

Clip #1 - Learning at the extremes (2:43) Frei

PROFESSOR FRANCES FREI: There'll be a decision in a case: Would you do *A* or *B*? First of all, every MBA student comes into class and you say, "Would you do *A* or *B*?" And the preparation that they do before they get challenged in class would be, "Well, you know what? I can see the pros and cons of *A*, and I can see the pros and cons of *B*." We don't want to hear the pros and cons of *A* and the pros and cons of *B*. We want to know, what would you do? Force people to make a decision, not because we're saying this is practice for real life, because learning goes on at the extremes. Learning doesn't go on over on the middle of the fence, and that's usually what the preparation has been.

So they get familiar with the material. They come into class. We say, "Would you do *A* or *B*?" We call on Oscar, and after a while, Oscar starts to understand how this works. He says, "Not only would I do *A*, I would do triple *A*. I would do way out here on this extreme." If Oscar says that, imagine now what everyone in the class is thinking. Those people that thought *B*—they all want to talk to Oscar. Those people that thought *A* thought, "Well, I thought *A*, but my goodness. Am I really willing to commit that much?" Everybody wants to respond to Oscar. So what goes on in the class is really this dynamic that we're pushing people to respond to learn at the extremes. Because at these extremes, we can start to see, when does *A* break down? *A* doesn't break down in the middle. *A* breaks down on the extremes and that's where the learning occurs. An ideal class is when Oscar says he really wants to do *A*; a debate goes on, and then he says something convincing, so everybody comes over to *A*.

And then all of a sudden, somebody brings up something and everybody runs over to *B*. And another thing—and the class is going back and forth so they really feel like they're in a Ping-Pong match. Now real learning is going to occur, because now we're going to really get at what's underneath; what's the generalizable lesson that comes from it? So I think it's really important to separate individual participation from what can go on in a group. And if you're just echoing individual preparation in a classroom setting, you're leaving a lot on the table, and you're going to care whether or not there's this sharing, and you have to come up with all of these schemes. But if you start thinking about the classroom environment as only, "What can we do collectively?" it really changes the game.

Clip #2 - Using a vote to engage the class (3:24) Garvin

The first question you've got to ask is: "Why do you want to use a vote?" And it turns out there's actually a very large body of research literature that says people will vest in their positions if they're forced to make a public commitment. A vote is no more than a public commitment: "Hands up: Who thinks this is a good idea? Hands up: Who thinks this is a bad idea?" We're now on the record. That has important implications because people won't always speak up about where they stand unless you've gotten them to visibly show it.

The second reason for taking a vote is that it gives you license. "Hmm, your hand was up. I now have permission that I might not have had before to call on you to explain why you voted the way you voted." The third thing it does—and this is particularly useful for a discussion teacher—is it gives you a sense of the weight on the two or three different points of view.

Before a vote, I have no idea. Is it fifty-fifty? Is it ninety-ten? Is it ten-ninety? I simply don't know until I've actually seen the show of hands. This turns out to be important, because if it's fifty-fifty, it's easy to get debate. If it's ninety-ten, I'm going to have to support the folks on the ten side and buttress their arguments so they don't feel totally outvoted.

Now, how do you get a really good discussion? The most important part of it is, once you've had the vote, make sure you don't go too long with too many uninterrupted comments on one side. If I have five people in a row speaking for the *yes*, it's awfully hard to get the *nos* in. But if I have one *yes* and one *no*, as I did when we talked about Schetter and Clarke, I have already set up the spectrum. Each side now has somebody they can point to and say there's somebody else just like me. That gives them, again, license and voice; a willingness to speak.

Sometimes you take a vote at the very beginning of class just to get a sense of where people stand and to stimulate the discussion. Sometimes I take the vote at the very end of class, as a form of closure, leading into what actually happened. And sometimes I take it in the middle. We've had a little bit of context. We've talked a little bit about changing roles, changing positions, changing industry dynamics. Then it's a way to kick the discussion into higher gear.

Clip #3 - The Visceral Power of Role-Play (0:51) DeLong

PROFESSOR DELONG: Any time one of your students starts saying, "I would do this," ask the person to be that person, and then don't humiliate them, but stick with them. Stick with them until they go into that role.

We remember because of our visceral experiences. If you think about the best teacher/leader/manager you have ever had, it may not be the model that they taught you, but it's the spirit that they created in the classroom. Something happened inside of you, and you want to say things and you want to act so that something happens inside a person.

Clip #4 - Structuring Multiple-Student Role-Plays (3:05) Garvin

The first important thing about role-plays is that I seldom go into them cold. I don't start a class with a role-play. I don't start a block of discussion with a role-play. First I want to get the context. So during the Donnelley discussion we spent a certain amount of time understanding the differences between the traditional printing and the digital printing business. We moved to sales and we tried to understand the differences in the sales process.

Only then did we move to a role-play. We actually ask somebody to play the role of a Donnelley salesperson; someone else to play the role of a potential customer. That was deliberate. First you have to set it up. The second requirement is, if you really want people to play along, to vest in the process, you better give them some of the particulars. I didn't simply say, "You be a salesperson, you be a customer." I said, "You're a salesperson; and this is a regional Bell operating company. And this is a company that's coming up for its contract after ten years." And then I gave some local color. "It turns out, your customer here is a devoted golfer. Not only that, it turns out you have the corporate jet for the weekend. In fact, it's even Masters weekend. How would you like to spend the weekend?"

Now, I wanted to give them an attempt to make the leap and move in the direction of playing along: taking the customer to the golf tournament, giving him or her exactly what they want, in return getting us signed on the dotted line.

When I'm trying to pick students for role-play, I typically keep two or three things in mind. The first is: Have they yet spoken in class? In this case, I picked people who had both already spoken so I knew they'd be forthcoming.

The second thing you try to do is take a look at their backgrounds. I try to pick people who either were fully identified with the role or, in fact, typically had opposite experiences so they could project themselves.

And then third, there is the physical dimension. I literally pick people across from each other in the classroom so they could keep their eye on each other, talk, and the discussion would flow across the middle of the room. It made for a much more visible debate, a much more visible discussion, rather than having them on the same side of the room or sitting side by side. Then it would be a tight as opposed to a broadly open discussion.

Clip #5 - The quiet moments (0:44) Nanda

PROFESSOR NANDA: When I had just started teaching, I used to hate the times when the class energy used to go down. I used to like things to be exciting always. But then some of my students came back to me and in their feedback they said something very interesting, which is that some of their best insights came during the quiet phases. So now I try to be patient. If the class's energy falls a little bit, then I stay with it for a little bit of time. And sometimes some of the best comments come in those quiet moments.