

The Group Leadership Intensive

By Julie Roberts, Ph.D.

The Group Leadership Intensive (GLI) is a five-day, residential training program in small group facilitation. The program is experiential, and teaches leadership, group theory, and assessing and designing for groups. GLI provides an understanding of how groups work and how to make them more effective. Think of it as a training-for-trainers in how to facilitate, motivate, and resolve conflicts in groups, meetings, and teams.

You come to GLI without your traditional roles which frees you up to just “be who you are” in the group. All participants are asked to leave their history and names behind. They take “pseudonyms” that represent what they wish to move into or learn (a name such as “Centered” or the name of a person who represents certain characteristics for this person, like “Teddy” for Teddy Roosevelt). This encourages participants to be in the group without the influence of their back home degrees, roles, titles and histories. They are truly members of the group, and experience themselves and others as equal members in the group.

In order to be an effective leader of groups, one must understand his or her strengths and limitations. Throughout the program participants reflect on and receive feedback regarding their leadership and membership in the group. What are the issues and behaviors of others that I relate to and which upset me? These will rule my reactions and behavior in a group unless I am aware of them.

What are the things that I inherently do well in groups/ meetings/ teams? How can I access more of these behaviors? What is the impact of my behavior on others? What’s the impact of my behaviors on the group’s progress? Am I aware of the group and what may be occurring with individuals in it? If I am unaware, I won’t be able to assess the group or plan (design) effectively for it. What prevents me from seeing what is occurring in the group? When do I get “hooked” and why? If I am hooked, then I am working from my need rather than the groups’ need? What is my need? What is the group’s need? If I pay attention to issues of concern regarding my leadership, they become the focus for deep-rooted learning about myself, and new understanding about how my leadership style impacts others.

GLI participants are encouraged to put these new understandings into practice throughout the week. Participants practice tracking their own behavior and understanding others and what might be going on for them as they interact in the group. New “how to think about groups” skills are practiced as the group works.

Members learn to ask the right questions at the right time, and they learn how to know when to take charge and when to get out of the way. They learn how to tap into the inherent potential of the individuals in the group, and they practice designing specific activities (interventions) to help the group make practical, concrete progress toward group goals.

GLI offers an accelerated understanding of the group development stages from three viewpoints: that of leader, member, and facilitator. After learning basic vocabulary and principles about how groups work and how to plan and lead groups, participants practice leading the group. Two names are pulled from a hat and those two people have twenty minutes to design the next hour and a half for the group. "To design" means simply to create a series of planned activities for the group, based on the changing needs and goals of the group as members and as a whole.

After Team One plans and leads the group, facilitators and members remove their leader / member hats, and become consultants, examining what just happened, and thinking about "What worked?" "What might we have done differently?" "What does this mean about group facilitation?"

After the critique, two more names are pulled from a hat and Team Two becomes the next facilitator to plan for and lead the group, followed by the consulting critique session. This process continues until everyone has had at least one chance to plan for, lead, and critique.

This process is called "the marathon" because we stay up through the night so that all of the participants have the chance to design and facilitate the group. We stay up for forty hours because it allows participants to experience all stages of group development (and witness planned activities—for these) in a condensed time period. The marathon guarantees that the members experience design & facilitation for each stage of group development. And this is critical to a leader's ability to facilitate effectively.

If we don't understand how to work with a group through all of its stages, and what to expect when the group is in that stage, we are ill-prepared for working in a group. One can lecture about what occurs in these stages, but until we experience it, we don't really understand what it is like to lead when the group is in the "forming" stage or how confusing it feels when the group goes through the "storming" stage. Or how we need to let go when they get to the "norming" and "performing" stage. Working in groups is a skill that needs to be developed, and GLI provides a wonderful opportunity for practicing that skill.

After the marathon, (during which we eat normal meals and we do have time to take a nap) we have three more days to practice and live these new skills. There is time for reflection on one's personal leadership and membership in groups, more time to practice and internalize the process of design, and a day to assess learnings and reflect on translating experiences to other group settings. Once you have been through this week, you will never see groups in the same way. You will see more, understand more and be more effective in leading any group in which you are involved.

Specifically, the workshop will:

- Provide an understanding of how groups work and what is essential for effective development of groups;
- Teach you how to build trust and safety in groups so that individuals feel valued and share their knowledge and resources;
- Provide you with an understanding of how to assess a group regarding what is occurring in the group and what it needs, and issues that might block its effectiveness;
- Give you practice in leading and designing on your feet and perhaps changing what you do based on the needs of the group;
- Help you to develop specific activities that will move a team forward;
- Guide you in how to improve boring and ineffective meetings;
- Help you to know how to focus and motivate a group;
- Provide methods for reducing and dealing with conflict;
- Help you to understand your strengths and areas of needed development;
- Show you how to develop collaborative solutions in a group;
- Provide an opportunity to practice managing a dual role of leader and group member;
- And it will allow you to practice new skills in a safe, supportive learning laboratory.