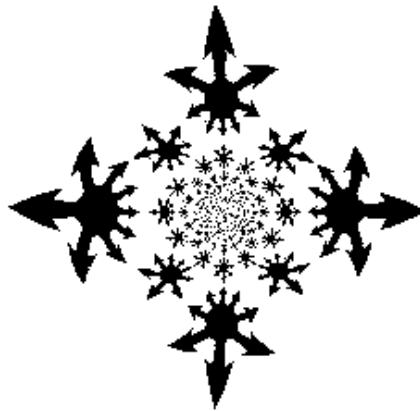


RUNNING **M**agical ***WORKSHOPS***

NOTES FOR FACILITATORS



PHIL HINE

Acknowledgements

These notes came together following two workshops in the U.S.A. in 1995 in Seattle and Milwaukee. I would like to thank those members, past and present of IOT USA who participated in organising these events. Also my thanks to Gordon the Toad for raising many useful points and considerations relating to organising events, and Jo Crow & Marian Lee for some insightful conversations.

This release is the first of a developing series of essays exploring magical group work and related issues. As always, feedback, comments & suggestions would be very welcome, and I can be contacted at a5e@ndirect.co.uk or by snail-mail via BMCOYOTE, London WC1N 3XX, UK.

Running Workshops: Notes for Facilitators

Phil Hine 1997

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INTRODUCTION

This collection of notes & musings looks at some of the practical aspects of running magical workshops, from the point of view of the facilitator.

The first section examines some basic considerations of running workshops. The second section looks at the feedback dynamics between facilitator & audience. The third section looks at approaches to structuring workshop presentations and offers some comments on developing Presentation Styles. Finally, I will examine the use of various aids and props, and some miscellaneous issues relating to venue management and working outdoors.

I have been facilitating magical workshops of one kind or another for nearly eight years, although I have also had the advantage of running psychotherapy & dramatherapy groups prior to this. This essay draws together much of what I have observed and taught myself over the years. It's by no means definitive, and as ever, feedback and comments from readers would be much welcomed.

Phil Hine, September 1997

I

BASIC CONSIDERATIONS

There are three basic considerations which attention should be given to. These are:

- i) You (as facilitator)
- ii) Them (audience or participants)
- iii) The Environment (workshop space)

YOU

A) KNOW YOUR MATERIAL

Before you go into your workshop, you should know what you're going to do, how you are going to present it, and in what order. It helps a lot if you have given yourself the opportunity to practice what you'll be doing, if only on a group of friends. Make sure you know enough about the background of the subject that if necessary, you can extrapolate.

B) CUE SHEETS

It's better to have a single A4 sheet with cue notes on it than a whole heap of lecture-style notes, as with the latter it is easy to get into the habit of reading directly from them and not looking at your audience. Keep your workshop notes short, and you won't be able to hide behind them or 'get lost' looking for the page you need.

C) BE FLEXIBLE

When I was trained to run therapy groups, I was given the very useful advice that it is always good to have ‘alternative’ exercises to switch to. This is particularly useful if you feel that an exercise isn’t well received (so you have to do something about the ‘mood’ of the workshop); if you run out of your main planned work well within the workshop time & so have to throw something else in; or if you have to modify your exercises due to any differences between actual and anticipated numbers of participants.

It’s useful sometimes to use exercises that can be quickly modified to suit the number of people who do show up. You may not only have to make changes in what you’d planned just before the workshop begins, but also during it. I often find that I run out of ‘planned’ exercises before the end of a workshop period, and have to improvise something on the spot. If you find yourself having to do this - don’t panic! If the workshop has gone well, your attendees will be on your side.

D) PROJECT CONFIDENCE

This is one area where the “Fake it ‘til you make it” idea does work. Public speaking trainers say that if you can get over the first two minutes of a presentation, you’ll probably be okay from then on in. I’ll come back to this later when I examine Facilitator-Audience Feedback.

In general, if you have considered the above points well and prepared your material, you should be relaxed - the fewer ‘background’ worries you have, the more confident you will be. You can sometimes get over momentary nervousness by re-interpreting it to yourself as “excitement.”

THEM

LOOK AFTER YOUR AUDIENCE

Your Audience/Participants are important. It is entirely possible that you will learn more from working with them, than they will learn from you. Bear in mind that the audience want to be informed, entertained, and given something which they can take away and apply themselves. Don't assume that everyone "knows" what you are talking about (unless it's a very select group, there will be a wide mix of experience from people who've literally just walked in off the street, as it were, to those who have been doing magical work for longer than you have). So be careful to explain your ideas in such a way that it doesn't sound patronising.

Also, and this is a very important point if you're a writer or author, attending your workshop will allow them to decide if your book (or whatever) is worth buying. So your workshops are in effect a form of advertising. Also, if you are 'representing' a particular magical approach (such as Tantra or Chaos Magic) you are likely to be taken as a representative for that entire genre. People will come away from your workshop with an opinion about you, your work, and your associated 'tradition' - so make sure it's the "right" one.

Remember that first impressions are formed very quickly. As soon as participants enter the space you need to be in "workshop mode" - aware of how you are presenting yourself and attentive to everybody and everything. Greet people, look around, check up on final details with your assistants and ensure that they are motivated and enthusiastic.

GIVE THE AUDIENCE WORK

It's boring if you're just sitting, listening to someone droning on for hours and hours. As facilitator, bear this in mind. It's useful to present exercises which get the participants working without you, preferably in a manner that means they have to interact with

each other. Dividing the participants into sub-groups and leaving them to work on a subject or presentation is a good move. Providing, of course, that you give clear instructions, and a time limit - or people might just spend the time chatting to each other. I tend to give people “5 minutes” to do something but don’t stick rigidly to clock time. If participants are going to need pens & paper for such an exercise, make sure that you have plenty of both to hand.

One of the most successful exercises I have used in Workshops is to divide the participants into sub-groups using a magical schema (Elements, Planets, 8 Rays of Magic etc.) and then give them time to “brainstorm” appropriate gestures, sounds, movements & visualisations.

USE HELPERS IF YOU CAN

Not only is such a tactic useful and fun for the audience, it can also provide a much-needed break for the facilitator. If you’re using Sub-group exercises, it can be sometimes useful to have ‘helpers’ in some groups, who you know will help motivate the others. A helper can be someone who’s done the exercise before, or a colleague who’s turned up to support you.

INSTRUCTIONS MUST BE CLEAR

Instructions for Exercises must be clear and understandable. This is something you work on beforehand - breaking techniques & exercises into clearly-defined and simple steps. All the same, ask if everyone’s understood, and visually scan faces as well. It’s also worth restating your instructions if there are a number of steps to work through.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THEM?

Background knowledge about your participants can be important. If, for example, you recognise several people as having come to

your workshops before, you can infer that they enjoyed your previous Workshop and have come back for more. Acknowledging them is a good move, showing that you recognise and value their being present. If you repeat an exercise or discuss a previous one, you may prompt them into giving valuable feedback or building on a point that you have already made.

It can also be useful if you can anticipate the audience's mood at the beginning of the workshop, particularly if the subject you are presenting is at all controversial. For example, in 1994 I was booked to speak to a discussion forum which was predominantly Pagan Federation members about Chaos Magic. Now this was just after a rather controversial article on Chaos had been published in the Pagan Federation's magazine. I didn't like what the article had to say, and I knew that a good number of other readers didn't like it either. So I kicked off my talk by saying "Hands up who read that bollocks on Chaos magic in the last copy of The Wiccan." This not only drew a big laugh, but also established that I was not to be associated with that article, and that I had some empathy with the audience's perspective & beliefs.

It's important to bear in mind that an audience is likely to have gained a perspective on a subject from (a) reading related books and (b) hearsay. One of the attendees to my Seattle workshop commented that he had been expecting a high theoretical/low practical content, but that he found that the reverse was actually the case.

A general point here is that I am careful never to criticise entire magical traditions or approaches. Saying that Wicca is a load of crap is not going to please any Wiccans in the audience - whereas it is okay to talk about specific problems you found with certain individuals who were Wiccans. This is a more effective way of bringing a point across since most people will have met obstructive individuals, although this does not necessarily invalidate an entire paradigm.

THE ENVIRONMENT

The environment is an important factor in running workshops. I like to check out a workshop space well before the actual event, just to get the 'feel' of it. The size and shape of the space may dictate limits on the kind of exercises you can use. For example, a small space, with lots of people means that you may not be able to do anything too energetic (without careful management).

RESTRICTIONS ON MOVEMENT

If you are behind a table, sitting or standing on a stage, or behind a microphone, you will be restricted in your movement, and again, may have to modify your presentation accordingly. Personally, I like to have the freedom to move anywhere within the workshop space, so if a microphone is necessary, I would arrange beforehand for a hand-held or throat mike.

FURNITURE

You will also need to bear in mind seating arrangements - can the seats be quickly moved away for active exercises? Do you need any tables (for products, taking addresses etc.) and where should they be placed? These points should be attended to before the workshop begins.

BEWARE OF DISTRACTIONS

Windows and Mirrors can be points of distraction - if you are nervous it's tempting to start looking out of them (looking up to the ceiling in search of inspiration is another). If you start doing this, it will actually serve to increase, rather than decrease nervousness. Your audience will start to wonder what is so interesting out there as well.

COMMAND THE SPACE

Working in large spaces (i.e. Auditoriums, Conference Halls) can be unnerving if you're not used to it. Don't be afraid of clambering up onto a stage before there's anyone else around and checking out how you feel about being up there. A technique I often use is to visualize my 'aura' expanding to fill the entire space. It can be unnerving being the sole focus of attention in a large room, so I tell myself that I am "in charge" of everything that happens in the environment while I'm the focus of attention.

II

FACILITATOR-AUDIENCE FEEDBACK

BE ATTENTIVE TO YOUR AUDIENCE

It's important to be attentive to your audience at all times during the workshop. Otherwise, you won't know how what you're saying/doing is being received. It's difficult to do this if you're nervous, when it's easy to hide behind your notes. If you can keep visually scanning your audience, then not only can you see their reactions, you are also demonstrating to them that you are confident and interested in them.

PARALANGUAGE

It can be tempting to read too much from paralanguage (non-verbal cues). If for example, someone has their eyes closed, they are just as likely to be listening attentively as to be asleep. What is more important is that you use your hands to emphasise what you're saying, i.e. use your fingers to mark off different points.

SENSING AUDIENCE MOOD

If you are Attentive to your audience, you can do something to alter the general mood if necessary. For example, if I think people are 'slack' - after a long day at the office or a train journey to get to the workshop space, a lively Warm-Up exercise can be thrown at them. Or if you sense that people are unhappy about something you've just said, you could shift to another, less

threatening topic or shove in an exercise to demonstrate the value of the point you've just made.

GIVING SPACE FOR FEEDBACK

The obvious spaces for structured group feedback, or questions and answers, is after a theoretical session or a group exercise. I'll look again at this area in the next Section.

In general, your audience will be giving you feedback all the time. If a particular exercise or 'line' works well, then you can use it again in the future. A trick I have found myself using is, in large workshops, to keep checking on one or two members of the audience, with the objective of making them laugh at something I've said, or getting them to 'open up'. This becomes a small objective within the entire event.

NOTICING ATYPICAL INDIVIDUALS

It's also worth paying special attention (not overtly, note) to people who, for various reasons, seem to you to stand out as being atypical participants. This may need to be no more than keeping an eye on them to see if they're feeling "out of place" or not. It may be worth checking on them personally during a break.

III

STRUCTURING PRESENTATIONS & DEVELOPING YOUR DELIVERY STYLE

A key to successful workshops is good planning in advance, and then learning from your mistakes afterwards. Whilst I was being trained to run groups, I found it useful to keep a “Groups Diary” noting what exercises I used during a session, and how they were received.

EXAMPLE WORKSHOP PLAN

I used this plan for the Seattle Workshop:

- i) Introduction (Assistant)
- ii) Modified Thanateros Rite - explanation (assistant on drum)
- iii) Talk (45mins - 1 hour)
- iv) 10 minute break
- v) Brief Questions & Answer Session
- vi) Soundscape (general Explanation):

PREPARATION

- Divide participants into 8 groups
- Assign each group a ray of magic (Pure, Wealth etc.)
- Each group gets 5-8 mins to work on presentation
- Each group then demonstrates their presentation to other groups

MAIN SEQUENCE

- Each group invokes their ray in turn
- At signal (drum) groups split up and intermingle
- At signal (drum) all sit, form a circle - keep sounds going
- At signal (touch) participant stops ray-sound, starts “Om”
- At signal (touch) participant falls silent

vii) Feedback

viii) Follow-Through talk

ix) Introduce Fra. Zauk

x) Fra. Zauk Explains & Leads Bee-Swarm Working

xi) Closing Stuff

Working out this basic format took about half an hour, with myself, Frates Areon & Zauk, & Sor. Kieja suggesting ideas. I developed this sequence in workshops in the U.K & Austria & knew that it worked well. The Thanateros Rite was chosen as a warm-up exercise - I prefer getting participants to begin with an active exercise. We decided to close the Workshop with a working from Fra. Zauk as he was the local IOT representative.

Other Pact members present assisted in the workshop by operating the video camera, joining in with the group work and acting as ‘doormen’.

PLAN B

My tentative “Plan B” would have been to run the workshop as above, but use a less complicated schema (such as the 4 Elemental attributions). At the Milwaukee Workshop, where there were both spatial restrictions and less participants we evolved an alternative workshop plan more or less on the spot:

i) Introduction

ii) Physical Warm-Up exercises (head rolls etc.)

iii) Talk (45mins)

iv) Soundscape (as above)

- Instead of dividing participants into sub-groups, we used one group for all the rays, and gave the group 5 mins or so to work out a group format for each ray.

v) Inflated Ego Rite (suggested by Kieja)

vi) Human Balloon Banishing

The Inflated Ego Rite worked well due to the spatial dimensions of the workshop space, which was basically two rooms with an open connecting doorway.

MAKING THE BEST USE OF EXERCISES

When planning workshops, I tend to make use of the general format discussed in “Prime Chaos”: Opening, Warm-up exercise, Core (lecture & main theme exercises), Wind-Down, and Closure.

Opening

In opening the workshop you’re welcoming people into the space, introducing yourself, dealing with money matters or any special requirements participants may have. If you can, outline what structure the workshop is going to take - what you are going to be asking people to do, and how.

Warm-Ups

There are a wide range of Warm-Up exercises which can be found in books on groupwork. A simple way of ‘warming up’ a group can be to lead them in some simple physical exercises such as head rolls, shaking limbs, jumping up and down. Ideally you should select one or two warm-ups which focus participants’ attention onto the event itself (rather than chatting to their friends or feeling nervous about being with strangers), get them moving, encourage eye contact between other group members and maybe even making physical contact with other members - exercises which involve hand-holding

or touch can be useful here. Warm-ups should be short and not too complex, and preferably, fun!

An Example Warm-Up: Pulses

Pulses is a simple dramatherapy exercise whereby the group stands in a circle holding hands. The facilitator starts a 'pulse' by clenching the hand of the person on his or her right - which is then passed along the circle. The facilitator can send pulses in both directions at once, speeding the number up until the group cannot keep up. This can be a good ice-breaker.

The Core

This is your main focus of the workshop - which can be anything from a lecture to whatever exercises you've planned to support what you're going to do.

Wind-Down

Wind-downs function in a similar way to the warm-up, allowing people to relax, or end the session on a 'lively' note.

An Example Wind-Down: Balloon Banishing

This 'banishing' wind-down was also, originally, a dramatherapy exercise. Everyone (except the facilitator) joins hands, forming a circle, and scrunches together as close as possible. The facilitator then tells them that they are a balloon, and that he is going to 'pump them full of air'. At the facilitator's cue, the group takes huge breaths, and as they breathe out, the circle slowly expands until everyone is standing up, arms stretched as far as possible, holding the 'air' in. At which point the facilitator says "Oh, look what I've got - a pin!" and drives it into the balloon with a cry of "BANG!" after which all collapse.

Closure

Closing a workshop space is just as important as opening it up. This is the point where you thank people for attending and praise their hard work in making the workshop a success. If you've had people helping you in various capacities, thank them also.

NOTES ON SPECIFIC EXERCISES/TECHNIQUES

Guided Pathworkings/Vizualisations

Guided Pathworkings are exercises popular at workshops. I find that these are best used before a break. After lunch, participant's attention tends to be lower & there is a tendency for people to 'doze' if they are lying down.

Rituals

If you're going to use a particular style of ritual, such as the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram, Gnostic Banishing Ritual or some other popular format, don't just launch into it, assuming that everyone present knows it as well as you do. Unless you're working with a very select audience, run through it beforehand.

Dealing with Sex

If you're planning on having participants remove their clothes or engage in any sort of sexual activity, for goddess' sake let people know in advance! Give them time to object or at least withdraw gracefully. This sounds rather obvious, but a friend of mine recently attended a workshop on 'tantra' where, without warning, the group was asked to take off their clothes and start masturbating - without any warning whatsoever!

Never assume that people will automatically go along with your ideas, particularly if they find a particular issue to be problematic, ethically, or personally. If you are going to do magic working for a specific end, or exercises which require a deeper level of self-disclosure than some individuals may be willing to go along with, it's a good idea to give people a chance to voice concerns or even be able to 'sit out' of a section of the workshop without them feeling 'trapped' or uncomfortable.

DEVELOPING A DELIVERY STYLE

Developing a delivery style is mainly a matter of finding out what works best for you - and to what your participants seem to respond best to. For example, when I am talking about the more abstract chaos techniques, such as Ego Magic or Paradigm Shifts, I always use personal anecdotes (from my own history or someone I have encountered in the past) as I have found this to be the most effective way of getting the message across. I find that participants tend to understand the application of a technique if they can relate it to a concrete example. If I think a particular anecdote & its delivery has elicited a good response, I will use it again. It's important to be able to sit down after your workshop and go over it in your mind, recalling which deliveries 'worked' and which seemed, in hindsight, to be ambivalent. Audio-taping or videoing your workshops then playing back the recording is an excellent way of assessing your own performance.

HUMOUR

Using humour has become an integral part of my workshop delivery style, to the point where I find myself watching television or stage comedians, on the lookout for good 'tips'. I once saw a comedian run on stage and shout "Give me an A!" Audience: "A!" - Comedian: "Thank you!" I used this once at the beginning of a workshop, and got a good response - it acted almost like a warm-up in that the participants gave me their full attention and I could

almost hear them thinking “What’s he going to do next?”

You do need to be careful with humour in general, and jokes in particular, if you’re not sure of the likely audience reaction. I find humour doesn’t work well if you’re being translated by someone else (unless you’ve worked the joke out beforehand with your translator). Humour can work well in delivering a message, and can be used directly in exercises. I once did a Soundscape Workshop in London where some of the participants were laughing during their presentation - which can be okay if you that is what you want. I like it when people laugh, as it’s usually an indicator that they are (a) enjoying themselves and (b) have understood what I have said/done.

USE YOUR VOICE

When one first begins to do any kind of public performance, there is a tendency to gabble or mumble - problems which quickly get into a feedback loop where you become progressively more nervous and your speaking deteriorates further. Remember that silence is an effective form of punctuation, as is lowering or raising your tone of voice at appropriate moments.

CO-PRESENTING

I have found it useful occasionally to co-present workshops with a colleague. This can have several advantages to working on your own. Firstly, it’s useful to have someone else for bouncing ideas around, and also for debriefing after you’ve finished. Secondly, it can be easier to empathise with a mixed group, if your partner is female. Thirdly, you can swap the ‘leadership’ of exercises and talk sessions, allowing you to monitor each other, the participants’ reaction, and if you need to suddenly depart from your plan, your partner might come up with a better idea for an exercise than you. Fourthly, a double-act presentation can make the workshop more lively, especially if you are doing a day-long presentation. Co-presenting is worth considering, especially if you are unsure of your own ability to work with a group.

IV

PROPS, AIDS & HANDOUTS

HANDOUTS

Three points about Handouts. Firstly, it is worth making them of a high quality as possible (even if you have to spend money to do so) remember that they will act as ‘reminders’ for the audience and might impress other people for future workshops. Secondly, when you’re copying Handouts for distribution, it’s better to have too many than not enough. Thirdly, unless you want people to refer to them during the workshop, it’s often better to give them out afterwards.

AUDIO-VISUAL EQUIPMENT

Overhead Projectors, Slide viewers etc. can be useful. If you’re going to use them, it’s often better to have an assistant take charge of setting them up and working them. Then, if something goes wrong, you can entertain your participants while someone else does the fiddling. Also, unless your whole presentation is based around a slide projector, they should only be used as Aids. Again, if for some reason they can’t be used, this shouldn’t prevent you from going ahead with your workshop.

PROPS

If you need special props, such as drums, strobe lights, incense burners etc. Make sure that you can get hold of them, and that they are suitable for your purposes. A whistle can be useful, particularly if you need to direct exercises where people are going

to be making a lot of noise! If you want people to bring props along, then this should be advertised or announced well in advance of the workshop.

MAKING A MESS

If you're going to do anything which involves making a mess - using glue, paper or paints - it's only courteous to inform the venue management ahead of time, and also to have plenty of cleaning material, paper or plastic mats for covering surfaces, etc. Be sure to clear up afterwards.

V

MISCELLANEOUS ISSUES

PUBLIC LIABILITY INSURANCE

If you are going to do anything which might possibly incur physical injury to participants - such as sweat lodges (there has been at least one case in the UK of someone having a fatal heart attack during a sweat lodge), Fire Walks, etc., then you need to look into Public Liability Insurance, particularly if you're going to be using a venue which is owned by someone else.

GOING OUTDOORS

Again, if you're planning to work outdoors, there are several considerations to be taken into account. Firstly, you need to know the territory you are going to be working in, particularly if you're planning to go there at night. A friend and I once picked a site for a night working which looked very easy to get to and fro from. However, getting to and back from the site after dark proved to be something of a nightmare - particularly as neither of us had thought to ask people to bring torches, finding a suitable parking space was difficult to say the least, and to cap it all, when we finally reached the site someone had set up a tent there!

Points to look into:

- Access to the site (public transport, parking spaces)
- Is there a nearby phone in case of emergencies, or is a mobile phone available?

- Who owns the site? Do you need to approach someone for permission to use it?
- Do participants need special gear (wellington boots, torches, groundsheets etc.)
- Dangerous fauna & flora - ticks can be a particular problem outdoors - some European varieties of tick are carriers of encephalitis or Lyme's disease. If you know that, for example, people can pick up ticks at a site, make sure they know about it, and that you know how to deal with them.

VENUE MANAGEMENT

I usually try and arrange matters so that if I am doing a workshop, someone else is dealing with the venue where it is being held. This is not always possible, so here are a few points to consider:

Good venues are often difficult to find. If you do find a suitable venue for a workshop, you don't want to risk losing it by pissing off the management. Find out what 'rules' the venue has regarding smoking, fire regulations (i.e. is it okay to burn incense there?), accessibility, departure times, etc., and make sure your attendees stick to them!

ADVERTISING

Again, advertising your event should ideally be put into another person's capable hands. How widely you advertise depends a lot on how wide you want to cast your net of attendees. Advertising can range from announcements in pagan magazines & newsletters, sending out flyers, getting people to hand out flyers at open discussion forums, etc., to adverts in local newspapers and even postings on the internet. It's often handy if you can put out a telephone number that people can use to find out more details or handle bookings. All advertising material should clearly show the times of the event, the address of the venue, and, where appropriate,

the nearest train station. And don't forget to take a notepad and pen to the venue so you can note down the addresses of people who turn up, so you can mailshot them with details of further events.

SUMMARY

This is just an introduction to what goes into facilitating magical workshops. Books on public speaking & image management can be useful reading, as can books on Drama & Dramatherapy. One of the easiest ways to pick up tips on running workshops is to watch someone else who's good at it, and try and figure out what it is that they are doing - then see if you can do it too!

USEFUL BOOKS

The Red Book of Groups by Gaie Houston ISBN 095 10323 3 X

Talking to the Earth by Gordon McLellan, Capall Bann Publishing
1995

IMPRO, by Keith Johnstone, Methuen Books 1983.

Personal Impact, by Michael Shea, Mandarin 1994.

