LEADERSHIP INSPIRATIONS

Early Bird vs. Second Mouse

A debate activity that requires groups to think critically and speak publicly

TIME
10-20 minutes

MATERIALS
None

TEAM STAGE
Norming, Performing

SUMMARY

In this activity, groups are assigned a topic to debate and a side to argue for. By engaging in a structured debate, they will refine their presentation and analysis skills.

SET UP

- Split participants into two groups.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Comedian Stephen Wright states, *"The early bird may get the worm, but the second mouse gets the cheese."*
- Nominate one group to be "early bird" and the other to be "second mouse".
- Give the groups 10 minutes to prepare a one-minute presentation on why their strategy would be best for business (or work, or life, or their group). Encourage the groups to make use of the knowledge, abilities, and views of all group members in creating their presentations.
- Have one group give their presentation while the other group listens quietly and respectfully, then switch.
- After the two presentations, conduct a five to ten minute debate between the groups about the question: *"Early bird or second mouse: Which is the most effective strategy?"*
- After the debate hold a "free" vote. Encourage participants to vote as individuals, putting their group loyalty to the side. Allow but do not encourage abstentions ("don't knows").

VARIATIONS

- If time permits, allow each group another round to refute the other group's argument with a rebuttal.
- Have participants switch sides for another round of the debate. They must use new arguments that haven't been used yet.
- Hold this debate with any number of topics - silly or serious. This activity could be used to debate between actual ideas that the group is considering or working on.

Large Group: To facilitate this activity for a large group, divide participants into four groups (or six, or any even number) instead of two. Assign half of the groups "early bird" and the other half "second mouse". Pair up groups to debate each other.

Online: To facilitate this activity virtually, put groups into breakout rooms to prepare their arguments. Then, close the breakout rooms and have the debate in the main meeting room. If facilitating multiple rounds of debating, re-open the breakout rooms between each round to allow participants to regroup and strategize. ***[click here for video]***

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VARIATIONS *(continued)*

Asynchronous: To facilitate this activity asynchronously, send each participant the prompt that is being debated and the side they are arguing for. Have each participant write out and submit an argument for their side by a specified date. Then, send each participant an argument that another participant wrote for the opposing side and have them write and submit a rebuttle to it by a specified date. Finally, send all participants all of the arguments and rebuttles that were written and have them vote. This variation will give participants experience with persuasive writing, while the other variations will provide more experience with persuasive speaking.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- What:
  - How effective do you think your debate skills were in this activity?
  - If you agreed with the position you were assigned to argue for, what was that like? If you did not, what was that like?

- So What:
  - What elements make a strong argument in a debate?
  - Why is it important to consider multiple perspectives in a situation?

- Now What:
  - When do you think debates might arise in your group?
  - What can you do to create a productive environment for healthy debate in your group?

Facilitator Note: These questions can be used to guide your debrief, however, pick the questions that best match your group's experience and add or change questions as needed.

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