

Marathon—Personal Growth for Group Leaders

An Intensive Training Experience for SUD Treatment Staff

Napier Models · Modules

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Part 1 • Overview

Marathon—Personal Growth for Group Leaders

An Intensive Training Experience for SUD Treatment Staff

This intensive experience challenges group facilitators to examine their own patterns, defenses, and growth edges. Through extended engagement, participants develop self-awareness essential for effectively leading therapeutic groups.

Full day or multi-day intensive

Learning Objectives

- Identify personal patterns affecting group facilitation
- Process personal material that impacts clinical work
- Develop advanced self-awareness as a clinician
- Experience intensive group process firsthand
- Build resilience for challenging clinical situations

Key Topics Covered

Self-Awareness

Group Dynamics

Countertransference

Personal Growth

Clinical Resilience

Therapeutic Use of Self

Professional Development

Intended Audience

- Experienced group facilitators seeking growth
- Clinicians preparing for supervisory roles
- Staff leading intensive group programming
- Professionals committed to deep personal work
- Teams of group facilitators training together

Prerequisites

- Significant group facilitation experience
- Completion of foundational workshops
- Personal therapy or supervision recommended
- Organizational support for intensive training
- Physical and emotional readiness for marathon format

Part 2 • Worksheet

Marathon—Personal Growth for Group Leaders

An Intensive Training Experience for Substance Use Disorder Treatment Staff

Duration: 3-day intensive (40-hour marathon + integration activities)

Purpose: Develop advanced group facilitation skills through experiential learning, self-reflection, and peer feedback in an intensive format that mirrors the vulnerability and transformation of the recovery process.

Note: This intensive experience requires skilled leadership and emotional/physical stamina. Participants should be prepared for a challenging but transformative journey.

Introduction: The Marathon Experience

The Marathon is an intensive 40-hour training experience designed to rapidly develop your skills as a group facilitator and deepen your self-awareness as a treatment professional. Originally developed for leadership training, this adaptation focuses on the unique needs of substance use disorder treatment center staff.

Core Principle: The most effective facilitators are those who can "redesign on the spot" - adapting their approach in real-time based on the group's changing needs. This skill is especially crucial when working with clients in various stages of recovery.

Goals of the Marathon Experience

- Strengthen your ability to assess client group needs in real-time
- Practice designing activities based on group dynamics
- Grow self-awareness of your impact in groups
- Experience stages of group development firsthand
- Identify strengths and areas for professional growth

Pre-Marathon Preparation

Before beginning the marathon, reflect on your current skills and set intentions for your learning journey.

Self-Assessment

What are your current strengths as a group facilitator?

Consider skills like active listening, managing conflict, creating safety...

What aspects of group facilitation challenge you most?

Think about situations that make you uncomfortable or uncertain...

What specific skills do you want to develop during this experience?

Be specific about what you hope to learn or improve...

How might developing these skills benefit your clients in recovery?

Connect your learning goals to client outcomes...

Phase I: The Training Marathon

During the 40-hour marathon, you'll alternate between being a facilitator and a participant. Each person takes 2½ hour blocks to design and lead interventions based on the group's evolving needs.

As Facilitator

Design Focus Area:

What aspect of group work will you address?

Key Interventions Planned:

List your planned activities...

Adaptation Notes:

How did you adjust based on group needs?

As Participant**Personal Reactions:**

What did you notice about your responses?

Group Dynamics Observed:

What patterns emerged in the group?

Learning Moments:

Key insights from others' facilitation...

Remember: The marathon creates fatigue and vulnerability - similar to what clients experience in intensive treatment. Notice how this affects group dynamics and your own responses.

Phase II: Integration Through the Four-Fold Way

After the marathon, integrate your learnings through three structured activities based on Native American wisdom traditions. These help crystallize insights and prepare for application in clinical practice.

Part I: The Quest (3 hours)

Sit quietly in nature, reflecting on your marathon experience. Let insights emerge naturally.

What symbol or image represents your key learning?

Describe the symbol and its meaning...

What insights emerged about your role as a healer/helper?

Reflect on your deeper purpose...

Part II: The Talking Staff

In a ritual circle, share your learnings while holding the talking staff. Answer three key questions:

What crystallized your learnings from the marathon?

The core insight that emerged...

What will you do with these learnings upon return?

Specific actions you'll take...

What did you bring back from your quest?

The gift or wisdom you carry forward...

Part III: The Collage

Create a visual representation of your learnings using various materials. This becomes a lasting reminder of your growth.

Describe your collage and what each element represents:

Colors, images, textures and their meanings...

Intellectual Closure: Key Learnings

Integrate your experiential learnings with intellectual understanding. In small groups, explore these critical areas:

Design Principles

What have we learned that should be unforgettable in relation to program design and individual sessions?

Key insights and applications...

Facilitation Excellence

What have we learned about "design" that would be useful in our clinical work?

Key insights and applications...

Group Dynamics

What do we now know about the issue of membership in any group or team?

Key insights and applications...

Closure & Rituals

What do we know about endings, closure, and rituals in treatment?

Key insights and applications...

Core Learnings Summary

"Everything one does as part of a design must be intentional with consequences considered."

"Facilitators are to facilitate only when necessary... not create dependency."

"How a group feels when it ends a day, event, meeting, or individual design is what they will bring with them the next time they meet... their feelings of success, failure, unresolved issues."

Clinical Application & Action Planning

Transform your marathon insights into concrete improvements in your clinical practice.

Professional Development Plan

Three specific facilitation skills I will develop:

How I will practice "redesigning on the spot" with client groups:

Specific strategies for flexibility...

Changes I'll make to how I handle group endings and transitions:

New approaches to closure...

How I'll support colleague development based on my learnings:

Ways to share knowledge...

30-Day Goals

Immediate implementation steps...

90-Day Goals

Longer-term integration goals...

Tips for Facilitators

Essential Requirements

- High facilitation skill and ability to manage intense emotional/process issues
- Prior experience with marathon formats strongly recommended
- Comfort with ambiguity and emerging group dynamics
- Ability to maintain boundaries while being vulnerable

Key Facilitation Principles

- Resist the urge to rescue participants - let them struggle and learn
- Trust the group process - the group is the teacher
- Focus on successes as much as mistakes
- Encourage observation of process, not just content
- Model vulnerability and authentic participation

Managing the Marathon

- Screen participants carefully in pre-marathon meeting
- Have arts and craft materials prepared in advance
- Build in adequate breaks while maintaining momentum
- Be prepared for intense emotions - tears, anger, breakthroughs
- Consider having backup facilitator available if needed

"Skilled teams are not the result of creating artificial simulations and games, but rather, learning together to deal with the very real and important issues that exist in any group and whose resolution increase trust and cohesion."

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