

Team Tease: an SF approach to team motivation

Stanus Cloete

Abstract

This paper is a condensed report on a piece of work submitted for SFCT membership as reviewed by Kirsten Dierolf and Marika Tammeaid. It is a case study in the use of SF principles and processes in building team motivation in a small team of seven members. The work done with this team made use of the OSKAR framework (Jackson & McKergow, 2007) combined with fun activities suited to the process and adapted to the client's grammar.

I was contacted by the proprietors of *The Men's Room Grooming Den* with the request for a team motivation workshop for their hair stylists. *The Men's Room* provides an upmarket hair salon for men although they have many female customers. They wanted to be distinct from unisex hair salons. One salon was two years in existence and the other six months. Both were new businesses that had to build their own client base. Two years back they started with one salon and Anel as the single stylist. The business had grown to two salons and five stylists besides Anel. Stylists were required to be available to work in both salons as customer needs dictated although they mainly had one of the salons as their main base.

Interview with the proprietors

In the interview with the proprietors it was determined that they had a need to build their team in terms of communication and motivation. They felt they had difficulty in communicating their wishes and their preferred particular style of client service to their team. They also felt there was a lack of trust between management and the team. In the past

Address for correspondence: Box 88, Carletonville 2500, South Africa

three months they had to take disciplinary action with some members of the team. This they wanted to avoid. They wanted to build a business where there was a friendly, open, caring and family atmosphere between the team members and the business and its client base. Team members should take responsibility for growing the business. Working in the salons should be fun. The fun element was stressed several times in relation to the working environment and especially in the way they wanted the workshop to be conducted. They chose *Team Tease* as a theme for the workshop as *tease* is a technical term for what stylists do as well as to behave playfully.

Interviews with the stylists

We also held individual interviews with all five stylists of *The Men's Room* to determine their specific wants for the *Team Tease* workshop. We decided on these individual interviews for the following reasons:

1. To determine who is a customer for change and a customer for what. We already knew what the proprietors wanted out of the workshop but what did the stylists want? This was a search for common ground to build on for the workshop (Jackson & McKergow, 2007).
2. To start building the platform for the workshop (Johansson and Persson in McKergow & Clarke, 2005) and also to communicate to the participants that we were interested in their point of view (Kay in Röhrig & Clarke, 2008) as they were the experts on what was needed. We wanted to engage everyone as a customer for change (Johansson and Persson in McKergow & Clarke, 2005). Building the platform is possibly best done before the workshop (Jackson & McKergow, 2007).
3. To help the participants to become aware of their personal goals for the event and take responsibility for their own successes (Meier in Röhrig & Clarke, 2008).

4. To allow the team to be more efficient at the workshop by setting the scene beforehand. Change is happening all the time (Jackson & McKergow, 2007) and positive pre-workshop change can be facilitated through the interviews.

Interviewing five stylists with the same set of questions led to a great variety of answers that had to be organised to make sense. I took all the answers of all participants and made a summary of them under headings according to the vocabulary they used. This I distilled into three overriding wishes.

1. The wish to grow as a successful business enterprise with an emphasis on team work.
2. The wish for a positive working environment.
3. The wish for personal growth with reference to knowledge, people skills, creativity, confidence and strengths development.

These goals of the stylists were in agreement with those of the proprietors.

Planning the workshop

In planning this workshop I decided to make use of the OSKAR framework (Jackson & McKergow, 2007) as a guideline. All the activities chosen to facilitate the OSKAR process were inspired by activities chosen and adapted from *57 SF Activities* (Röhrig & Clarke, 2008). They were adapted for their relevancy to the needs, expectations and goals of *The Men's Room*.

From the interviews we could determine two overlapping sets of goals for all concerned. First of all there was a business goal of procuring and retaining clients through excellent client service and thereby building the business. Secondly there was a goal for the working environment which should be inspiring and characterised by team coherence. To have

fun in the working environment was important to all participants. I also got the impression that although the second goal was important in itself, it was also seen as in service of the first goal. The way in which people work together and communicate contributes much to the business goals of an organisation (Meier, 2005). In the light of all this I wanted to provide a process that could serve both goals in a playful manner that would provide lots of energy.

The day of the workshop

Welcoming, affirms and announcements

We started the day by welcoming everybody and giving affirms around the wonderful help we got from everybody during the interviews we had and saying how impressed I was by the fact that there was a great unanimity about what was wanted.

Outcomes

I started the process by focusing on the outcomes wanted from the workshop. I presented it in three A2 posters using the wording of the participants. I asked them if they were in agreement and if they wanted to add something to it. There were no additional outcomes presented and the participants were quite excited about the posters.

Next I wanted to create an atmosphere of positive expectations and nurture optimism (Jackson & McKergow, 2007) by a preliminary focus on the strengths and resources of the team. I also hoped this would introduce problem-free talk into the workshop. It is important to create a “yes set” early in the workshop to get the client in a frame of mind to accept something new (de Shazer, 1985). A positive context early in the workshop combined with compliments and positive suggestions creates a positive atmosphere with magical effects on the direction of the workshop (Cauffman, 2007).

To this end we adapted the *Resource Telephone* activity of Godat (Röhrig & Clarke, 2008). There were three rounds to this activity and each round had two phases, a telling and a responding phase. Participants got the opportunity to tell the team in a first round about two recent achievements they were very proud of. In the following round everyone got the opportunity to tell the whole team of their two greatest skills, and in the last round everyone told the team what they enjoyed the most as a hair stylist. Everyone was warned beforehand to listen closely as they would be asked during the second phase of each activity to react on what they had heard. In the second phase they thought of a resource or strength they had noticed about their neighbours in the circle during the previous phase. This was then communicated out loud to the team member on the left. Examples of this could be: *I am very impressed how you can do* or *I was surprised by the fact that you can* or *I am inspired by the fact that you* The recipient listened to the compliment and thanked his/her neighbour and then offered a different affirming message to his/her neighbour on the left. The process was continued until everyone had received an affirming message. This exercise created a lot of energy and goodwill towards each other as well as a very positive vibe very early in the workshop.

The next step was to make the goals of the workshop more tangible by describing observable behaviour in the future (Meier, 2005). I used an activity that describes the Future Perfect to set the direction of the workshop (Jackson & McKergow, 2007). Engaging the team's imagination related to the future solution is an important first step towards a solution. At this stage I wanted to help the team to conceptualise what would be different before I helped them to make it happen (de Jong & Berg, 2008). A positive and detailed view of the future without the problem also creates hope and a progressive storyline (de Shazer & Dolan, 2007). It creates a preview of the rewards of the solution and thereby increases motivation (de Shazer & Dolan, 2007). For this I used the activity *Dream Team* by Rohm (Röhrig & Clarke,

2008). What I like about this exercise is that it is set in an inter-actional setting which promotes thinking out of the box. I divided the team into two groups. The participants of the groups were to be journalists of a well-known hair magazine. They were to write a report together telling the success story of *The Men's Room* six months from now when they had fulfilled all their goals and have won the Swartzkopf Salon of the Year Award. They had to choose a name for the magazine as well as a funky name for their article. The success story would have two components: first of all the view of clients on the service they had received from the salon and secondly the view of the stylists on their working environment. I sent them out of the room to find a place of their liking for completion of the exercise. I observed both groups from afar while doing the exercise and noticed a lot of excitement and animated talk amongst them. It was noticeable that everyone participated. After the completion of the articles, each article was presented to the whole team. These articles were titled *New Dimensions* and *Alter Ego Dream*. I was amazed at the participants' creativity and it was easy to give a lot of well grounded affirms for an exercise well done.

Scaling

Scaling was the next phase in the process. The use of the scaling tool is to ground the vision of success in reality (Berg & Szabó, 2005). It is a tool that helps the team to express complex intuitive observations about their past (de Jong & Berg, 2008) in a more concrete though subjective manner. The aim is to open up the possibility for a dialogue around differences that make a difference (de Shazer & Dolan, 2007), to help the team discover how far they have come and discover the presence of hidden miracles (Berg & Szabó, 2005) in the here and now. This can be repeated as seeds of the solution.

To facilitate this, I made use of the ideas of both Jackson and Hjerth (Röhrig & Clarke, 2008) and called the exercise *Scaling Party*. I acted like a toastmaster and invited the team to a party

on different points of a scale between 0 and 10. I used a line drawn on the floor and explained that 10 represented the future perfect and 0 the complete opposite. Then I invited the team members to rate the performance of *The Men's Room* between 0 and 10 as on the day. Everyone had to decide for themselves and had to keep their rating to themselves. Once they had rated the performance of *The Men's Room*, I invited them to a point more or less on the middle of the scale which we called point "N" and which represented whichever number they had selected as rating. At this stage I invited them to choose in which direction they wanted to look. They chose 10 and we all moved to 10 on the line. We investigated the reasons for their choice and the benefits of it. We set the mood of 10 by referring to the articles they wrote. I investigated with them what was different at 10 and what the benefits of 10 were. This was done to get a clear picture of what was wanted and was likely to be highly motivating (Jackson & McKergow, 2007). A lively conversation followed and we celebrated the success of *The Men's Room* with a bowl of chocolates. I chose chocolates as one of the participants during the interviews indicated as a joke that her expectations of the workshop would be fulfilled if there were chocolates at the workshop.

After the celebration I invited them back to the present and investigated what of the future was already present in that they rate their performance as "N". What was already there on the surface? What had been working for them? What had they done to get this far?

At the end of this session I asked them what surprised them about "N". The general response was that they were faring better than they thought. All participants said that they had a much more optimistic view of the business than before. I took time to affirm the past and future by amplifying and reinforcing their answers with compliments to the team.

Know-how and Resources

I now wanted to explore know-how, what of the Future Perfect was already present, when did the outcome happen

even a little bit and how did they do it. This is much the same as searching for counters (Jackson & McKergow, 2007) and a continuation of the scaling exercise. We wanted to look for existing strengths and skills, known and hidden. This is to be found in what lies between 0 and “N”. I wanted to talk about solutions. Talking about solutions creates solutions (Meier, 2005). Focusing on strengths and skills fosters dynamic and effective change (Meier, 2005).

I wanted to make their resources visible and confirm the team members in their strengths (Meier, 2005). It was to create a sense of possibility and capability (Jackson & McKergow, 2007) and about eliciting, amplifying and reinforcing things already present (de Jong & Berg, 2008). I wanted to help the team to notice the differences that made a difference. McKergow sees this emphasis on noticing what is useful as one of the key elements of the SF approach (Röhrig & Clarke, 2008). This is highly important since teams develop in the direction in which their attention is focused (Meier, 2005).

To facilitate this part of the process I made use of an activity I called *Client in the chair*. I got the idea from Grün’s activity *Team Spirit* (Röhrig & Clarke, 2008). Stylists do have clients in chairs. This is an activity from a third party perspective.

In this exercise, the imaginary client sat on an empty chair in the middle of a circle of chairs occupied by the team. We gave the following instruction to the participants: *Let’s imagine the client comes in the door and takes a seat in the waiting area. This client is experiencing a better than normal day at The Men’s Room. It is more like a 10 than an “N”. Can you think of such a client in the past month? Let’s put this client in the chair.* Then we asked the participants: *What has the client noticed coming in the door? What else? What else?* Next we asked: *What does the client notice about the stylists?* Then we said: *The client is in the stylist’s chair. What does the client hear the stylist saying?* Then imagining the client leaving the shop, we asked: *What will Mr. D tell his colleagues at work?* Then we asked them to think about

the total client experience and asked them questions like: *What did you do differently? What helps you to perform at this level of “N”+? What did you actually do to make this happen?* The last question in this exercise was: *What do you need to do to give this client an “N+1” experience?* During the whole exercise I wrote down all strengths, resources and skills mentioned by the team on post-its and stuck them on the empty chair.

At the end of the exercise all the post-its were grouped on a flip chart according to the choice of the participants. The team had a good look at them and got the chance to ask for clarification.

Affirmation and Action

Throughout the process it is important to take note of what the participants notice and do well, what is going well and to affirm this with compliments. To talk about and label competencies and skills (Meier, 2005) is to build motivation and perseverance. This helps team members to take credit for their successes and offers a view on how a particular performer’s efforts have contributed and can contribute to the progress of the team (Jackson & McKergow, 2007). It also gives the opportunity to build optimism for further progress and serves as a motivator for taking the next small step towards the preferred goals (Jackson & McKergow, 2007). The aim of affirmation is not only to create a yes set, but mainly to amplify strengths and resources and to reinforce the continuous use thereof.

Throughout the workshop I gave compliments and sometimes a *Sparkle* (a kind of hard sweet with a fruity taste) to a participant who made a significant contribution to the conversations. I got the idea from an intervention that Peter Szabó did together with Daniel Meier (McKergow & Clarke, 2005). Of interest was that they started competing in a friendly way in who could get a *Sparkle* and sometimes even recommended each other for a *Sparkle*. This led to lots of participation as well as energy in the workshop.

The main thrust at this point in the process is to help the participants to formulate small next steps towards the solution. The focus is on Action. What will take you one point up the scale? What would tell you that things are a little bit better? If this scale could talk, what would it recommend as your next step (Meier, 2005)? What would your customers want to see as a small next step? How would your customers react to this small step? It should be based on something that works or is expected to work (Jackson & McKergow, 2007). It should be the beginning of something rather than the end of something. Something that can be done tomorrow and very concrete (Jackson & McKergow, 2007). Something under your control and that you are reasonably confident that you can do. It should be something personal and also something that will support the team and further client service and satisfaction.

To facilitate this part of the process I introduced the activity *Footsteps* as developed by Godat (Röhrig & Clarke, 2008). He states that the context and purpose of the activity is to take the results of the workshop into relevant and realistic next steps and at the same time to increase the motivation and confidence of the participants in their planned action. I adapted this activity by presenting the team members with two printed baby feet on a piece of card board of A3 size. They were to take 10 minutes private time to decide on two next steps they could take. One step was to be taken within the next 12 hours and the next within 10 days time. Each step had to be written down in one of the printed footsteps. When this is done the participants are called back into a group and everyone presented their two steps to the team. Group members reacted one at a time to every step presented to them by naming resources and strengths of the presenter that make them confident that the presenter could take these steps. The presenter chose the five most useful resources and wrote them down in the toes of the footprint. The participants could take this home or back to the salon as reminders of their commitment to themselves and the team. This activity facilitates building a bridge between the work-

shop and the everyday work life of the team. We presented this exercise as small experiments since the outcome was unknown but we wanted to express the belief that “doing is knowing” (Berg & Szabó, 2005).

The group as a whole was excited about their plan of action and the affirms of resources and strengths.

Review

The review part of the process on what was better, what they did to make it better, what effects the changes had and what they thought will change next was done in a six week follow-up workshop of 3.5 hours.

Follow up workshop: Review

We started out with a re-focus on the goals for the previous workshop. To build a bridge across the time that had elapsed between the workshop and the follow-up, I also presented each participant with a printed copy of both their articles titled *New Dimensions* and *Alter Ego Dream*. I read both stories aloud to them and then complimented them again on their creativity. I asked them to read the articles again on their own and to highlight the keywords in the articles. Afterwards we wrote it all down on flipcharts. This was intended to be a review on the first workshop as well as a base to do a proper review of what was better.

To review what was better since the first workshop I made use of the activity by Peter Szabó, *Wouldn't it be nice?* (Röhrig & Clarke, 2008)

In phase 1 the participants had to think about two recent examples of success to which they personally had made a significant contribution. They had to make up a third example of success, something they would have liked to have happened. Then they had to give all three examples a catchy name.

In phase 2 we took turns in telling the titles of the stories and the team decided which story they wanted to hear more

of. It did not matter if it was a real or imagined story. The team members then asked questions of the story teller to elicit the details of the story. Questions asked were: *What happened? How did you do that? If I wanted to do the same thing, what would I have to think about? What are you especially proud of?* The aims of these questions were to elicit agency, resources and sharing know-how. It also promoted a sense of achievement and success which was highly motivating.

After these questions the team had a round of resource gossip about the story teller. They gossiped about what impressed them about their team member and what the story told them about their team member's resources and abilities. They also reflected on how this would contribute to the team experience and what they would like to see their team member keep on doing. The result of the resource gossip is lots of compliments that build confidence and motivation. It also solidifies team coherence and a shared team dream.

With every story I took notes of the resources and abilities of the team that I would use in phase 3. Lots of energy was created through this exercise and the participants became addicted to the process. During a short break I made a concise summary of the stories on flipcharts under the headings of team resources and new learning. After the break I complimented them on the giant steps they had taken and illustrated it with examples from the flipcharts.

In a next step I did a short scaling exercise with the team where 0 equalled the previous workshop and 10 equalled their *Dream Team* come true. We determined where they were now as position "N" and then enquired what told them they had made progress to position "N". The team mentioned many indicators of progress made: *There is a closer unity in the team. The vision is clearer. They have learned to turn negatives into positives. There is more work structure in the salon. New learning has taken place since the previous workshop. There is more knowledge and skill sharing between the stylists. There are higher and more uniform standards of client service. Their client base is*

growing. The whole motivation of the team is higher as seen in a greater willingness to work together, positive attitudes and lots of smiling. I then investigated with them what would take progress to “N” + 1. They replied: To act on the vision. They should have more sharing of knowledge and ideas with the team on behalf of the team. They must stay focused. They must keep doing what works already.

Outcomes

The review showed a lot of evidence that the intervention delivered better co-operation and team unity. Relationships between the manager and the stylists had improved. The team discovered how they already complement each other and how that could be enhanced in future. Throughout the intervention they discovered and accepted that they were valued members of the team. Warm personal relationships were built. Evidence was presented that positivity and enthusiasm became part of this team's everyday life. The team confirmed that working was definitely more fun. There was growth in communication and confidence. Two of the stylists were learning new skills in their own time and expense and were successfully experimenting with their new skills. A third stylist was negotiating a contract with a model company to do their models' hair through *The Men's Room*. Better self management became clear as the stylists were doing more of the routine stuff in the salon. Stylists were meeting higher financial targets. These addressed most of the main goals of the proprietors and stylists with the workshop. As far as growing the business as a goal which was part of the intervention, it is too early to tell if this has been reached. If team motivation, warm relationships and a family atmosphere as well as better self management can be maintained, I am convinced that it will eventually lead to growing the business.

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Stanus Cloete has 30 years of life coaching experience and started doing business coaching in November 2008 when he established Agosolf Coaching (<http://www.agosolf.co.za>). He studied with SF Work in the UK during 2009 and obtained his SFPro Certificate with Mark McKergow and Jenny Clarke of SF Work. He is a member of SFCT, SOLWorld and COMENSA (Coaches and Mentors of South Africa). stanus@agosolf.co.za