

International Entrepreneurship Educator's Programme

Entrepreneurial Learning - Pedagogical Note Series

27. Personality selling exercise – the Balloon Debate

1. What is use of Balloon Debate

The Balloon Debate is a personal selling exercise. Each participant assumes a character. This may be an entrepreneur, an historical figure, a priest or indeed a person of any kind, famous or merely generic (for example a housewife). The person assumed is to have the qualities to establish a new world embodying new values and ways of doing things. The person can be dead or alive, fictional or non-fictional and from any walk of life. It is an exercise in imaginative thinking. All the characters are going up in a hot air balloon to escape from a world falling apart below. A planet up there is waiting for a new leader. The purpose of the exercise is to enable each character assumed to argue/sell themselves as the best person to lead this new world. Progressively the participants are eliminated by a voting process until only one person is left in the balloon – the future world leader. In the entrepreneurial programme context the objective set can be one of being the leader of a future entrepreneurial society.

2. How is the exercise constructed?

After a brief introduction, each participant is asked to assume a character.

Round 1. Each is then given 5 minutes to prepare a one minute speech. The speech aims to sell themselves as the person with the vision, the leadership qualities and character to build a new world. After the speeches a vote is taken to select the top 5 (say out of a group of 20). One cannot obviously vote for oneself.

Round 2. Each of the remaining participants make a 30 second speech aimed at destroying any arguments put forward by the others – they are not at this stage promoting themselves.

Round 3. Each character then makes a 30 second speech defending themselves and making a final statement as to why they are the future leader of the world.

And better than the others. The last sentence must be a real rallying cry.

Round 4. This can be a 1 minute rapid fire hot seat of each candidate by the remaining participants,

There is then a final vote to select the new world leader.

Round 5. This is a post mortem discussion led by the facilitator as to why the final leader was chosen – bringing out aspects of personality, persuasive argument and presentation.

3. Relevance to Entrepreneurial Learning

The exercise is essentially a personal selling exercise. It brings out the importance of the entrepreneurial personality. The emphasis is upon personal projection and the ability to articulate convincing argument under pressure. In an entrepreneurial real world situation customers and stakeholders are 'buying' the personality and estimated capacity of the 'seller'. Projection of self belief, engagement of the 'audience', and personal charisma are dominant. The argument is often of less importance.

4. Outcomes

The key outcome is the realisation that stakeholders in an entrepreneurial world 'buy' the person as much as the product. The two are inseparable.