

Electric Maze Field Notes  
Interel. Inc.

Coach's Guide to The Maze

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## **THE MAZE: AN ACTION LEARNING LAB:**

The Maze is a learning tool which has been designed to demonstrate the exponential power of strategic teams when comprised of self-empowered individuals who are united by a shared vision and fueled by a collective IQ. The Maze is part of an ever expanding library of interactive learning devices designed by Interel/Action Learning for educators and trainers.

Teams frequently assess their business challenges accurately and develop strategies to meet those challenges, but are unable to pass the real test--translating strategy to action. **ACTION LEARNING LABS** by Interel/Action Learning offers participants "practice fields" in which to experiment, explore, and apply the principles of effective teamwork against the test of action. In these "practicum" settings, teams can make productive mistakes, try out new behaviors, and synthesize discrete learnings into new awareness. Through an incremental action-learning process, teams develop "basic skills" (such as total participation, commitment to quality, communications, and trust) in order to better face the "turbulence and challenges" inherent in today's business challenges.

### **The Coach/Facilitator's Role:**

During the Maze activity, explain that you will be playing several different roles and that you will try to be clear about which one you are representing at any particular time. Your first role is that of a learning coach. As a learning coach you will set the stage for the exercise. You may call time-outs, you will facilitate the post-exercise debriefing, etc. Your second role will be that of a "customer". As the customer, you set the parameters, or business requirements, around the challenge in order to test the group's ability to deliver what you need in a quality and expeditious manner. In the role of the customer, the group will seek to satisfy your business requirements rather than "out-think" you.

### **The Basics:**

- \* Respect people's dignity at all times.
- \* Affirm CHOICE
- \* Though we challenge people, our prime goal is to help them "win."
- \* In debriefing, our most basic goal is to explore:

1. SPECIFIC ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS THAT HELPED THE TEAM TO "WIN", i. e., get the results it wanted
2. WAYS TO TRANSFER THOSE WINNING STRATEGIES TO THE WORKPLACE

\* As the "Coach" everything you do should lead to an enhanced sense of self-respect and team respect; if there is a "mistake" or difficulty, the coach's job is to frame it as an opportunity to learn and improve in the future.

## PROGRAM

(Prepared Flip Chart)

5 Minutes	Welcome and Introduction Purpose of the Experience
10 Minutes	Business Constraints
10 Minutes	Plan Group Strategy
10 Minutes	Articulate Group Vision and Values for the Experience
25 Minutes	The Maze Exercise
35 Minutes	Debrief

## PURPOSE OF MAZE ACTIVITY

(Prepared Flip Chart)

Guided by your vision, practice working together to produce great results in a way that will help you do so in real life at your organization.

## THE MAZE BUSINESS CONSTRAINTS

### (Prepared Flip Chart)

1. Only one person on THE MAZE at a time. Maintain sequence and take turns. Turns alternate between groups.
2. Progress is made one square at a time--forward, backward, sideways, diagonally. You may not skip squares.
3. A person progresses along the safe path until a "beep", which ends his/her discovery process. The person must return safely along the known path.
4. When one person has successfully traveled the length of THE MAZE, the constraints of "one person at a time" and "going in order" are suspended.
5. The entire team (both groups) has 10 minutes for planning stately and then 10 minutes to articulate a shared vision and values for the experience.
6. There shall be no further verbal communication among team members, at the completion of the planning meeting. You may not write down information, nor may you use a 'Hantzel and Gretel' method of marking the path with objects.
7. Team success is measured by:
  - Financial Performance
  - Time to Complete Task
  - Quality of Experience
  - \* Completion in 25 minutes meets business requirements and earns \$25 million.
  - \* \$1 million bonus for each minute under 25.
  - \* \$1 million penalty for each minute over 25.
  - \* \$1 million penalty for each "beep" in "known territory" (i.e. a mistake).
  - \* You will assess the quality of experience by the vision and values your team articulated.

## **DEBRIEF GUIDE**

**(Prepared Flip Chart)**

**CELEBRATE!**

What result did you want?  
(Vision)

What result did you get?  
(Current Reality)

What result did you get in terms of:

Financial Performance

Time to Complete Task

Quality of Experience?

What did you do together that worked well?

What did not work well that you would like to improve?

Does this experience resemble how things are done in your organization?

What learnings can you draw that could help you improve how you work together in your own organization.

(note: this is just one sample of a debrief guide--create your own)

## **Principles of a High Performing Organization Highlighted by the Maze**

### **1. Everyone acts like an owner**

To what extent did everyone act like "an owner" of the results? To what degree did we "play" like it wasn't either real money or at least not "our real money"? How many people in our organization feel the same way?

### **2. There are no artificial barriers. People don't say "that's not my job". If they see a "snake" they step on it.**

During the maze exercise were there examples of when individuals stepped out and helped "plug" a problem in the system? When was the group most focused? Why are sideways and backward moves so hard to find? How is this similar to the "business path"?

### **3. Innovative ideas are used quickly.**

What happened to the original plan? Give examples of innovative breakthroughs during the exercise.

### **4. Continual learning and improvement are cultural imperatives.**

What was learning in the context of this exercise? (my answer: the organizational ability to collectively retain the lessons of experience) What is a mistake? Who "owns" the mistake? Is there potential "learning" in a mistake?

### **5. Teamwork and collaboration across all levels is omnipresent.**

What examples of teamwork occurred during the exercise? What role did trust, support or celebration play?

### **6. Leadership is fluid and is found at all levels of the organization. There are no artificial barriers.**

Where would you place the group's system along the continuum of closed and hierarchical versus open, fluid & flat? To what extent was the carpet "seamless" and not divided by horizontal and vertical lines?

### **7. Ideas are welcome, utilized and "dialogue" prevails over "discussion".**

How effective was the original planning process? Were all ideas solicited and heard? Did everyone understand and buy into the plan?

### **8. Individuals "walk the talk". There is no disparity between words and deeds.**

What role did "modeling behavior" play in transforming the culture during the exercise? To what extent did the group "live" the norms and operating principles that they identified in the five minutes prior to the activity?

## **Coach's Time-Outs & Interventions:**

What do good coaches do when they see that their team is floundering, performing poorly or seems stuck? They do not wait until the end of the game to tell them how pathetic they were. Groups know when they are performing poorly and good coaches know when and how to help them. It is my personal belief that many action-learning facilitators sit on the sidelines for too long instead of calling a time-out and helping the group "change set".

### **Sample Coaching interventions:**

A. "Time-out, Lets take 2 minutes off-line and talk among ourselves about what we need to do to create a higher functioning Organization".

B. "Time-out, what I would like everyone to do is to give themselves a score on a 1 to 10 basis, measuring their commitment and involvement to the total result of what is happening here. Then I would like to encourage each of you to ratchet up your number at least two notches."

Group is losing too much money and doesn't seem to be concerned--

C. "Time-out, our team is approaching this exercise like this isn't real money which of course it isn't. Humor me, what would our behavior and commitment level look like if this was real money and real time?"

Group is queued up on the maze and someone (you aren't sure where) hits a beep

D. "I am going to give you a 'mulligan', play-on"

Sometimes just saying the word "focus, please" or "hey team, we need everyone's commitment" are good coaching techniques and can help encourage a group toward success. *Remember, we are part of the whole system and not just observers.*

### **Logistics:**

A. Remember to turn off the battery when demonstrating the exercise and to turn it off at the completion. Note: Have spare batteries available, should one fail.

B. Each group should have \$25 million dollars. I suggest play money. We pin the lost money on the wall during the exercise to graphically display results....i. e., a scoreboard.

C. Post the Customer Requirements

D. Keep track of all discovered squares on your "coaches grid"

E. Monitor time--again, something you might have to "coach" around.

**Summary:** I hope that this brief guide to THE MAZE is helpful to the user. Remember there is nothing finite about the utilization of any learning tool. This is just one way and it has been formatted for a brief 1 and 1/2 hour time period. In fact, with more time, a facilitator could debrief and process this one exercise for at least an hour or more. With videotape, you can enhance the awareness level of the participants as they watch themselves. With groups that meet again or with more time, you could use the Maze in an iterative fashion-- i.e., do it again after incorporating the group's awareness from this first experience. The author would love to hear from you about your ideas, what works for you, and what principles you feel are consistently demonstrated through The Maze. I encourage you to redesign and to frame the exercise to fit the specific issues of special groups--with career counseling, the maze becomes the career path; with sales groups, it might represent the sales cycle, etc.

**Acknowledgments:** The author would like to thank Tim Rumsey of Action Learning and Charlotte Roberts & Chuck Conn of Innovation Associates whose ideas and suggestions have been incorporated within this Coaches' Guide.

### **Team Learning Lab™:**

The Team Learning Lab™ consists of a series of action-learning exercises and tools supported by a coaching process aimed at developing leadership and team skills for learning organizations. Like any laboratory, the Team Learning Lab™ is a safe and risk-controlled environment within which to experiment, explore, and apply abstract principles of high performing teams against the test of action. In this lab setting the team can take risks, make productive mistakes, try out new behaviors, and synthesize discrete learnings into a new whole. ACTION LEARNING ASSOCIATES creates "learning tools" and designs workshops and educative experiences in order to demonstrate the exponential power of teams when comprised of self-empowered individuals who are aligned around purpose, united by a shared vision, and fueled by a collective IQ.

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