

STOP REMINDING ABOUT GROUND RULE #1

You are wasting a learning opportunity !

Start in style

Every Action Learning session starts with a reminder of the ground rule. If the team is relatively new to Action Learning, the coach will explain that there are 2 ground rules in this kind of session, with the first being that "Statements can only be ... etc." Even if the team has been through several Action Learning sessions, we still remind them at the start, so the team has a clear "check-in" that this is an Action Learning session, and not any other type of meeting the team may be used to. If the team is already quite familiar with Action Learning, the coach can invite the team members to share what they know the ground rules to be, rather than simply reminding about them.



So, in summary, every Action Learning session always starts with a reminder of Ground Rule #1. The catch is that this reminder should be the one and only reminder for that session !

Rules (sometimes) get broken !

Ground Rule #1 is what makes Action Learning so special, and sometimes a bit awkward when members join for the first time. The habit of making statements, advocating and explaining quickly creeps into the session. That's OK, this is a great learning opportunity. But I often see this learning opportunity squandered by the coach. When I read application papers of soon-to-be CALCs, and the applicant describes how the team members don't ask questions, or make statements, I often read "... so I reminded the team about the ground rule."

This is a wasted learning opportunity and not in the spirit of Action Learning. Why ? There is no need to remind the team about the ground rule. The coach already reminded about the ground rule at the start of the session. So why remind again ? And again ? And again ...? Telling or reminding is not how real learning happens.

Embedding Ground Rule #1

When a team member breaks Ground Rule #1, the coach can gently (but firmly) ask to reformulate what they say as a question. If that behavior is repeated, by several members of the team, the coach can create a double-loop learning reflection ... around What?, So What? and Now What?. "How are we doing as a team when it comes to following Ground Rule #1 ? What would happen in trying to understand the problem if we make statements rather than questions ...?" Etc. This short

intervention will create meaningful exchanges from the team members, even if some might complain that following the ground rule is tough!

If the coach falls in the trap of 'reminding' the team, we are limiting the learning to single-loop only, a bit like the school teacher or police officer, who reminds us to "not do it again" when we make a mistake or break a rule. "Let me remind you about Ground Rule #1" is fine before the start of the session, but once the session is under way, it is not the WIAL way to encourage learning and reflection. The team is very well capable of reminding one another, and of reflecting on what the value of the ground rule is.

Catch 22

This is a detail but there is one question around Ground Rule #1 I try to avoid. When one or more team members break Ground Rule #1, as a coach, I will never ask "Do you remember Ground Rule #1?". Why not? It is a closed question first of all, but asking this question only leads to some loss of face. If the team member says they do remember, it means they admit they are not capable of following it because they just broke it. If they say they don't remember, it is a bit embarrassing to admit because the coach just reminded about the ground rule at the start of the session, not that long ago. Asking "Do you remember Ground Rule #1?" when someone just broke it is a catch 22 question, and really there is no real learning here. A better question could be ... "What do we remember about the ground rule?"

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