

Low Elements Facilitating Guide

Initiative debriefing, or preferably reflection, is a subtle art. Like most arts or disciplines you only get better at it the more you do it. To succeed at Low Element reflection you will need a sense of responsibility, humility and competence. No amount of reading will make you a great initiative leader; you must do it and be as prepared as possible. However, good facilitating often involves less talking than listening. You have to find the balance between giving instructions and letting the group figure it out, giving input and asking questions (or remaining silent), talking and listening, letting the group fail and helping them learn, keeping things fun and helping them sense that something significant is happening here, giving enough time to work at it and not letting it go too long.

It's a delicate balance. Your role as a facilitator is not to give them all the solutions to fix the problem, but to give them what they need to find the solutions themselves. That might mean making a suggestion if needed, but most of the time it is keeping the experience safe physically and emotionally for all the campers for them to figure it out together.

Below you will find helpful information in leading the reflection time. I encourage you to review this every time you will be heading to do a low element, or bring it with you. Learn this mantra to give structure to your reflection time:

What?...So What?...God's What?...Now What?

What?

- * Publish the activity. Literally, what happened? Everyone experienced it, but it is another thing to describe it. The first step of reflection is essential to warm up to the broader lessons.
- * Each person must contribute one word, phrase or sentence that describes the whole experience for them as an individual
- * Have each person end a phrase in her/hers own way. For example: I'm glad that...I wish we had...I didn't like...I liked...etc.
- * Each person holds thumbs up, down or somewhere in between measuring whatever it is you ask them. For example: Was the group successful? Did the group work well together? Was everyone involved in a positive way? Ask questions of the locations of the thumbs to begin a greater discussion
- * Bring your phone for a camera to take pictures or videos of the group solving the challenge, or other important events. Have the group look at the pictures and discussion is sure to follow.

So What?

It is here that the group members are abstracting and generalizing what they are learning from the experience. Many of the above "what" questions could become "So what?" questions simply by shifting the descriptive to the interpretive. Broader lessons are extracted here. Buzz words like "teamwork" and "leadership" will surely arise. Be patient and ask questions to help campers interpret what happened during the initiative. The younger the camper, the harder it may be for them to make abstract connections since they are not developmentally there yet.

Below are some open-ended questions to help in your reflection:

- * What interfered with getting the activity done and what could have been done about that?
- * What things made the activity work better and why?
- * If you could have had one wish during the activity to help you and your group, what would it have been?
- * If you were going to do the activity again, what would you do the same, different, and why?
- * How did you feel about the procedure your group used?
- * I tried to make the activity good for myself by...
- * My highlight during the initiative was...
- * I tried to make the initiative good for others by...
- * How did your team function? What were some of your team's strengths...weaknesses?

- * What is the one word that would describe why your team was successful?

God's What?

Here, we're helping participants look for ways to integrate the story of scripture, the mission of God, the image of God, etc. with the experience they just shared. The goal is not to "over-spiritualize" the experience, but rather, to engage in some good theological reflection.

- * In what ways was God's character displayed by group members? At what points?
- * Can you think of any stories from scripture that relate to your experience as a group or individual?
- * Use a particular scripture to help them reflect and connect their experience to discipleship.
 - o Micah 6:8—what does it mean to, "act justly, love mercy, walk humbly"? What's hard about living out the prophet's message? What about this exercise reinforces or challenges how you think about this passage of scripture?
 - o Genesis 1:27—"so God created humankind in his image...male and female he created them" Do we see each other as God sees them? Do we discount abilities? How might you take this experience and help it inform how you see others as God does—that is, made in God's own image?
 - o In Mark 1:17, Jesus said to his disciples, "come and follow me..." Were you a good or bad follower in this experience? How do you know how to follow? What do you need to follow? What prevents you from following faithfully?
 - o 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 is Paul's metaphor of the body of Christ. In what ways did you need each other, or belong to each other in this experience? What does it look like to always live this way?

Now What?

This is often the most difficult phase of reflection, but arguably the most important. This is the process of transferring learning, or taking lessons from one experience and reapplying them to other situations. Here at camp other situations could be, "how we treat others in your cabin." Broader life lessons can be extracted if the campers can make those connections. As a facilitator, YOU may see the lesson(s) clearly, but the campers don't have a clue. In this case be patient and careful that you remain a facilitator and not an instructor. The group members must make connections without you doing it for them. Rather than pointing out the connections to campers, present your observations as questions to help the group discover the connections that are most meaningful for them.

- * One thing I learned about myself from the initiative was...
- * A personal challenge I had during the initiative was...
- * One strength I have come away appreciating about myself is...
- * One thing I have learned about people that I can apply elsewhere in my life is...
- * Have you gained any insights about teamwork that you can use elsewhere in your life?
- * Did you notice any changes in the team from the start of the initiatives to the end of the initiatives?
- * How does what happened in this activity apply to your real life? To discipleship? To this week at camp?

Remember, this takes practice and doing. Be careful that you do not script out the whole of the activity, with lessons in mind—let things happen organically and be a meticulous observer, maybe even bring a pad of paper to take notes on. Finally, should a group fail you must still reflect on that failure and look for the lessons from that failure. We know from "real life" that we also learn from failures. Be gracious in the situation. Keep things light hearted—especially if things are getting heated. Know how to help the group walk away with encouragement, even if the path is through some failure first. **It is your responsibility to stop the action if it becomes physically or emotionally unsafe.** And maybe there is an opportunity to revisit the element later in the week—overcoming the failure!

Be wise. Listen well. Be playful. Make good observations. Be creative. Keep the four "whats" in mind. Go with the flow of the group!

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Warm-ups, Games, and Initiatives

Here are some great group initiatives or warm-up activities. Some are more intense than others and stand on their own. Some are good as a warm-up to build a foundation before you do a low element or initiative. Some require supplies, most of which a leadership team member should be able to point you in the right direction to.

Remember, as the facilitator it is your responsibility to warm up and instruct the group in the necessary safety rules and procedures. Trust is built incrementally; there's great wisdom in having your activities follow a progression from playful and low-risk games to more challenging team-based elements. If you feel the group is not prepared or is acting without respect for safety you have the authority and responsibility to stop or instruct the group prior to injury or undue risks being taken.

Amoeba

Have the group stand as close together as possible. Tie a rope around them at the waist to create the "amoeba." Have the group travel over a designated course up, over, and around obstacles. Dangers include the group moving too fast and falling on top of each other. The task could be timed or have the group blindfolded and a "shepherd" needs to direct the group verbally through the obstacles. People should have their hands ready to brace themselves and act as bumpers.

Blind Knot

There are several different ways to do this initiative, but always blindfolded. After all are blindfolded, tie some knots in a piece of rope, and then have everyone hold the rope with both hands. The object is to untie all the knots without anyone letting go. People can slide along the rope, but they cannot drop the rope and pick it up at a different point. An alternative is just to tangle the rope and have them untangle it. Another is to give them an unknotted, untangled rope and call out types of knots they must tie (if they know any, if not, teach them).

Blind Line Up

With eyes closed and no speaking, have the group line up according to different criteria (height, shoe size, birthday, age, etc.) Do not tell them where one end of the line is (i.e. where the tallest is and where the shortest is. Have the group decide when they are done. Safety concerns: have hands up as soft bumpers, and move slowly. If blind is too intense, try just no talking.

Blind Maze

Make a rope loop (with twists and turns if you like as long as it connects back to itself) around trees or obstacles. Have the group hold the rope blindfolded. No speaking. The object is to find the way out of the maze, which there is not. Tell them to raise their hand if they need help (this is the way out). Once someone raises their hand, pull them aside and tell them the way out was to ask for help. If you want, have those who make it out say to the group "I'm out." Debrief why it is often so hard for us to ask for help.

Copy Cat

Circle up and have everyone, in his or her head, choose someone else in the group who will be their leader. Once the activity starts each person will mimic the person they have chosen. If your leaders moves or changes position, you must mimic them...as if you were a mirror. Have people try not to stare at their leader, because it makes it too obvious. Before beginning make sure everyone has chosen a leader and have everyone close their eyes and assume a comfortable pose. On opening eyes each person should assume the pose of his or her leader. Maybe have the group try to guess who was following who.

Diminishing Load

The group must move across an open field as quick as possible. To cross the open area, a member must be carried and may not touch the ground. The carrier must return and be the next person carried him or herself. The only member allowed to walk across alone is the last member.

Four Sheets to the Wind

Give everyone a piece of paper and have them close their eyes. Instruct them to fold it in half and tear off the bottom right corner. Next fold it in half again and tear off the upper right corner. Next fold it one more time and tear the lower right corner. Open eyes and compare results. Address ambiguous directions and personal uniqueness.

Helium Pole

This requires an old tent pole or a light stick long enough for each member of the group to have one finger underneath (the lighter the better). Tell the group to line up sideways with one finger out in front of them. It does not matter if they are all facing the same way or alternate. Place the pole on top of the row of outstretched fingers. Tell them to lower the pole to the ground without losing contact with anyone's fingers or they start over. Simple right? Not so much.

Human Knot

Circle up the group. Have them reach across the circle with their right hand and grasp someone else's hand, but not the hand of the person next to them. Next do the same with their left, but not the hand of the same person whose hand they have already. The object is to get untangled without letting go. With certain groups, make it so they cannot talk to up the ante. They can change the position of their grasp for comfort and twisting around, but they should not lose contact.

Turnstile

The challenge is for everyone in the group (including the rope twirlers) to successfully jump one time without letting the rope make an additional revolution between jumpers. All you need is a long stretch of rope. Don't be fooled by the simple instructions, it can take HOURS.

Points of Contact

In a field mark off a start and finish line at least ten yards apart. Multiply the number of participants in the group by a $\frac{3}{5}$ and round up to the nearest whole number. This is the number or "points of contact" that the group is allowed. For example: 9 participants $\times \frac{3}{5} = \frac{27}{5} = 5 \frac{2}{5}$ rounded up to 6 points of contact. The group must move as a connected unit from start to finish with only the designated number of points of contact touching the ground. Each hand or foot is considered a separate point of contact.

These Low Ropes Elements can be done anywhere:

The Beast

Goal: To build a structure by copying an example, relaying messages between team members

The Maze

Goal: Get all participants through the maze without any wrong turns and no talking

Set up: Lay down an 8x8 (or larger) grid with masking tape or something with no directional markings. Make a map of the same size grid on a sheet of paper and arrows pointing the way through the maze, one arrow per square. This directional map is for your eyes only.

Rules: The group stands at a designated entry square and must choose silently which square to go to next. Should they make a wrong turn, you, the map holder, simply says "no" or "go back" and the next person in line must start from the beginning and make another attempt. If their chosen direction is correct you say nothing. Once the entire route is deciphered the entire group must get through without any wrong turns, one wrong turn sends the entire group back to the start.