



Why Did We Do That?

How To Process Teambuilding Games

By Tom Heck

“Why did we just do that?” It was the first question the group of 15 teenagers asked me after investing 90 minutes into completing the Spider’s Web initiative. My response? I bumbled around for a minute or so mentioning buzz words like “teamwork” and “leadership” and I tried to explain how they would use this stuff once they returned home. They didn’t buy it – and I must confess that neither did I.

The year was 1987 and I was in my first year working for the Camp Woodson program in North Carolina – a wilderness based pre-release program serving adjudicated youth. Our job as camp counselors was to help the program participants learn and practice important life skills that would keep them out of jail and maybe even turn their lives around.

Like many new to the field of adventure learning, I found myself leading teambuilding activities that I had just learned (from a book or from another staff member). My greatest challenge was that I had very little knowledge about how to effectively help the participants learn from the activities. It was unclear to me how to “debrief” these activities with any degree of confidence.

Fortunately for me (and more importantly the campers), my supervisor Betsy Hipple was present at that particular event to help bail me out. She skillfully led the group of teenagers through an amazing series of questions resulting in a dialogue that helped the students learn the lessons they needed to learn. She was able to do this in a way that allowed the students to take ownership of the information, which I found magical. I decided then and there to learn and master group facilitation and to uncover the mystery behind the debriefing process.

Though I may not be at a stage of mastery, I have learned a few things about helping a group successfully navigate the debrief process.

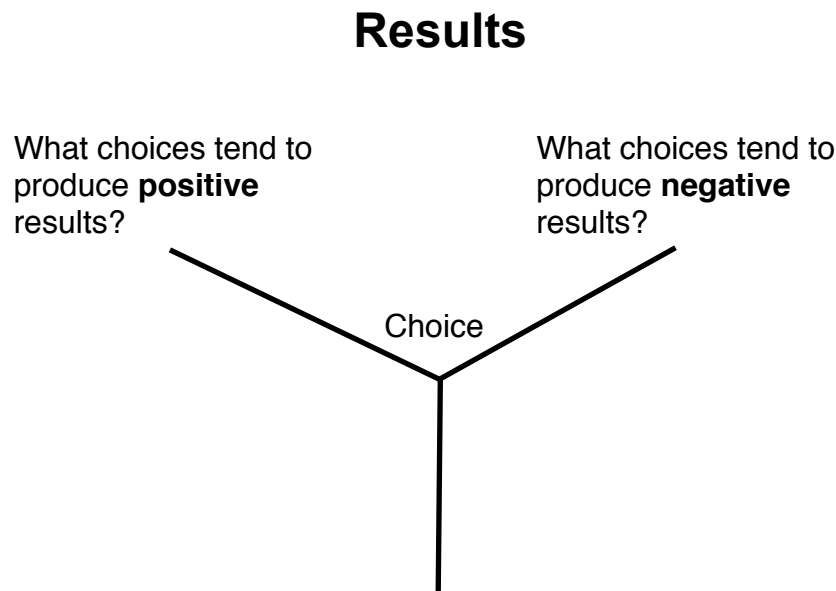
The following debriefing model is a direct result of my working with over 8,000 fifth grade students in an in-school adventure based learning program I developed and delivered for the YMCA of Western North Carolina between 1991-1996.

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The program was called “Adventure Day” and the program’s purpose was to help an entire class of fifth graders (about 25 kids) learn and practice specific strategies that would lead to greater team (classroom) harmony. The program utilized basic portable teambuilding activities (examples included the Hoola Hoop Pass, Pass The Can, All Aboard, Toxic Waste, etc.).

I would start the day off with a discussion about teams – asking the students to supply examples of “real life” teams. The kids almost always supplied sports teams as examples (baseball, football, basketball, etc.) then the kids would start to give examples of people who work together in everyday life (doctors, police, fireman, construction workers, pilots, families, etc.). The purpose here was to set the stage for this key understanding: teams are everywhere in our society.

I would then share with the students that the Adventure Day program was really about a scientific journey to discover the specific choices in behavior that produce consistent beneficial (positive) results both to the team and individually regardless of the activity (regardless of the particular teambuilding challenge). This is when I would share the following “Results Diagram” which I would draw out on a giant piece of newsprint.



I would describe the diagram with the following analogy: “If you were walking through the woods on a path (I would point to the vertical line in the diagram) and you came upon an intersection, you might decide to go right, or left, or backtrack, or stand still. Today’s program is all about moving forward (rather than standing still or backtracking) and it’s about paying attention to what’s happening based on

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your individual and collective choices. This Results Diagram will help us record the results of your choices for future reference.”

I would use the diagram throughout the day of teambuilding exercises by returning to it both during and after nearly every activity. During these brief meetings I would ask the students the following question: “What did you learn from this last activity that will help you on the next activity even though you don’t know what the next activity is?” What I was fishing for were specific choices in behavior that helped the team succeed.

I stood with marker in hand, ready to record the student’s thoughts on the newspaper. The students would initially come up with responses like “teamwork” or “communication” - - buzz words they had been hearing for years from teachers and others. I always pressed them for specifics. “What about teamwork?” I would enquire. “What specifically?” Usually after a minute or two they would come up with answers like: planning, sharing ideas, and cheering each other on.

Sometimes I would ask the question and a student would respond with an activity specific strategy like “We need to hang on to each other and balance on the next activity.” I would usually suggest that the next activity happens to have nothing to do with balancing and holding on to each other. This would require the student to come up with a suggestion (behavior) applicable to any activity - - examples might include: help each other, trust each other, brainstorm, and so on.

As the day progressed the activities became harder and more involved and the group would often start to have difficulties of one kind or another. When difficulties would arise, I would call a time out and have the group sit down to discuss what was going on. I would lead the discussion in a “charge neutral”* fashion, always approaching the work from an inquisitive “scientific” standpoint. I would simply go back to the Results Diagram and ask “What choices are you making now that are producing negative results?” Sometimes the students would have to take a mental “step back” in order to answer the question. For some it could be a bit of a challenge to acknowledge that they are making choices that are hurting the team or causing some kind of negative result. Typically the students would come up with responses like: being mean, not sharing, being rude, pushing, not taking things seriously enough, etc.

By the end of the day, the diagram was filled in with choices that produced positive results regardless of the circumstances and negative results regardless of the circumstances. It was not uncommon for the classroom teacher to look at this and remark “I tell them this stuff all the time!” The difference was now the students “owned” the information because they had generated it through their experience. They had vivid memories of which exercise produced a particular learning (piece of information).

The program was typically offered at the beginning of the school year and the teacher usually posted the Results Diagram on the wall and referred to it throughout the school year.

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The “Results Diagram” then is simply a debriefing tool used to help participant’s link behavior (choices) with specific outcomes (results). This task of helping kids develop a clear link between their choices and the outcomes was the drive behind the Adventure Day program. I’ve since come to believe this is one of the most important services adventure programs can provide – helping participants see that success or non-success is a result of choices we are making both on a conscious and unconscious level, both individually and collectively. The ultimate goal being to empower the individual and the group.

Since those days delivering the Adventure Day program, I’ve successfully used the Results Diagram with a wide range of groups – from 5th graders to corporate executives and everything in between. It seems that regardless of the population, there are few who would not benefit from clarifying the link between their behavior (their choices) and the results of their behavior. The Results Diagram encourages people to “own” the fact that their choices have caused them to end up in the situations they experience on a day-to-day basis.

The Results Diagram is based loosely on the work of William Glasser’s *Reality Therapy*. The Questions that Glasser developed for his therapeutic process were:

- 1) What do you want?
- 2) What are you doing to get what you want?
- 3) Is it working?
- 4) If it’s not working are you willing to try another approach?

*Charge Neutral - - This is a term I learned from Thomas Leonard who is known as the father of the coaching industry (life and business coaches). When working with a group it’s important to be aware of the “charge” you’re showing up with because the group will read you and begin to take direction from your energy. The skillful use of a charge neutral approach will allow the group to move and grow in the direction that most serves them.

- *Charge Positive* - - It’s raining and Bill says, “I love the rain. It helps everything grow.”
- *Charge Negative* - - It’s raining and Sally says, “I hate the rain. It’s such a downer.”
- *Charge Neutral* - - It’s raining and Joseph says, “It’s raining.”

This example does not take into account voice inflection and body language, which are also critical pieces to communication.