



SIMAGES

The Official Online Newsletter of the North American Simulation and Gaming Association (NASAGA)

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How to use the funnies for effective training

THE EDITORIAL BOARD GAME By Jim Hull



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THE CHAIR IN THE CORNER

BY CHRIS SAAGER

It's hard to believe that 2003 is half over. I am writing to you on the Summer Solstice. The word solstice from the Latin for sun stands still. Maybe it is a signal for us to stand still, debrief, and see what we what we can learn from our experience of NASAGA in 2003 so far.

How are you feeling?

- ◆ I am enthusiastic about increased NASAGA activities this year.
- ◆ I am excited about the upcoming conference in Montreal.
- ◆ I am also feeling overwhelmed by how much there is to do in continuing to bring the promise of games and simulations to the world.
- ◆ I am grateful for my increased abilities to use games and simulations so far this year.

What? (Happened)

- ◆ Board member, Brian Remer, held a one day mini-conference with attendees from Vermont and New Hampshire, Thiagi also presented at the conference.
- ◆ Overall membership is now 793

- ◆ Messages on the yahoo groups list are up from last year.
- ◆ The member survey results point to ways we can better serve you.
- ◆ The Montreal Conference is shaping up to be one of the best ever.
- ◆ A special session at the Montreal conference will bring together almost all of the Ifil-Reynolds Award winners and other long time NASAGA members.
- ◆ I have used what I have learned in my work .
- ◆ I applied debriefing ideas from simulations to participation in all on-line multi-day collaborative learning conference and improved the conference experience.

So What?

- ◆ More opportunities to interact throughout the year increase our ability to promote the use of simulations and games for learning.
- ◆ The increase in membership demonstrates an increased interest in the use of simulations and games.

- ◆ The increased number of messages on the yahoo group may be an indication of our strengthen online community.
- ◆ The member survey will help guide the board in finding new ways to involve each of us in our community.
- ◆ I realize how much I have learned this year and the value of NASAGA in my life.

Now What?

- ◆ You suggested improving how we handle email messages and the on-line community we are now exploring alternatives to the current yahoo group that will be easier to use.
- ◆ We will aslo examine how we can support additional regional activities.
- ◆ In addition to our fabulous face-to-face conference, we will be exploring an on-line conference for NASAGA in 2004.
- ◆ NASAGA 2003 in Montreal will be here before you know it. I am looking forward to seeing you there. ■

— Christopher

SURVEY SAYS ...

BY CHRIS SAEGER

Here's what you told us about how we can make NASAGA serve you better! The board is working on several initiatives based on your feedback. Your top suggestion for additional activities was online events. We are exploring an all online mini-conference in early 2004, Stay tune! Send your thoughts on the survey results to chris_saeger@yahoo.com.

1) How did you learn about NASAGA?

1. From a friend, 41%
2. From web search, 27%
3. Other organization affiliations, 17%
4. Flyer mailer announcement, 5%
5. Speaker at another conference, 5%
6. Don't Remember 5%

2) How many years have you been involved with NASAGA?

1. Less than one year, 53%
2. One to five years, 28%
3. Six to ten years, 10%
4. More than ten years 9%

3) How many NASAGA conferences have you attended?

1. I have not been to a NASAGA conference, 63%
2. I have been to one conference, 12%
3. I have been to two to five conferences, 13%
4. I have been to more than five conferences 13%

4) Meeting other people who use experiential training activities.

1. Not important at all, 1%
2. Little importance, 6%
3. Neutral, 14%
4. Important, 42%
5. Very important 36%

5) Seeing/experiencing games/ simulations.

1. Not important at all, 0%
2. Little importance, 0%
3. Neutral, .8%
4. Important, 43%
5. Very important 49%

6) Large network of resources when I need help with a job.

1. Not important at all, 8%
2. Little importance, 10%
3. Neutral 12%
4. Important 37%
5. Very important 32%

7) Networking with group of people who might use my services.

1. Not important at all, 11%
2. Little importance, 18%
3. Neutral, 23%
4. Important, 31%
5. Very important 12%

8) Networking to identify consultants/trainers I might hire

1. Not important at all, 30%
2. Little importance, 28%
3. Neutral, 26%
4. Important, 15%
5. Very important 1%

9) Guaranteed fun at the NASAGA conference.

1. Not important at all, 9%
2. Little importance, 6%
3. Neutral, 24%
4. Important, 40%
5. Very important 21%

10) Receiving feedback to improve games I have designed.

1. Not important at all, 3%
2. Little importance, 8%
3. Neutral, 17%
4. Important, 53%
5. Very important 19%

11) Hearing "Big Names" in the field make presentations.

1. Not important at all, 8%
2. Little importance, 11%
3. Neutral, 36%
4. Important, 36%
5. Very important, 6%

12) Top suggestion for additional activities.

1. Local activities, 23%
2. E-conferences, 35%
3. Special interest groups, 14%
4. More cross cultural exchanges/ topics 23%

13) Top suggestion for the conference

1. Marketing yourself/your games, 18%
2. More computer simulations, 20%
3. More networking time, 24%
4. Fewer concurrent sessions 12%

14) What best describes your involvement with simulations and games?

1. Corporate training/performance improvement, 32%
2. Independent training/performance consultant, 37%
3. Student, 1%
4. K-12 teacher, 0%
5. University faculty, 14%
6. Other 16% ■

GREAT TRAINING CAN BE COMICAL

BY BRIAN REMER

Creating effective training is no laughing matter – but it could be if you use the comics pages from your Sunday paper. You can tap into the funnies of your weekend newspaper to gain inspiration, aid retention, break the ice, and invigorate your participants. In a moment we’ll get to the “how” but first, the “why.”

Newspaper comics are cheap and readily available. In a few weeks you can easily save enough for a year’s worth of workshops – especially if you gather them from more than one paper each week. People like the funnies. Everyone has their favorite and is able to identify with specific characters. Written as they are for mass consumption, they speak to contemporary themes and can be easily related to current issues. It is this aspect of the Sunday comics that makes them valuable as a training tool.

Used as metaphors, the funnies can add depth and meaning to the training topic at hand. When participants take the familiar characters of their favorite comic strip and transform them into a metaphor for what they are learning, they create new mental and neuro-

logical pathways that strengthen and reinforce learning. In short, people gain insight. And you will always be surprised at the depth and layers of meaning people are able to read into a simple comic strip!

Here are just a few suggestions for using the comics in your training. Read through them then see if you can invent other uses!

Personal Inspiration

If you are looking for that special something to add zip to your presentation, do your research, thinking, and writing then set it aside for a few days. When you are ready to look at it with fresh eyes, turn to the comics.

Read through them

and ask yourself how each might relate to your topic. If you are grounded in your topic, you will find a comic strip that connects. Then flesh it out by asking what metaphorical connection each character has with the topic. Use your insights to inform your presentation.

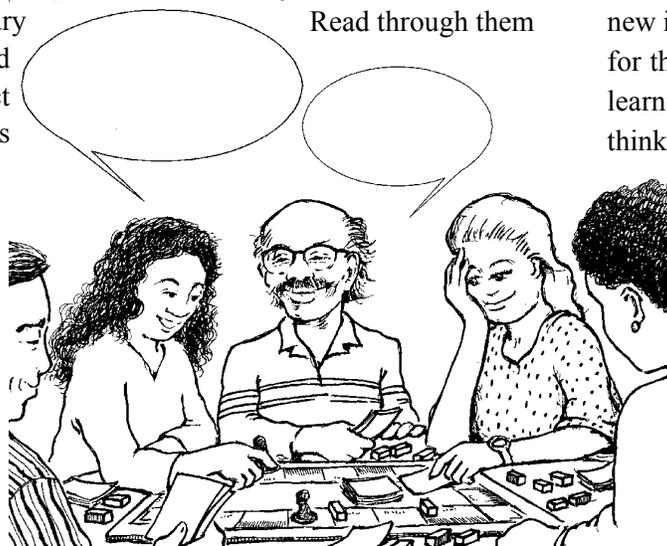
Event Theme

This is similar to Personal Inspiration. Choose a comic strip that you feel has some connections to your workshop theme. Show it to your participants at various times during the event and ask them to identify ways it is similar to what they are learning. Be strategic and ask participants what new insights the comic strip reveals for them after you cover each major learning point. Notice how people’s thinking becomes more profound

when they are asked to derive new meaning from the same comic several times.

Icebreaker

Cut several comic strips apart into their individual picture panels. Distribute the panels randomly to different people. Instruct people find the



folks who have the panels from the same strip. Have them put their panels into the correct order and introduce themselves as they read their whole strip to the rest of the participants. You can keep people in these groups for the next activity or you can have them describe how their comic might be a metaphor for the training topic at hand.

Extreme Learning

You can intensify the learning experience by asking participants to create their own metaphorical connections. Begin by asking people to reflect silently or jot a few notes about the topic. Then send them to a table spread with comic strips. Ask them to find one that could be a metaphor for their views on the topic. Have them share their comic and its metaphorical meaning with the rest of the group. Extreme Learning can be used to examine expectations, explore different learning points within your training topic, as a review, or to begin writing action steps.

Get Creative

Push the creative limits of your participants. Distribute comic strips with the words blacked out. Ask teams or partners to write dialogue for the comic characters so the strip illustrates one of the learning points for the training topic. Use this activity in the same situations you might use Extreme Learning, above.

Remember, our brains are built to make connections. If people are encouraged to think of a comic strip as a metaphor, they will make surprising connections between what you are teaching and what they are learning. And isn't that your ultimate goal? ■



Planning for the 2003 conference is in full swing. Registrations are coming in every day and people are very excited. The preliminary program is now on line and what a line-up it is! Check it out at <http://www.nasaga.org/conference2003/prog.html>

Pre-conference Workshops

Thiagi and Raja will be conducting a workshop on interactive strategies for intercultural training. They will be accompanied by three experts on intercultural relations and long-time NASAGA members: Judee Blohm, Sandy Fowler, Peggy Pusch.

Kevin Eikenberry and Chris Saeger have put together a game-lover's ideal workshop. You will learn rapid design strategies for designing games, create a game and test it out, all in one day! If that wasn't enough, Mel Silberman will review the games for possible inclusion in the Training and Development Sourcebook.

David C. Jones has prepared an exciting workshop in the best of improv tradition. The focus is on getting your team working better together. David is a master improviser and, his workshops have been described as "an inspiring combination of gentleness and challenge".

Opening Session

The opening session (Thursday morning) is so exciting, we can't tell you about it...it would ruin the surprise. A piece of advice though, plan to be present for the opening cocktail on Wednesday night. That's where it all starts.

Concurrent sessions

We were astounded to receive so many interesting proposals for the concurrent sessions. The line-up is a veritable delight of innovative and intriguing sessions. Check out the preliminary program at

Tribal Campfire with NASAGA Elders

This is a special treat for the 2003 conference. Barbara Steinwachs and Pierre Corbeil are hosting this special gathering of the "Elders of NASAGA". Come to hear the stories from the elders and to understand the evolution of simulation and gaming and NASAGA.

Early Bird Registration

Don't forget that the deadline for early bird registration is August 1, 2003. Register early and save \$100. ■

DO YOU KNOW THIS MEMBER?

BETH LEVINE INTERVIEWS
ALBERT (AL) WIDMAN FROM BROOKLYN, NY

How long have you been a NASAGA member?

I've been a member of NASAGA for a bit over a year. I became interested in the organization after seeing Thiagi speak at a Training conference a few years ago and it took me a short while to see if it'd be a good fit for me. It is!

What do you do to earn money?

After working as the COO/CFO of a large charitable organization for many years, I taught an evening class at a local college after getting my doctorate. I loved it and started teaching more and more. I'm now teaching full time and am the Chair of the Management Department at a New York business college called Berkeley College (no relation to the more famous California institution).

What do you do to sustain your energy?

Energy has never been an issue for me and I get a wonderful burst from my students. One of the classes I teach, Management Simulation, often meets late on Thursday nights. Since I have a tendency to gain energy as I go along, it becomes impossible for me to sleep that night because I'm so wired by the end of the class. Go ahead; ask me the late night TV schedule!

What's the thing most likely to drain your energy?

I hate negativity and dishonesty. These days, with everything going on in the corporate world, it can be sometimes painful to study management and business.

My proximity and close association with the World Trade Center over the years also makes it (still) painful for me to spend much time near the site. Walking past it and just glancing over can be draining for me.

What kind of music do you listen to?

I can listen to a wide variety of music. I particularly like "smooth jazz" and fusion jazz. I'll confess to still listening to my old 60's, 70's, and 80's rock and even a classical CD now and then. I'd like to listen to more current music, but I have a hard time with rap.

What's the most recent movie you've seen?

That's easy. Matrix Reloaded (on the second day of release). I'm watching for the release date of Terminator 3. See a trend there?

What are you reading?

Reading? Do people still do that? Actually, I recently reread (20 years

after I first read it) *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Universe*. I found it to be as good as I remembered it to be.

Would you rather be able to fly or be able to become invisible?

Can't I do both? I thought that Genie's give you three wishes. If I had to choose, it would probably be to fly (but only if I could go really fast). Flying around at 15-20 mph wouldn't do enough for me.

Why?

If you rode the subway to work every day, you'd look for alternatives also.

Actually, I'm very straight forward and sometimes overly blunt. If I was invisible, I'd still open my mouth and give myself away.

What's the question I should have asked you?

What a great question! That may be it.

Probably the best question would be, if you could roll back time what would you have done differently? Aside from play shortstop for the Yankees (but it could be tough to beat Jeter out for the job) — not very much. My wife is an extraordinary person, I've got a great job, I'm happy, and I never sold out my values. I'll take it just as it is. ■

A NASAGA FIRST IN NEW ENGLAND

BY BRIAN REMER

“Even though it might seem silly, the element of learning and *fun* really works!” said one participant. “The day flew by.” She was talking about Play Learn Perform, NASAGA’s first-ever regional conference on simulations and games held in Keene, NH last month.

Play Learn Perform brought together fifty-one participants from New Hampshire, Vermont, and Massachusetts to learn about interactive strategies for use in the classroom and training environment. Another participant said, “Anything seems to go! You can fit your format into much of what was shown with a little slicing and dicing.”

The one-day event attracted college professors, training consultants, human service workers, and graduate students who used the conference as both a learning and networking opportunity. “I left more confident about interactive methods and how they apply to sales and marketing,” said a training consultant.

The event was designed both to raise awareness of interactive strategies and to spark interest for the upcoming NASAGA conference in Montreal this October. “I really didn’t know who would come out of the woodwork,” said Brian Remer, conference organizer and member of NASAGA. “It’s such a rural area. I

had no idea this would be so successful!”

Several factors contributed to the success of Play Learn Perform. Remer was fortunate enough to find sponsors who gave a grant that

“Even though it might seem silly, the element of learning and fun really works!”

covered the costs of professional design and printing of the brochure. “I think that gave the event credibility in the eyes of many people,” Remer said.

Programming was also a key success factor. Sivasailam “Thiagi” Thiagarajan, the featured presenter, led the morning session on interactive strategies for teaching and training. Thiagi’s reputation alone brought many enthusiastic participants to the event. In the afternoon, the conference offered two concurrent sessions. Trainer and consultant Carrie Hudson facilitated “Icebreakers, Energizers, and Jolts.” Brian Remer led a session called “What’s in a Metaphor?” The program concluded with a series of

short, rapid-fire learning activities called “99 Seconds,” a format pioneered by Thiagi at previous NASAGA conferences.

Other factors for success included:

- ◆ **Keeping it simple.** Catering services were minimized by not offering lunch. Instead, participants received a list of local restaurants in their information packet. The application process for scholarships was straightforward. If you needed one, you got one. Costs were reduced by using meeting rooms at a local university rather than a conference center or hotel.
- ◆ **Marketing.** Personal notes were written to prospective participants on sticky notes and attached inside the brochure. Several volunteers did personal recruiting. The brochure was available on the web as well as in a PDF format that could be sent by email. Key prospects received follow-up phone calls. Group discounts were offered.
- ◆ **Adding value.** Every participant received an information packet which included a note pad, pen, and a couple small toys. All sessions made handouts available. Web sites for NASAGA and Thiagi were advertised for follow up. ■

OQ: FACILITATING A DIVERSE GROUP

BY THIAGI AND RAJA THIAGARAJAN

Questions in web-based training are mostly of the closed variety that has a single correct answer. In contrast, questions in the real world are mostly of the open variety that can be answered in many different acceptable ways.

While waiting for brilliant artificial-intelligence programs that will evaluate responses to essay questions, we have been working on a cheap strategy for incorporating open-ended questions in web-based courses.

This is what you see in the OQ (Open Question) format: You are presented an open-ended question along with a text box. You type your answer in the text box, editing and revising it until you are happy with the results. Then you click “Send”. You are sent to a menu page that provides various choices for you to be taken in any sequence, any number of times. You can self-evaluate your answer with a

scoring key. You can compare your answer with experts’ answers. You can compare your answer with peer answers.

None of these choices are as personalized or impressive as authoritative feedback from an instructor. In this approach to open-ended questions, you have to process your own answer. This is a difficult task, but when you perform it, you receive new insights and perspectives about your response you provided.

An Invitation

To help experience the OQ format, we have created an open-ended question related to conducting a training game with a diverse group of adults. To read and respond to this question, and to learn from experts and peers, please click [here](#). ■

PLEASE E-MAIL
YOUR IDEAS,
ARTICLES, AND
TIPS FOR
SIMAGES TO:

thiagi@thiagi.com

ABOUT NASAGA:

THE NORTH AMERICAN SIMULATION AND GAMING ASSOCIATION (NASAGA) IS A GROWING NETWORK OF PROFESSIONALS WORKING ON THE DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION, AND EVALUATION OF GAMES AND SIMULATIONS TO IMPROVE LEARNING RESULTS IN ALL TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONS. WE BELIEVE GAMES AND SIMULATIONS ARE AN EXTREMELY USEFUL TOOL FOR CREATING RICH LEARNING.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO JOIN NASAGA OR ARE CURRENTLY A MEMBER AND HAVE QUESTIONS REGARDING YOUR MEMBERSHIP, VISIT WWW.NASAGA.ORG

MONTHLY ONLINE NASAGA CHAT

July 3, 2003 at 8:00 Eastern, 20:00 GMT-5

The first Thursday of every month, Chris Saeger, NASAGA chair, will hold a live chat for NASAGA members. You must be a NASAGA member who participates in the yahoo group email community to attend. The chat will be located in NASAGA's yahoo group [chat room](#).

Note: When you click on the link you will be asked to log in using your Yahoo ID. You can also register for a Yahoo ID on this page if you have not done so. Please be sure to use the email address where you are currently receiving email from NASAGA when you sign up. This connects your yahoo ID to the NASAGA yahoo group.

For help with Yahoo registration, please visit this website:

<http://help.yahoo.com/help/us/edit/>

BECOME A NASAGA MEMBER

Become a member to NASAGA for FREE! No hassle about having to renew each year. This membership includes full access to the web site, use of the mailing list, and an electronic copy of our newsletter, SIMAGES.

If you would like to become a member, please complete the form at http://www.nasaga.org/become_member.asp. If you have any questions concerning memberships, please send an email to info@nasaga.org.

PLAY FOR PERFORMANCE

As a NASAGA member you are invited to the July issue of this online newsletter. To access this issue point your browser to

<http://www.thiagi.com/pfp/IE4H/july2003.html>

Read, play, and enjoy!

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