



The Third-Act Workshop

It's just the beginning.

What are the 'ingredients' that make for a successful workshop? Reflecting on comments made from participants on previous workshops and from my own reflections as a Facilitator of 50 or 60 workshops in the past few years, the following are some of the ingredients that seem to be relevant:

1. You need a compelling and relevant topic.
2. Participants that "self-select" to attend.
3. Participants willing to do some pre-preparation.
4. Facilitation that doesn't get in the way.
5. A location that is warm, comfortable and safe.
6. Sufficient time to allow things to sink in.
7. Some follow up afterwards.

1. A COMPELLING AND RELEVANT TOPIC

The topic needs to be compelling and not just in the sense of being 'objectively' interesting; it also has to be 'subjectively' relevant. Advances in human longevity and its social impact is undoubtedly an interesting phenomenon but the more immediate question is, 'how is this relevant to you right now'?

2. PARTICIPANTS THAT SELF-SELECT TO ATTEND

This may seem obvious but you really need participants to 'self-select' to attend. It's not impossible if they don't, but it does slow things down for everyone else as the facilitator has to spend the early part of the workshop reassuring some attendees that it is okay to be here.

3. PARTICIPANTS WILLING TO DO SOME PRE-PREPARATION

Being well prepared doesn't just apply to the facilitator; having the right location, the right materials, a sound method of inquiry and an effective and empathetic delivery style, it also refers to the participants. Some initial reading



and reflection on the kinds of questions they would like to explore helps to ensure that the workshop can begin long before they arrive. Also, each participant is asked to bring a gift; a bottle of wine, chocolates, a cake, plus a story, song or recitation as this helps participants go from, “what can I get from this workshop” to “what can I bring to this group”?

4. FACILITATION THAT DOESN'T GET IN THE WAY

Being a facilitator is a bit like being a tour guide. You take people on a journey of their choosing, point out some things along the way, are not prescriptive about what they see and return them home safely to the car park. As part of this, the facilitator needs to balance the need for structure and direction with knowing when to let things go.

5. A LOCATION THAT IS WARM, COMFORTABLE, PRIVATE AND SAFE

As we go about reflecting on our interiors, it is important that our exterior comforts are looked after. Thus the immediate environment needs to be warm, comfortable, private and safe. This will help participants relax into the underlying questions that we silently know influence our decisions and our behaviour.

6. A SUFFICIENT AMOUNT OF TIME

A good workshop leaves participants with sufficient time to work through the issues that are arising. Much of this can occur ‘in between’ sessions; chatting with others, walking in the grounds. In our normal busy lives, our reflections on the third-act are relegated to more pressing matters, “I’ll deal with that later”. Working with similar others on a topic of mutual interest, over a 2-3 day period, is sufficient time for these important issues to be considered.

7. SOME FOLLOW UP AFTERWARDS

So what do you do afterwards, when the workshop is over and you return to your ordinary life? Has anything changed? A workshop is analogous to a cut on your hand where you see a part of yourself you would not ordinarily see. This



doesn't last for long though as the body soon responds to protect and to heal the intrusion. A scab forms within 48 hours. A week later the body has healed itself. A week after that you can hardly remember where the cut was. And so perhaps it is with the insights you gain from a workshop.

So what can we do to prolong these insights and turn them into lasting changes in our lives? Recall that it takes five years to learn a new language and we are perhaps referring here to an even more profound change from the second- to third-act in life. Our answer is to create 'transformational programme' over a longer period, 6-12 months. By 'trans-form' here we mean to get over our usual way of operating; thinking, feeling and doing. The best the workshop can hope for is to give us some new insights into this, a wake up call that this third-act is for real. Now the 'real' transformational work can begin.

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