

## **Take-a-Stand: Connecting Learners to Learners and Learners to the Topic**

By Sharon L. Bowman, M.A.

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### **What Is Take-a-Stand?**

In traditional training sessions, learners remain seated while participating in small group discussions about topic-related issues. With *Take-a-Stand*, learners move around the room and choose a designated place to stand before engaging in small group discussions. In effect, the activity includes kinesthetic (movement) and spatial (visual) ways of learning as well as linguistic (verbal).

*Take-a-Stand* also encourages learners to use higher order thinking skills (analysis, evaluation, synthesis), as they discuss their own perceptions and opinions of questions, issues, or concepts related to what they are learning.



During the activity, one side of the training room represents one topic-related issue, problem, statement, or viewpoint and the other side represents the opposite (the sides can also represent “strongly agree/strongly disagree” with the middle of the room representing “undecided or need more information”). Participants stand and move to one side or the other (or anyplace in between) to represent their own opinions, feelings, or choices about the issue. They discuss their choices with those around them. Participants on each side can also take turns commenting about their choices in a whole group discussion.

### **What Does Take-a-Stand Do?**

*Take-a-Stand* can be an intense, rich, and thought-provoking learning experience. With this activity, learners can:

- **Recognize** important, topic-related concepts and issues.
- **Analyze** their own perceptions of these concepts and issues.
- **Take** an instant position on a topic-related issue.

- **Refine** their own opinions based on the small group discussions about the concepts and issues.
- **Evaluate** the perceptions and opinions of others and whether or not these will be useful to know.
- **Synthesize** what they've discussed into new ways of perceiving, thinking, and acting.
- **Use** both kinesthetic (movement) and spatial (visual) learning to increase retention.
- **Build** positive social and psychological connections among small groups.
- **Strengthen** the learning community of the class in a positive, low-risk way.
- **Time:** 5 – 15 minutes. With only five minutes, do one *Take-a-Stand*, with one statement or issue. Keep the processing time at the end fairly short (a 60-second *Shout-Out* works fine). For the 10 or 15-minute version, you can fit in two or three *Take-a-Stand* rounds with more than one issue or statement. Learners move quickly for each statement, and discuss each choice with a 60-second *Pair-Share*. You lead a short, whole group discussion at the end of the *Take-a-Stand* rounds.

### Take-a-Stand Instructions

- ### Getting Ready
- **Materials:** Instead of just explaining what each side of the room represents, you may also want to give learners that information in written form. If so, you will need wall charts, overhead transparencies, or computer slides.
  - **Set-Up:** Make sure there is enough space in the room for participants to move to one side of the room or the other, or in-between (for example, large aisles and empty side areas). A large breakout area in the back of the room or hallway would also suffice.
  - **Group Size:** To make the activity worth the time, the minimum size group should be about a dozen. There is no maximum limit.
  - Explain to the participants what each side of the room represents. Examples are: strongly agree, strongly disagree (for topic-related opinion statements); lots of experience, a little experience (for job-related statements such as use of technology or specific job skills); resident experts, experts-in-training (for experienced employees and new-hires); yes, no (for simple questions). The middle of the room can represent “Undecided,” “Need more information,” or “Middle-of-the-road.”
  - Instruct learners that they are going to stand and move to the side of the room that most represents their perception or opinion about the stated issue, or answer to your stated question. Then tell them the issue, question, or statement. For example, in a customer service training an issue might be: “What is the appropriate way to handle a customer service complaint?” A question might be: “Does this situation constitute poor customer service (name the situation)?” A statement might be: “The best way to

handle poor customer service is to fire the employee who is responsible.”

- Once all learners are standing in their chosen places, instruct them to form small standing groups and discuss why they chose to stand in this particular spot. They can also share their own perceptions and opinions of the choices they made.
- Process the whole activity by asking for comments from both sides and from those standing in the middle. You can also process the activity by alternating sides (first a comment from one side, then from the other, etc.).
- If time allows, have standing groups reform into mixed small groups, with each side represented within each group. Have the mixed groups continue the discussion for a few minutes longer.
- When learners return to their seats, they (or you) can summarize some of the important points from the small and large group discussions. Or they can take a minute or two to do a *Think-and-Write* about what they learned from the activity.

### Take-a-Stand Variations

- **On a Scale of 1 - 10.** The space between each side of the room can be a continuum from one extreme to another. For example: one side stands for the number 1 (“I don’t know anything about this topic”) and the other side for the number 10 (“I know everything there is to know about this topic”). Participants

can stand anywhere on this continuum from 1 - 10.

- **Four Corners.** Instead of using the rooms' two sides to represent topic-related statements, you can use the rooms' four corners. For example, the corners stand for “Strongly agree, strongly disagree; moderately agree, moderately disagree.” The middle is “Haven’t decided yet.” Or the corners stand for four jobs, four levels of experience, four issues (“Stand by the most important one”), or four concepts to learn more about (“Stand by the one that interests you the most”).
- **Take the Pulse.** To check how the learners are feeling about an issue, ask them to stand on the side of the room that best represents their feelings: strong feelings about this versus no feelings about this. Or to check how they are feeling about the training, the sides could represent “All is well - carry on” versus “Stop and talk - I have some concerns.”

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### About the Author

Sharon Bowman is a veteran trainer, teacher, and author of seven popular books, including her two newest books: *Using Brain Science to Make Training Stick* (2011) and *Training from the BACK of the Room* (2009). Over 90,000 of her books are in print. Log onto her website at [www.Bowperson.com](http://www.Bowperson.com) for free book excerpts and articles.