



A View From 30,000 Feet By Leslie Marmor

We've all heard the expression of "using the right tool for the job," and most of us have experienced the difficulties that result when we are not able to use that tool or we simply are not aware of what the right tool might be. Just ask a carpenter to build a house using a wrench rather than a hammer. On the other hand, utilizing the right tool can make our lives much easier. One of the tools utilized in the Creative Problem Solving (CPS) framework is the Advantages, Limitations, Unique Qualities and Overcoming Limitations (ALUo). In several cases, this tool has turned out to be the right tool for the job. In this article, two applications are illustrated where the ALUo was utilized.

I am 25,000 feet above Memphis, on my way back from a business trip to Birmingham. I've just spent two days gathering information about what our organization sees as training needs out in the field. As I stare out the window I begin to sort and make sense of what I've heard, not only on this trip but on other trips to other locations. The pad of paper comes out and I begin writing. It isn't until fifteen minutes into this process that I realize the form it has taken. I find myself synthesizing, looking at the common threads, what the organization is presently doing, well, not so well, and thinking about next steps. How can we improve our recruitment process? How can we meet the expectations of our employees? How might we communicate information to the field? How can we ensure follow-up from the home office to the field operations? How might we take our training programs from theory to application? While this is not using the Creative Problem Solving (CPS) method know as Advantages, Limitations, Unique Qualities, and Overcoming Limitations (ALUo) in the strictest sense possible, it is a way of bringing CPS into the real world on a daily basis. Once I have completed this process, I will have the essence of my report, and a suggested action plan, to present in my debrief to management.

Often, a method that we have learned, having been given the textbook way to use it, can be creatively applicable to other situations. Another recent example is a feedback session that I held with my training administrator, Jennifer, regarding her solo facilitation of a program. I wanted the feedback experience to be a positive one providing us a foundation on which to develop an action plan for future training programs. We began the feedback session with what went well and what we liked, from all aspects of the training program (Advantages). This helped to set the tone for the rest of the discussion. I was insistent that we keep the discussion on target even when the answer from her came back "nothing!" and the inclination was to move into criticism. What Jennifer and I discovered

was that there were a large number of things we liked about this particular training program, some were aspects of the group dynamics, but some were a direct result of her facilitation.

We then moved into what we did not like, or what we would change (Limitations). We phrased the feedback in the form of "How could...?" and "How might...?" This was extremely effective in taking a proactive approach to the feedback and initiating our thinking on action steps. How might we better prepare Jennifer to facilitate? How could we continue to hold the session at the home office rather than off-site? How could we involve upper management in the session? and so on. Asking the question "What could be done to make Jennifer more comfortable in front of a group?" is a more positive and proactive approach than saying "Jennifer, you weren't comfortable in front of the group, why?"

From the Advantages and Limitations we moved into what we saw as being unique to this training program and ways to overcome the limitations for continued improvement on the program and Jennifer's facilitation skills. At the conclusion of the time we had allotted ourselves, we looked over what we had developed and found we had the start of an action plan that we could begin work on. When I met with my director I was able to communicate our action plan along with the logic behind it.

I can not take credit for the idea of using ALUo for feedback. In my previous organization I co-facilitated with Brian Dorval, of CPS-B, on a number of occasions. At the conclusion of each session Brian and I would use ALUo to debrief what we had just done. In the two years that we worked together, I used our debriefing session as a way to improve my skills, both in training and program development. I found the feedback, regarding my performance, easier to hear because we always began with the positives of the program and worked our way through. When forced to think about what is good, it is amazing the number of positive aspects that come to mind. Once that is done, it seems less painful to move into what didn't go as well, but in a way that points to improvement, not just criticism.

Feedback to help improve performance is only effective when the feedback is heard and accepted. Often when we begin a feedback session we find ourselves, as the feedback giver, trying to fumble for words, and the feedback receiver on the defensive. By using the ALUo method, all parties involved have input into the session, making it a two-way rather than a one-way communication. By following the prescribed steps and looking at the advantages first, a more positive tone is set. This in turn begins the foundation for the development of an action plan that includes the ideas and suggestions of all those involved. Today's

organizations require continuous improvement in order to remain competitive in the marketplace. I view using ALUo as a tool in that effort.