play is the spirit that fuels fun *and* creativity.
- People have to feel safe and trusted to experiment with new ideas.
- To play productively, define your playing field.
- People have enormous power to do the right thing if they feel comfortable that they can.

2. Conversation Starters

Targeted questions, prompted by the video, help your group to begin exploring your beliefs about leadership. These questions help you to honestly assess whether the impact you are having is the impact you want to have.

3. Activities

Choose from several activities to help participants become engaged in their learning and take ownership of it. If you have purchased FISH! For Leaders Participant Workbooks for individual participants, we've provided page references so you can help them follow along during the session.

Example: *(If using Participant Workbook, see Workbook page 6.)*

4. Action Plan

John Keats said, "Nothing becomes real until it is experienced." Here your participants come up with their own plan to act on what they have learned. The actions may be simple: If you feel you haven't been connecting with your colleagues, you might decide "the first thing I'll do when I arrive in the morning is to greet every person in my area by name."

5. Tips

If participants are not sure what to try or need more ideas, we've provided some suggestions.

6. Follow-Up

After you put your ideas into action, it helps to reflect on what you learned. What worked? What didn't? What impact did it have on others? What impact did it have on you?

Introducing the Video



Before your team watches Play, it's helpful to give some context. Here's one way to introduce the film:

When you think of the word Play, what comes to mind? Most of us would probably say something like fun or relaxation. Maybe even goofing off. It's no wonder we usually see Play as something completely separate from work.

But the word that I associate most with Play is creativity. As kids we learn by playing and we learn the same way as adults—by playing with ideas, experimenting, trying to find a better way of doing things. Experts say a playful mindset is necessary for any organization that wants to be creative.

So what do we need to do as leaders to encourage that playful mindset? To be creative, people have to feel safe. When people are afraid of making a mistake, of getting in trouble for trying something new, you can kill a new idea simply by shaking your head or saying, "That'll never work."

As a leader, you can't just install fun or command people to be creative. You can, however, encourage an environment where people are free of fear. Get rid of the fear and creativity will fill the vacuum. And when people are being creative and productive, they have fun, too.

As you watch the video, think about "What can I do as a leader to make the people around me feel safe to Play?"

We included lots of questions to prompt discussion, but don't feel you have to get through every question in one session. You may want to choose two to three questions and if you have time for more, go for it. If a particular question really ignites discussion, don't feel you have to move on immediately to the next question. Go with the energy of the group. Keep the conversation going with statements such as, "Tell me more about that."

1. What concerns do you have about Play being appropriate at work?
2. When do you and your team have the most fun at work? When it's fun, how do you feel? How do you treat each other?
3. When do you have the least fun at work? What is happening when you're *not* having fun that you need to change?
4. Why do you think playfulness and creativity live together in some workplaces and not in others?
5. What drives you to try new ideas at work? What keeps you from trying new things at work?
6. How do you encourage people to be creative in your workplace?
7. In the video, John Yokoyama says his business took off when he started to trust his employees. Trust is also a key element of the other playful workplaces we saw.
 - How much do you trust your team? What impact do you think that has on their enthusiasm and effectiveness? What can you do to trust them more?
 - How much does your team trust you? What impact does that have on your effectiveness? What would it take to increase their trust in you?
8. Herb Kelleher says, "If you're leaning toward the customer, rather than away from the customer, we will forgive anything you do." When your team makes mistakes, what are you willing to forgive? Why?

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 #1: Playstorm *(continued)*



Your role during the brainstorm is to create a safe space. Allow one person to speak at a time and don't let the people who shout the loudest to dominate. Encourage everyone to contribute.

After the brainstorm, ask the groups:

- As far as offering wild ideas, how do you think the group did?
- Think of a time when ideas were slow in coming: Any reasons why? Anyone who found it difficult to come up with wild ideas? Why?
- Think about when the ideas got rolling: What contributed to this? What role did trust play?
- Was it easier to come up with ideas knowing that others were not going to judge them?

Have each group take a few minutes to evaluate the ideas they generated. Ask participants, “What did you learn? What was your favorite idea? Wildest idea? Most practical idea?”

(If using Participant Workbook, see Workbook page 7.)

Are there any ideas that you could put to use? Any wild ideas that, with a slight twist, would be worth trying? For example, “We can't do Food Fight Friday but what can we do that accomplishes the same goal—to bring some relaxation and fun to the end of the week?”

Ask the group to think about the feeling a wild idea would create, then think about more practical ideas that might generate the same feeling. Try combining ideas to generate possible solutions.

Finally, ask for a few people to share about: “How would we benefit if we brought this open, creative approach to all of our work?”

Action Plan

Ask each group to select their favorite Playstorm ideas and plan how they will put it into action—time, date, location, who will be involved, etc.

(If using Participant Workbook, see Workbook page 7.)

Activity #1: Playstorm *(continued)*



Tips

- Ask your team what they'd like to do to have more fun at work. Put one of their suggestions into action and join in.
- To start meetings or to lighten the mood when things get too serious, do something energizing. Toss a beach ball around, do 10 jumping jacks, do the wave. It's the equivalent of taking a deep breath to freshen your mind.
- Start a "Play of the Week" (like the sports news) highlighting playful or creative things
- Equip your meetings with out-of-the-ordinary objects: toys, rubber balls, building blocks, etc. Toys encourage people to Play.

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.)

Activity #2: Define Your Playing Field *(continued)*



Ask the group:

- What are the consequences of going out of bounds? When might it be safe to go outside the boundaries?
- How much input do your employees have in determining the boundaries of your playing field?
- What would it take for you to expand the boundaries? How might expanding your playing field help your team?

Share the results of this exercise with your team. To increase their sense of ownership and commitment, invite them to go through this exercise with you. It will help everyone to be on the same page.

Action Plan

Ask participants, “What will you do to create a clear (and potentially expandable) playing field with your team? Write what you will do and when you will do it.”

(If using Participant Workbook, see Workbook page 10.)

Tips

- If you’re ever unsure about whether a playful activity is appropriate or not, ask yourself three questions:
 - Does it Make Their Day?
 - Does it help you Be There for others?
 - Does it reflect the kind of attitude you would choose if you wanted to be helpful or uplifting to someone?

These FISH! Philosophy practices, together, help ensure that Play is appropriate and professional.

- When a team member admits a mistake, ask what they learned from it. Praise them for finding what can be harvested from the mistake.
- Write a brief story for the team newsletter, bulletin board or broadcast email titled, “The Best Mistake I Ever Made . . . And Who Helped Me Learn From It.” Tell how it felt to make the mistake, what you learned from it, and a person who encouraged, forgave you or helped you put it in perspective. Mention that you’d like to be that kind of person, and see what reactions you get.

Activity #3: What If We Couldn't Fail?



“Recently we were in a brainstorming meeting,” recalls the director of organizational development for a major corporation. “The ideas were coming fast and furious until our newest employee, a young man we had hired two weeks earlier because of his energy and creativity, threw out an idea. Almost before the idea had even left his lips, one of the senior people in the meeting said sarcastically, ‘That’ll never work.’”

“There was a moment of uncomfortable silence. I noticed that our new employee had slunk down in his chair and never said another word during the meeting. He didn’t say a word in a meeting we held two days later either. I wondered if he would ever feel free to contribute the creative spirit we had seen in him.”

John Gardner warned that by the time we graduate from college, we have accumulated an “encyclopedia” of things we’re never going to try again . . . simply because someone temporarily dismissed them or regarded them as a failure.

Rob Gregory, owner of Rochester Ford Toyota, once asked his employees, “What would we do if we knew we couldn’t fail?” His point was that the only way to grow and progress is to try new approaches. If you are learning from what doesn’t work, the only way you can truly fail is not trying at all. As basketball coaches often say, “You miss 100 percent of the shots you don’t take.”

Instructions

Have the group brainstorm this question for 10 minutes: *What would we try in our individual jobs, team or organization if we knew we couldn’t fail?*

If you have a large group, divide into groups of four to six. Provide flip chart paper and markers to each group. Remind them to follow these brainstorming rules:

- Encourage wild ideas
- 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 #3: What If We Couldn't Fail? *(continued)*



Afterward, ask the group:

- Setting aside for a moment the ideas we came up with, what did you learn during this exercise?
- Any ideas that you've actually thought about trying before? What kept you from trying them? What would it take to let go of that?
- Any ideas that seem promising? What would be the worst thing that would happen if these ideas didn't work?
- What might happen if you were more willing to try out new ideas?

(If using Participant Workbooks, ask individuals to record their favorite ideas on Workbook page 12.)

Action Plan

Ask participants, "What will you do to make it safe for team members to propose new ideas? Write what you will do and when you will do it."

(If using Participant Workbooks, see Workbook page 12.)

Tips

- Not every idea works, but you can still find something to acknowledge in every sincerely offered idea. It might be the motivation that led to the idea, or the qualities it took to generate it or that the person dared to think differently. First tell the person what you like: "What I like about that idea is that _____." (e.g., you were really concerned about the customer.) Then build on the idea by noting how to make it better next time or more applicable to the situation: ". . . and what if we _____." (e.g., built in more profit margin.) This technique makes it safe for people to generate ideas, and the next idea they bring might be one that helps the team and solves the problem.
- Ask five employees how safe they feel to express ideas with you and the team. Ask what you can do better.
- In the video, the Sprint call center introduced fun ideas to create a more engaged workplace. When they tried a new idea and it didn't work perfectly, they didn't over-react. They kept what worked, got rid of what didn't and kept experimenting. With each new idea they tried and didn't take away, trust between management and agents grew. Agents even started coming to Lori Lockhart on their own with ideas for improving the business. Ask your team for 10 suggestions on what would make their work more fun. Try two of them. If they don't work, try two more. If they do work, try two more.



1. If your team has a regularly scheduled meeting, check in with participants next time you get together. Review what they wrote in their action plans/commitments. Ask:
 - What new things did you do?
 - What happened?
 - What was the impact on others?
 - What was the impact on you?
2. To remind participants of your *Play* conversations and their action plans, send them occasional emails of the Tips from the end of each section.



The FISH! For Leaders Series consists of six programs, each of which helps leaders to be more effective by applying one aspect of The FISH! Philosophy. Use any combination of these six thought-provoking programs to create the leadership training that fits your team's needs.

FISH! For Leaders programs include:

It Starts with Me

The secret to outstanding leadership is not in what you command others to do for you, but what you inspire them to do through your example.

Be There

People may admire your talent, charisma and business skill, but they will not really trust you until you make the effort to be present for them, emotionally as well as physically.

Play

You can't just order creativity like a lunch special or install happiness like a program. To enjoy the many business and human benefits of Play, leaders must first nurture an environment that is full of trust and respect, and free of fear.

Make Their Day

One of the best ways for a leader to make someone's day—or month, or year, or life—is to value them. Simple gestures, such as appreciation and giving people a voice, fulfill emotional needs that are too often ignored on the job.

Choose Your Attitude

Your attitude has a powerful effect on the people you lead. What impact do you want to have on others? You alone are responsible for choosing the attitude that will achieve that impact.

Who Are You Being?

Great leaders are guided by what they stand for, not by the temporary ups and downs happening around them. To lead more intentionally, you must define your purpose, recommit to it every day and ask others to help you be the person you say you want to be.