

Telling the Story with Bottle Tops- yes Bottle Tops!

The power of story telling

- We tell more than we can write
- Telling a story brings additional information on a topic or issue that traditional brain storming or other methodologies don't
- Story takes us out of our 'expert' role where we tend to pattern everything we see and hear to fit what we know
- Opens up thinking in a new way



Why bottle tops?

- Easy and inexpensive resource
- Many colours, shapes and sizes
- No one is an expert in, or boss of, bottle tops!
- Inclusive of diverse backgrounds—it doesn't privilege those with better education or language skills or positions of power
- Creates a common/shared language and helps people understand each other—people speak different languages or use different jargon
- Visual representation—a picture is worth a thousand words—can describe a complex situation more and quickly
- Engaging—but purposeful—it's a bit like playing with blocks; people generally have fun which enables more innovative thinking

How do you use them? (Only limited by your imagination)

Individually or in groups. Individuals can create a bottle top picture of their organisation, their role in a situation, an issue they are seeking input on, and then open up for others to ask questions, consider what would be different if some of the bottle tops moved, and so on. Groups can work together to build a shared picture. Adding and moving bottle tops and building consensus about what they present back to a larger group, or deciding on priorities for action.

Gaining a shared understanding of how things are now and/or designing a desired future. Individuals or groups design a picture of the "now" and use this as a starting point to discuss issues and ideas emerging. Equally they could start by building the vision of the future and sharing that. Or two groups could be working at the same time—one on the now, one on the future—and then compare and contrast to create a shared view of what needs to change to move from now to the future.

Describing or exploring different approaches to an issue—an alternative to a Powerpoint presentation. Individuals or groups present using the bottle tops.

When would you use them?

- Looking for new ways of viewing a situation or issue
- Where there is conflict or challenge--focusing on building the bottle top story/ picture allows for conflict and challenge to emerge more safely (being directed at the bottle tops rather than individuals)
- Exploring new ways to think about an issue, situation or system
- As a way of getting diverse people to get to know and understand their perspectives quickly or better
- Can be used as a simple way to present to a group

Some examples:



In this group they added torn paper to the picture to show the barriers between different elements of the system they were describing.

In this instance, there were bottle tops representing people about to fall off the edge of the table. And a 'consumer' put some bottle tops representing people on the floor, outside the room and closed the door to show how cut off people were.

It gave others a very powerful message with the 'consumer' not having to 'say' very much at all.

It doesn't matter how organised the story/picture is--it is meaningful to the group who puts it together and tells others about it. There is always a quite detailed story to recount, but it is done quite quickly and simply with the benefit of the bottle tops to illustrate.



Here there was an engineer in the group who, with others used the analogy of the arch as the strongest structure to talk about how important it was for all stakeholders from diverse backgrounds to be involved and give strength to the issues and problems being faced.

People deliberately place bottle tops to represent meaning. In this one, those face up are open to change, those down, closed. The size and colours were representative as was the closeness to others.

