

“Coming Up Trumps”

Created by Brian Edward Shimanto

The word *trump* is a corruption of a 17th century card game called *triumph*. In triumph, trump cards temporarily outranked other cards and the trump suit was selected at random by cutting the deck. Selecting the right suit to match one's hand was an advantage in the game so “*coming up trumps*” became synonymous with success.

Our personal identity is comprised of a unique combination of social group affiliations including race, gender, class, sexual orientation, [dis]ability, and spirituality. And like a card game, many of these affiliations are assigned to us randomly. In this workshop, participants will have a chance to imagine their identity as their “hand” in a card game, allowing us to discuss how our individual affiliations impact “game play,” or our ability to be successful.

In preparation for this workshop, participants are asked to read “*What Kind of Card is Race?*” written by Tim Wise **prior** to attending.

Multicultural Competency Development

This workshop will assist participants in developing *Multicultural Awareness* and gaining *Multicultural Knowledge*.

EDGE Rating

This workshop is rated *moderate to somewhat challenging*.



When on the edge of our comfort zone, we are in the best place to expand our understanding, take in a new perspective, and stretch our awareness. Pay attention to your internal reactions to activities or other people (Signals: feeling annoyed, angry, anxiety, surprised, confused, or defensive.) If we retreat to our comfort zones by dismissing what we encounter, we lose the opportunity to learn. ***The challenge is to stay on our learning edge with the discomfort we are experiencing to see what we can learn.***

MATERIALS

You will need to create one “set” of identity cards per participant. The master PDF includes two “wild” cards. The facilitator should keep all “wild” cards until later.

FACILITATION

This activity can be facilitated in multiple ways. The original design is as follows but I encourage you to get creative and explore how the cards might be most useful for your group.

The **OBJECTIVES** of this session are...

- to create an environment where participants can openly discuss identity for the purpose of getting to know each other better,
- to go “beyond” introductory social justice training, and
- to provide participants with an article they can read to supplement professional development.

1. You may choose to use **GUIDELINES** if necessary. I recommend covering some if you think the risk level might be challenging for the group. I’ve attached the guidelines I usually use.

1 *Coming Up Trumps*: Facilitation Notes

2. Distribute a “set” of cards to each participant and explain that each card represents a different facet of their identity: Race, [dis]Ability, Position (in the organization), Class (SES), Gender, Spirituality, and [sexual] Orientation. *“In most card games, when players receive their cards, the first thing they do is organize their hand. I encourage you to review the identities represented in your hand and organize them in whatever order makes the most sense to you. For now, please keep your hand private (do not show anyone how you organize your cards).”*

2. Offer “wild” cards: *The identities on the cards are only some of the groups we belong to and there may be other identities that are “more important” to our sense of self or “more salient” such as parental status, marital or relationship status, birth order, nationality, language, etc. If anyone would like a wild card to supplement your hand, you may have as many as you wish; however, you must **discard** another card from your hand.* Ask participants to place their discards face down in front of them and give each participant enough “wild” cards to maintain a seven-card hand.

3. Then when everyone has a hand that they feel represents them, ask them to place their hand face down and begin to process the Time Wise article. Possible processing questions may include:
 - “What did you **think** or how did you **feel** about the article?”*
 - “What portions of the article stand out for you?”*
 - “Is the ‘race card’ a valuable card?”*

4. After you have spent enough time on the article, return to the cards. *“Recall how Tim Wise pointed out that the frequency with which white people respond to charges of racism by calling those charges a ploy suggests that the race card is equivalent to the two of diamonds. In other words, ‘playing the race card’ is a really bad play and next to worthless. This suggests that some identities are more ‘valuable’ than others. Consider which of your cards are most valuable...”*

5. Ask everyone to show what they were holding and allow everyone a chance to look at other people’s hands. Ask what people notice about other people’s hands. Does anything surprise them? This usually leads to some good conversation. Naturally some people feel the need to explain themselves (“I’m still a ‘good’ person”). I allow this, but also encourage people to challenge each other by role modeling. In other words, I don’t let people off the hook, but also don’t railroad them and drive them into a corner. This is a good time to remind people to *“speak their truth with care.”*

6. Next I ask people to weigh-in on who they think has the “strongest” hand and why. What cards *trump* other cards? It is important to remember that how one may perceive the relative “strength” of someone’s hand is entirely independent of how they might perceive themselves. For instance, although two participants may share the same gender identity (“male”), to a gay man the strength of this card may differ depending on how it is combined with other cards: a “male” identity combined with a “straight” identity and a “parent” identity makes for a much stronger hand than “male” and “gay.” However, to a woman in the room, the “male” card may *trump* “female” any day.

7. No one actually “wins” or “trumps” someone else’s hand. The cards are a mechanism to engage in the conversation and learn about how others view themselves and other people. This is a nice place to make a comparison to “real life.” *“Does our identity ensure we ‘win?’ How does who we are - or who we are perceived to be - impact how we come to the table? How does our identity influence our experience working here, going to school here, or living here? Remember that strength in one card is impacted by weakness in another: I may be white, but I am poor; I am a man, but I am gay; I am the director, but I am a woman in a male-dominated leadership group; etc. This is a great opportunity to listen to one another’s experiences: ‘I never thought about how your gender changes the way you experience being in charge... What does that mean (to me, to you, to us)?’*

GUIDELINES: *“Speak your truth with care...”*

1. **Participate** as much as you can. The wisdom is centered within the room, rather than at the front of the room. We can all learn much more when we all participate in the conversation, sharing our own personal experiences.
2. **Safety.** I would like to guarantee that the space within these four walls is completely safe but I cannot. It takes everyone’s agreement to make this a safe place. And safety looks different for different people. What do you need to feel safe? Can you ask for it if you are not receiving it?
3. **Confidentiality & respect for what others share today.** I will ask that we agree to keep what is said in this session confidential. That does not mean that you cannot share what you have learned here – that limits your ability to truly learn. On the contrary, I hope you will talk about what you learned but I ask that you do not attach names.

Respect also looks different to different people. To some, it means not being interrupted when they are speaking. To others, it looks like not disagreeing with them (at least publicly). Think about what you need to feel respected and at least extend that courtesy to others in the room.

4. **Speak from your own experience – using “I” statements.** Although you may have been elected by all member of your social group to “speak for” all members, I am asking that you only speak for yourself today. Use statements like, “I feel angry when I hear you say that,” rather than, “People get angry when you say that.”
5. **Listen carefully; speak truthfully – “no discount” policy.** Listen carefully, speak truthfully is fairly self-explanatory. By a “no discount” policy, I mean do not discount what others have to say and equally as important, don’t discount what you have to say by prefacing a comment with a phrase like, “I might be crazy...” or “this might sound stupid.”
6. **Seek first to understand, then to be understood.** Listen actively to what is being shared rather than splitting your attention between listening and developing a response. Some people are verbal processors and may need to say their thought process out loud before reaching some understanding. If you only hear the beginnings of what they are saying and begin to disagree, you may interrupt their process of coming to that place on their own. Sometimes what we need to say needs to be “messy” or it cannot be shared at all.
7. **Both/And vs. Either/Or.** Try to make space in the room for “multiple truths” rather than one person being right and the other wrong.
8. **Take risks: have courage to feel uncomfortable and talk about uncomfortable feelings.** Only by taking risks can we truly begin to explore some of the difficult issues involved in diversity and multiculturalism. These conversations can often be uncomfortable since we have not had permission to talk about them before or they have been “taboo.”
9. **Stay open to new ideas: be willing to “try things on.”** Just because something someone says sounds completely wrong to you, stop for a moment and imagine what it might mean to you (and others) if what you are hearing is true. “Try it on” if only for a moment and consider what the implications of this possible truth might be.
10. **Be honest.** Be as honest as possible. If you cannot be honest in this session for some reason, at least be honest with yourself. Make note, or track, why you cannot share with the group what you really think or feel. As long as you acknowledge the truth to yourself, you can still learn from the group.
11. **Have FUN.** Finally, try to remember that learning something new can be a whole lot of fun! We can be serious about our diversity & social justice work without being serious about ourselves..