

Unite Your Brain: How to Effectively Use Visuals in Training, Teaching, and Coaching

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Ways to Use Visuals

There is a range of visual tools that are available to use in training, teaching, and coaching. This includes everything from photographs to asking people to draw. They can all be useful, especially if you align the strength of the tool to the outcome you are trying to achieve.

Conveying meaning

The most common way images are used is to convey ideas, or describe concepts a trainer, teacher, or coach wants the group to understand. Most commonly this is through the use of PowerPoint. We have content, and we illustrate that content, hopefully through wisely selected images that help the viewer deepen their comprehension of what we are telling them. This is the most common use of images we see around us in everything from advertising to journalism.

Organizing meaning

Visual tools are very helpful in organizing ideas. This can be anything from using index cards and sticky notes to mindmaps and organizing templates. Here the visuals take a backseat and are used most often to organize words. Image elements are used to create structure and order and increase our ability to see the interrelationship between the parts.

Eliciting meaning

Images can also be used to elicit responses from individuals. Fine art often strives for this, seeking to inspire thought or emotion. While the person who created the image may have had some idea to begin with, it's the meaning the viewer brings to the experience of seeing it that becomes most important. This can be particularly helpful when you are

looking to understand similarities and differences and when you need to think differently about a place of stuckness.

Why Use Images

To create more engaging processes

Photographs have a natural way of getting people to look and ask questions. There are usually stories attached to them. Think about the last time you were around someone showing pictures of a recent trip or of their family to a group of people. What happens? Stories get told, people ask questions and the lookers begin to tell stories of their own, because the combination of stories and pictures spark connections for them.

To increase participation

When you are using a visual-based tool, you have helped people to engage with the process. This kind of engagement develops a synergy. When one person “gets it,” the others are soon to follow. Even people who had no inclination or desire to participate when they arrived are much more inclined to do so when others get actively involved. Who wants to be the odd one out?

To help connect the dots

Images help participants get below the surface quickly. They create a door between the conscious and subconscious, giving your groups the ability to make associations and connections to information that is not always directly accessible. This linkage allows them to take leaps in their thinking by getting them out of their literal, analytical minds.



To level the playing field for non-native speakers

If your group consists of non-native speakers of the dominant language, then using images gives them another way to express themselves. Visual tools allow these participants to literally show their thoughts and give them ways to communicate other than just in words. This has the added benefit of helping them feel included and empowered to share more.

To inspire storytelling

Stories are everywhere. They are the basis of communication regardless of culture. Every day we are bombarded with stories in the form of advertisements, movies, news, books, radio, songs and more. Images help unlock the inner storyteller in your participants.

To increase learning through fun

Visual tools invoke fun in participants. They will compare and share stories about them, and engage in creative dialogues and find new ways to express themselves. Don't ever doubt the power of increased learning through having fun—especially when it comes to adults!

To break out of habitual patterns

It is easy to fall into routines of thinking—it's actually how we develop our expertise! Most of the time this is very helpful, but it can also tip into patterns that do not allow for new possibilities. Using images to spark associations can lead us to new ideas and insights that are beyond what we think about with words alone. The brain processes pictures faster and in larger chunks, so we can further open the possibility of making leaps in our thinking by using images.

Using Images to See Differences

Using images to elicit meaning promotes diversity and helps greater intercultural awareness by revealing commonalities and differences that exist among individuals from different cultures. It exposes the beliefs, values and assumptions that are the basis of cultural differences, helping people of diverse cultures to bridge differences and learn to work together more effectively.

Using images this way, you offer the participants a group of images to choose from in response to a prompt.

Framing the Prompt


As with other applications, it's important to know what issue the group is trying to solve when framing the prompt. If the goal is to encourage participants to be more aware of the commonalities and differences that exist among different cultures, some sample prompts are:

- Who are you?
- Create a picture of yourself as a cultural being.

Another way to frame the exercise is to isolate one particular aspect of life that differs from one culture to the next. This can be a great way to isolate conflicts and help participants work together more effectively. For example:

- Create an image that shows how you feel about time.
- Create an image that shows how you feel about conflict.

Regardless of the framework you create, it's important to let the participants know they are free to redefine the question. Any question you



create contains a certain number of cultural biases and assumptions. Enabling the participants to redefine the question reveals the biases present within these questions. For example, asking the participants to create an image of what they desire in the future may make sense to North Americans. Yet for cultures that are more focused on the past and present, the question may seem meaningless.

What to Observe

Pay particular attention to how different participants of diverse cultures approach the question. Do some need to redefine the question in order to answer it? Do some find the images culturally biased, and have difficulty finding images that are meaningful to them? In addition, notice the stories participants tell about the images they chose, paying particular attention to the patterns you notice culture to culture and in the images composed by people from different cultures in a diverse group.

The Debrief Session

A framework that exposes cultural differences is a great jumping-off point for conversation. During the debrief session, ask questions that expose the value differences that exist among different cultures. Be aware that we all see things through our own cultural lens. Allow each participant to interpret the meaning of his/her own images, and make sure you don't make assumptions. Also, be aware that behaviors that mean one thing in one culture can have a completely different meaning in another. Use the questions you ask to illustrate the fact that different cultures see things through different lenses. Help the participants to understand this, so they begin to limit the number of assumptions they make and learn to work more openly with others.

Want More?

Join us for our six week teleclass beginning Sept 2010.

- Getting Started Using Visuals
- Designing Your Session
- The Facilitation Process
- Using Visuals for Organizing
- Using Visuals to Conveying
- Putting it all together

The class will be customized to participants needs. You'll have opportunities to make suggestions and ask questions about your context.

VisualsSpeak Resources

You can try a free online sample of our icebreaker

<http://www.visualsspeak.com/products/online-icebreaker-sample>

You can get additional ideas for using visual tools, explore VisualsSpeak products, and get additional tips by going to our website at **www.**

VisualsSpeak.com.

There, you can sign up for our e-newsletter to get news, special offers, and updates to our guides and manuals. You will get a free icebreaker when you join, and can unsubscribe anytime.