Throw Me A Line

Fraternity Value: Personal and Intellectual Growth
Suggested Facilitator: Vice President Member Experience

Shared by Pi Beta Phi's South Dakota Alpha Chapter

Goals:
• To encourage participants to think critically about verbal communication.
• To allow participants to feel more comfortable providing compliments and positive feedback to fellow participants.
• To allow participants to develop their abilities to more effectively communicate during challenging or difficult issues.

Room setup/materials needed:
• Make sure you have enough room for participants to sit comfortably as a large group as well as space for small group discussions.
• You will also need a large ball of yarn, string or twine for each group.

Getting Started
Talking points are indicated with a callout bullet (●). Please use these as speaking guidelines, but be sure to jazz up the presentation with your own personality. Facilitation instructions are indicated with an arrow (→) and serve as hints you might find helpful when administering the material. Most importantly, have fun!

Instructions

→ Introduce the activity

● Today we are going to discuss healthy and honest ways to communicate. Whether you are faced with a challenging or difficult issue and need to offer someone constructive criticism or you want to offer someone an encouraging compliment but don’t know how, today’s seminar will help you be more comfortable in a variety of communication scenarios.

● Let’s first talk about compliments. People like to receive compliments whether they’re about how they look, the talent they have or even their personalities and how they relate to others. Everyone here has positive attributes that can’t be overlooked.

● Have you ever wanted to offer someone a compliment but just didn’t know how? Paying someone a compliment can come very naturally for some people, yet for others it can seem extremely uncomfortable. The following are tips to remember when offering a compliment:
  • Always look for something in everyone that you can compliment whether they’re traits, features or characteristics.
  • When offering someone a compliment, it can be as easy as telling them you like the way they style their hair or the clothes they are wearing. However, complimenting someone on characteristics deeper than just surface level can mean much more to the recipient.
• Compliments do not have to be planned far in advance and often happen in a casual moment when crossing paths with someone, seated at a meal or in class.
• Ensure your compliments are given in a tone of sincerity. Take your time instead of rushing through your words. Use their name and look the recipient in the eyes before you pay the compliment to make it more personal and sincere.
• Lastly, paying a compliment doesn't always mean you will receive one in return. Giving a compliment sometimes is just as rewarding as receiving one.

> Break the group into small groups of about 15–20 participants each. Instruct each group to sit in a circle, and give each group a ball of yarn, string or twine you have prepared ahead of time.

This activity will allow us to put to use the pointers on paying others compliments. The person with the ball will hold the end of the string and roll the ball to another person of their choice. When the other person receives the ball, the first person addresses the receiver by name and proceeds to give them a compliment. Once you have received your compliment, roll the ball of yarn to another participant and pay that person a compliment. Continue until each group member has received a compliment. Take 5-10 minutes to complete this activity. Once the ball of yarn returns to the person who started the activity, wait patiently until all other groups have finished.

Wait for all groups to finish. Then proceed with the discussion of constructive criticism.

Although we all enjoy receiving compliments, there are times when constructive criticism will need to be given in order to strengthen the group as a whole. Constructive criticism is essential to the productivity and survival of any group. Each of us at some point in our time as members of Pi Beta Phi will be called upon to confront problems whether it is with a roommate, a sibling or even in our academic pursuits. Though it often seems easier to just to “turn the other cheek,” constructive criticism will enhance the dynamics of the group when delivered and received properly.

The following guidelines are useful for offering constructive criticism:
• “I” vs. “You” statements: Use “I” messages when giving constructive criticism. “You” statements tend to lay the blame on the receiver.
• The problems vs. the person: Focus on the problems you wish to resolve not the person involved in the problem.
• Specific vs. Vague: Know exactly the problem you are addressing. Vagueness will not pinpoint the problem but may in fact hinder the resolution of the problem.
• Timely vs. Untimely: Give your feedback as soon as the problem arises. You do not want to bring up incidents occurring long ago. Focus on what is going on now.
• Brief vs. Lengthy: Avoid drowning the receiver in criticism. Make it short and to the point.
• Sometimes/Often vs. Always/Never: Use “sometimes” or “often.” Very few situations “always” or “never” happen, although we are tempted to say they do.
• Effect vs. Cause: Explain the effect of the problem rather than the cause. By examining the effect, the basis for criticism is clear. Identifying the cause once again places blame.
• Changeable vs. Non changeable: Be critical of problems that can be changed. Effective, constructive criticism focuses on changeable matters. Non-changeable situations can only be hindered by criticism.

As a leader you will be expected to be critical of your group. Accept the challenge with compassion. Also, be prepared to accept constructive criticism from others. No group excels without being critical of itself.
Now, turn back to your groups and in the same order you paid each other compliments, offer a piece of constructive criticism.

When each of the groups are finished, if time permits, allow participants to offer a compliment and a piece of constructive criticism in the reverse order of the way they first presented compliments and constructive criticism.

Discussion Questions

Bring the entire group back together and talk through the following questions. Allow multiple participants time to respond to each question.

- Think about the best, most honest compliment you have ever received. How did it make you feel?
- Did receiving a nice compliment make you want to pass on a compliment to someone else?
- Did the compliment make you feel appreciated? ... grateful? ... loved?
- When was the last time you gave someone constructive criticism?
- When was the last time you received some?
- Of the constructive criticism you gave to others, what is the likelihood you would have given it to them had it not been for this activity?
- Was it harder to accept or offer the constructive criticism?
- How do you think what was said in this seminar will affect the chapter?
- How can we differentiate constructive criticism and complaints?
- How do mean comments or complaints effect the morale of the chapter?

Final Wrap-Up

Bring the discussion question answers to a close and offer the following closing statement.

It is important to encourage both compliments and constructive criticism among members. Giving constructive criticism is difficult because it tends to be discouraged by society. By holding each other accountable, we can promote both personal and organizational growth. As Pi Phis, we should respectively accept the opinions of others and use it as a tool to improve ourselves.

Evaluation: Don't forget to help the Fraternity assess this program. The program facilitator, as well as a member of each class, should be asked to visit the Leading with Values* website, www.pibetaphi.org/leadingwithvalues, to fill out a quick survey. Remember, the name of this seminar is Throw Me a Line.

The chapter's Vice President Member Experience should remember to record the presentation of this program in the chapter's monthly regional report.