

Using the "SO WHAT" test as a team builder:

Goal: *To get Members, Staff and Volunteers to speak to 'why what we do matters' instead of simply 'what we do.'*

Introduction:

Ask an AmeriCorps Member what he or she does, and you'll likely hear about their activities, the daily logs, and their physical work. Obviously, this is good; they should know ~ they are doing. More important, however, is that their activities make a difference. We need to get them to understand the "how come" part of why they tutor kids, clean up rivers, and fill out paper work. As staff leaders, we too need to make sure the supervising, leading, listening, evaluating and completing forms relates to the broader changes we hope to be a part of through our projects.

An exercise to get at this that can be useful is the "so what" test. The idea is j that we can question everything we do against the question "so what?" If we can't make a reasonable answer to that question, we ought not to ~e doing the activity. It is the ultimate evaluation.

This exercise might be used at the start of a team meeting, at a mid-year retreat, or some such gathering .

Steps:

1. Select a Member with whom you are comfortable "provoking" a little bit. Ask him or her to tell you and the group what he or she does.
2. After getting out a few things ("I meet with kids after school I do presentations to parents, I fill out my timesheets"), ask him/her the simple question:

"OK, so you tutor kids after school SO WHAT?"

3. Be prepared for defensiveness; he or she might say, "well you told me to do this!" He or she will likely respond with some more activities, and you want to keep asking "SO VWHAT?" until he or she is getting at why these activities are important:

"I act as a friend to kids who have nowhere to go after school."

So what?

"I keep them out of trouble. So what?"

"They aren't as likely to be in trouble with the police." So what?

“They’ll be more productive later in their lives...”

“They’ll be less of a burden on taxpayers...” “They’ll be better readers...”

4. You will likely get some outrageous answers and things that can't be substantiated. That's OK, but be sure in ending the exercise that you get your Members to realistically describe what we know to be true and separate the parts that you think or hope are true.

Example: Adults who can't read are far more likely to be in prison, so a reading enhancement program can be described as a part of crime prevention; however, it is not a fail proof way to prevent crime.

5. After you have gotten your one Member to satisfactorily answer the question, have your group break into smaller groups or to pair up and practice this with each other. Hand out the " AmeriCorps Form 1A" as a tongue-in-cheek form for them to “complete.”
6. End the exercise by encouraging the Members to run this question through their head constantly as they go about their work.

Be prepared for an occasional challenge to some seemingly mundane task (I've decided that showing up on time doesn't really matter), and be ready to have an answer as to why the desired activity actually does measure up!

John Pinter CNVS Technical Assistance 1224 Sunnymede South Bend IN 46615-1016
{219} 631-8016; (219) 631-6813 fax jcpjcpjcp@msn.com