

Blindfolds - An Important Training Tool

12 Good Reasons to Consider Using Blindfolds in Your Learning Programmes



As we purchase lots of blindfolds as components in our Colourblind® training activity (and it is an essential part of the original learning design for that experiential learning game), we decided to review all the other uses that blindfolds can be put to – in a training & learning context! It may be an inexpensive training tool, but it can be very powerful and an important element for designers of training to consider incorporating!

When creating Colourblind® my colleague Dr Geoff Cox decided to use blindfolds within the experiential learning game design to simulate the lack of a shared visual frame of reference between a pilot and an air traffic controller. This was because the original design of the Colourblind activity was to be used to train new air traffic controllers in the difficulties in obtaining shared meaning, and precise communications when people don't share the same visual frame of reference.

While we could simulate this in other ways, for example having people in separate rooms, or having each individual only having sight of some materials, the use of the blindfolds provides some other, perhaps unique experiences.

Outlined below are some additional ways in which we have seen blindfolds used in other learning contexts, both with some of our other RSVP Design experiential learning materials, and in other situations.

- 1 **Trust** – whether some or all of the training participants are blindfolded, there is a requirement for a significant level of trust between participants and the facilitator. When briefing the use of Colourblind I always make the explicit point that putting on a blindfold (particularly early in a programme) will require that the group trusts me. I find that asking early for this level of trust has advantages (if I then prove to be trustworthy!). In a teambuilding environment, using a blindfold with only some of the participants can be a useful way of getting them to build trust in each other (and is perhaps safer than trust falls, fire walking and other activities!). For example having a sighted colleague lead a blindfolded colleague around a simple obstacle course, then developing a non-contact way of safely & successfully repeating the exercise, requires the building of a significant level of trust between them. You can find this and some other simple trust activities on our free experiential learning manual [CLICK HERE FOR DETAILS](#).
- 2 **Control (leadership)** – it is usually more difficult to exert personal control over a situation that involves some mechanical action if you cannot see! For experiential activities where participants have to build or manipulate something, the use of a blindfold can reduce a participant's control. In leadership training it may be useful to explore how a participant can 'lead' another to complete a task – for example in our Team Balance or Network 2i activities we can introduce blindfolds to the players, and have a 'leader' step out of an activity that they were all previously operating when sighted. How does the situation and behaviour change when an external leader now controls the situation and the remaining participants are reliant on the leader's instruction to proceed? How does the new leader feel now that they have to achieve the task through the other (blindfolded) participants?
- 3 **Remoteness** – our sight gives us so much extra information to process when viewing a situation than when we are remote from it. Consider the effect of remote management, or voice-only communications by introducing blindfolds to ensure the parties can't see each other. How does the remoteness of the individuals affect them and their performance?
- 4 **Focus** – using a blindfold seems to provide a focus on other senses. If you want a group to focus their attention on their listening skills, then using blindfolds can allow them to do that, and not be distracted. However see below for problems this can cause.

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- 5 Diversity** – using blindfolds can bring to people's attention the notion of diversity in skills and abilities. Noticing what can and cannot easily be done when a significant change is introduced can be useful, including the fact that some people may have a deep aversion to being blindfolded and others are unconcerned about it. Always design-in choice for a person to refuse to wear a blindfold during the training activity but give them a role to play (even if it is as an observer). Use a blindfold to simulate a specific disability relating to eyesight issues, or for more general awareness of the challenges those with disabilities face in the workplace, or as customers.
- 6 Slow the Pace** – in my experience blindfolded participants tend to slow down, listen more attentively, and allow opportunities for others to speak. If it is important to slow the pace down, reduce people talking over each other, and generally calm down then consider introducing a blindfold activity.
- 7 Attitude to Change** – completing the same activity blindfolded is a very different challenge to that which you can see / have seen. Consider introducing blindfolds to allow people to understand change, and their reactions to it.
- 8 Bias** – we all have many kinds of conscious and unconscious biases. Consider using blindfolds to uncover some of these effects. For example how many times do we form an (inaccurate) visual impression of someone based on a telephone call, or an email message? What extra information do we absorb when watching a video compared to listening to the audio?
- 9 Increasing Complexity/Reducing Capability** – adults need a degree of challenge in order to engage fully with experiential learning activities. Consider whether adding or removing blindfolds would help increase or reduce the challenge to an appropriate level for the group.
- 10 Emotional Trigger** – we know that learning that has a strong emotional aspect will more likely enter long-term memory. Our experience is that 'the activity with the blindfolds and the plastic shapes' is long remembered many years later by participants who have used Colourblind®. Consider using blindfolds in order to make a strong emotional memory for some or all of the participants, and trigger better learning.
- 11 Resilience** - we know that learning is difficult (see my colleague Geoff's post on Where are the Antifragile Learners). Using blindfolds can make many tasks more difficult and can be used to develop resilience skills - the ability to stick with difficult tasks and see them through, but also to recognise when an alternative approach may be needed.
- 12 Developing non-directive coaching skills** - One of the main difficulties in learning non-directive coaching skills is the inclination to provide answers and solutions based on prior knowledge and experience. Using a blindfold causes the coach (Person B) to focus on the skill of asking facilitative, coaching questions... Here's how.. Person A is asked to complete a construction task within a tight time constraint... eg. 'Build a lego structure that exactly matches the one in front of you. You have 5 minutes planning time and just 1 minute to complete the task.' To assist your planning, you will be coached by Person B. Person B is asked to support Person A during their 5 minute planning time by asking non-directive coaching questions. To ensure they are not tempted to offer solutions and instead, focus on the technique of non-directive questioning, Person B has no prior knowledge of the task and is required to wear a blindfold.

If you have any more reasons to blindfold your participants then please email me: graham@rsvpdesign.co.uk and we'll add them to this list!

If you need to buy some blindfolds to use on your learning programmes then call us in the **UK** on **141 561 01387**, in the **US** on **+1 888 70 20023**, or **CLICK HERE**

