**Taking Flight**

An Interactive Discussion Opener

This opener is an activity that should be used to engage your audience in small group interaction, discussion and discovery. As a presenter it’s not always up to you to have all the answers or talk through the entire presentation. In fact, some of the best presentations involve the audience directly…and not just taking notes!

If you’re unfamiliar with this style of opener trust the process and follow the instructions to the letter. You’ll be tempted to take shortcuts or leave things out that seem silly or unnecessary. Take it from a pro, this works if you trust it. The goal in this type of format is to engage the audience at some emotional level, debrief the experience, and connect that experience to your point. If you do it well the audience will internalize your point and it will stick with them.

Instructions are in italics and the scripted pieces that you will say to the audience are bolded. You can read the scripted parts, but I suggest you become familiar enough with them that you can give the instructions without reading from notes.

**Supplies:** You’ll need enough sheets of 8 ½” x 11” white copier paper (use colors if you want a little flair) for every participant to have one with extras for do overs and a roll of masking tape, duct tape or gaffers tape *(I prefer gaffers tape because it doesn’t leave residue, but it’s the most expensive option).* Have a whiteboard or flip chart with markers to record audience insights.

**Set Up:** No matter the size of your room pick the long side and place two lines of tape opposite each other at least 20’ from each other (a little farther apart is better). Make sure there is enough room behind one of the lines for participants to stand behind it without being crowded.

**The Activity:** *(Don’t explain any of this in detail to participants. Follow the script.)* Participants will be given time to create paper airplanes. They can design their own, ask for help, copy other people’s designs but you are not to give them any instruction on how to make an airplane. When construction time is up they will launch their airplanes to see whose design covers the distance between the two tape lines.

**The Point:** The point you’ll be helping participants discover is this, “To achieve our goals and get a project across the finish line we have to build the right vehicle.” This activity is designed to get them to discover this point. DO NOT ANNOUNCE THE POINT – LET THEM DISCOVER IT!At the end during your summary you can state the point explicitly but by that time participants should already own it for themselves.

**Start:** *Greet participants as they come in and welcome them to the presentation. Once everyone has arrived distribute or have an assistant distribute the sheets of paper. Say:* **Welcome everyone; it’s great to have you here. We’re going to start off with something a little out of the ordinary today. Remember when you were kids and you went through that phase where you were fascinated with paper airplanes? Well, today we’re going back to those days. Each of you has been given a sheet of paper. When I say ‘go’ you’ll have about five minutes to fold that sheet of paper into a paper airplane. Now, unless you think this is just an exercise in creative folding, when you’ve finished your plane you will actually launch it and we’ll see whose design carries the farthest.** *(pause)* **When I say go, you’ll start building your airplane. You can use your own design, copy off a neighbor, ask a friend for help…whatever it takes to build your airplane. And….GO!**

*Watch them build and keep track of the clock. At four minutes let them know there’s one minute left. If everyone finishes before the five minutes then move on. If there are quite a few still working on it after five give them one more minute.*

Say: **Alright, time’s up. I’m seeing some very creative airplanes around the room. Now we’ll see if they fly.** *If there is enough room for everyone to line up side by side along the launch line do that. If not, arrange groups. If you do groups have the winner of each group line up for a final ‘launch off’.* **I want everyone to line up side by side along the launch line right here.** *Or* **First group line up along the line right here. On the count of three give your plane your best toss. One, two…three!** *If you’re doing groups say:* **The winner of this group stay close by. The rest let’s watch group two. On three, ready, one, two…three!** *Repeat for as many groups as you have.* Say: **Alright, this is our final round. Let’s see whose plane goes the farthest. One, two…three!**

Say: **Thanks for being such good sports and I’m impressed by some of the budding aeronautical engineers in the room! Please connect with four or five other people and form groups of five or six to talk about this experience.**

*Give them time to group up and settle back in their seats but not more than two minutes at the very most.*

Say: **In your groups each person share how you came up with the design for your plane and how well it did. Start with the person whose birthday is closest to today and go around to their right until everyone has shared.** *Allow about four minutes to share and warn at one minute left, 30 seconds and stop.*

Say: **Take a couple minutes and evaluate your plane. Tell your group what you would do differently if you could do this again.** *Allow time but cut off conversation at two minutes.*

Say: **I’d like each group to report some of what you’ve been talking about. How were planes designed and built, what happened and what would you do differently.** *You should have a whiteboard or flip chart on hand to record the participant’s responses. This will come in handy later. Collect the responses asking for clarification or more information as needed.*

Say: **Now in your groups I’d like each of you to talk about a project you’re currently working on. This could be a project at work or at home.** *It’s your choice to make the project a work project only if that fits your presentation.* **Tell the group what the goals are for your project and what it will take to finish the project.** *Allow time for them to discuss this. Watch to see that they groups stay on point with their sharing and allow as much as eight minutes before calling them back to attention.*

Say: **To wrap up our discussion I’d like you to talk briefly about this question. How was the plane building activity like the project you’re currently working on?** *Allow time to talk about this then ask groups to share their insights.*

*You’re looking for comments about planning, executing, testing models, rethinking approaches, etc. The cool thing about this process is you’ll get answers you don’t expect. Look for ways these insights fit and enjoy the discovery process.*

Say: **Thanks for taking part in this activity with such enthusiasm. Today I want to talk about building effective vehicles to accomplish our goals. From concept to design to execution crafting the right vehicle…structure, process, methodology…is an important first step to getting a project across the finish line well.**

Incorporate the insights from the activity into your talk for maximum effectiveness.

THE FLOOR IS YOURS!