

# The 2003 Annual

## Volume 1<sup>™</sup> Training

Jossey-Bass  
Pfeiffer

## 731. AARDVARK AND ANTELOPE: EXAMINING TEAM LEADERSHIP

---

### Goal

- To demonstrate in a creative way the idea that one cannot rely on the team leader/expert to make all the decisions.
- 

### Group Size

Eight to twenty people, whether from intact teams or not.

### Time Required

Twenty to thirty minutes, depending on group size.

### Materials

- Name tags for participants.
- Two different colored marking pens.
- One aardvark and one antelope stuffed animal (optional).

### Physical Setting

A space large enough for the group to sit or stand in a U-shape.

### Process

1. Explain that the activity you are about to do concerns various aspects of teamwork.
2. Have everyone write out and affix a name tag to the front of his or her outfit and then stand or be seated in a U-shape on the floor or by drawing up their chairs.

3. Introduce the person at the end of the "U" as the "fount of all knowledge about aardvarks." Hand that person one of the markers and say: "Whenever anyone needs to know anything about aardvarks, he or she has to come to [Jane], who is the fount of all knowledge about aardvarks."
4. Introduce the person at the other end of the "U" as the "fount of all knowledge about antelopes." Hand that person a different colored marker. State: "Whenever anyone needs to know anything about antelopes, he or she has to come to [Bob], the fount of all knowledge about antelopes."
5. Explain to the group the rules of the activity:
 

"This is how it works: [Jane], you tell the person next to you [Sally] 'This marker is an aardvark.' [Sally], because she is NOT the fount of all knowledge, must ask you, [Jane], 'A what?' before accepting the aardvark. [Jane], you must reply, 'An aardvark.' Now that [Sally] understands, [he or she] is allowed to take the marker from [Jane].

"Now [Sally] in turn must explain the aardvark to the next person in line, [Kelly]. But because [Sally] is NOT the fount of all knowledge, she has to go back to the fount of all knowledge [Jane] and ask 'A what?' To this [Jane] will reply 'an aardvark.' [Sally] will then tell [Kelly] 'It's an aardvark.' And so the process continues. The only person who can verify that the object is indeed an aardvark is [Jane]. The same thing holds true for [Bob] and the antelopes."
6. Make sure both "sides" understand the rules before you continue. Clarify that their goal is to ensure that [Bob] understands about aardvarks and that [Jane] understands about antelopes, but remembering that, as they pass the marker down the line, the founts of all knowledge must verify the information each time the marker passes from one team member to the next.
7. Then stand back and watch the confusion, especially when the two pens intersect at the midway point. Note what happens for the debriefing. (About ten minutes.)
8. Pull the group back together to debrief the activity with the following questions:
  - What do you think about members of a group being designated as the founts of all knowledge?
  - Does this happen in real groups?
  - Why was it necessary to keep going back to these people? What sorts of problems did it cause?

- Do you see this dynamic at work on any current team of which you are a member? How does it play out in real life?
- How can we prevent this dynamic from occurring back on the job?

(Ten minutes.)

---

Submitted by Kristin J. Arnold.

*Kristin J. Arnold, MBA, CPCM, specializes in coaching executives and their leadership, management, and employee teams, particularly in the areas of strategic and business planning, process improvement, decision making, and collaborative problem solving. An accomplished author and editor of several professional articles and books, as well as a featured columnist in The Daily Press, a Tribune Publishing Group newspaper, Ms. Arnold is regarded as an expert in team development and process improvement techniques. With building extraordinary teams as her signature service, Ms. Arnold has provided process facilitation, training, and coaching support to both public and private sector initiatives.*