

SILENT INTERVIEW

This is a fun and creative process for getting more acquainted with others. Here's how it works. Get into small groups of 3-5. Using the interview questions below, each person will "interview" one other person in the group. However, the interesting thing about this interview is that it is silent. That means no one will be speaking during the interview. Make sure that everyone is only interviewing one other person and that everyone is being interviewed.

This sounds far more confusing than it actually is. I will use Roger, Keith, and myself as an example of how it works. Let's say we decide that Roger will interview Keith, Keith will interview Jason, and Jason will interview Roger. We would spend about 10 minutes conducting our interviews simultaneously. During that time, Roger would simply look at Keith and write down what he believes would be the correct answer for him to each of the interview questions. This means that he cannot ask Keith any questions. He simply writes down his best guess. While Roger is doing that, Keith would be writing down what he believes would be Jason's answers to each of the questions. At the exact same time, Jason would be looking at Roger and writing what he thinks Roger's answers would be.

Here are the questions:

1. Which parent was dominant in raising this person?
2. Did this person grow up in a religious family? If so, in what faith?
3. What grade point average did he/she have in high school?
4. Describe the type of music this person really likes?
5. How many brothers and sisters and what is their position among the siblings?
6. Was this person raised in a rural, suburban or urban environment?
7. What does this person do for recreation?
8. Is this person organized?
9. How does this person handle conflict?
10. What does this person find most satisfying in their work?

After everyone has written down what they believe to be the correct answers to each of these questions for the person they are interviewing,

we take turns sharing our answers with the person we interviewed. For instance, Roger would share each of his answers about Keith while Jason simply listens. Keith will let the group know when Roger got an answer right and when he was wrong. Either way, all of us learn the truth about Keith. And, Keith is always encouraged to elaborate on any of the answers and the rest of us are encouraged to ask additional questions. For instance, Keith might tell us more about his siblings or where he grew up.

After Roger shares all of his answers about Keith and Keith lets the rest of us know the right answers about himself, Keith would then share his answers about Jason while Roger listens and learns more about Jason. And finally, Jason would share his answers about Roger.

That's it! I have facilitated this activity many times over the years with people who have never met before as well as with teams that have worked together for many years. It is always interesting and entertaining to see how incredibly accurate we can sometimes be about people. It is equally fascinating and hilarious how far off we can be in our assumptions about others.

One of the most valuable lessons I think we get from this activity is learning just how much we all tend to judge a book by its cover. In other words, we conduct "Silent Interviews" with everyone we meet. We make so many snap judgements about others and we ASSUME that we are right! When you do this activity, you will find that you CAN be exactly right on some things. And, you will no doubt find that you can be completely wrong about other things. So, what is the only way to know the truth about others for sure? Obviously, you have to actually take the time to talk with other people and get to know them. As I think about it, this could be a good activity to use with teams as you provide training on equity and inclusion.