

Hotwashes

What is a hotwash?

It is a review of any team effort after the work is completed. It is commonly used after completing a meeting, event, deliverable production, project, or proposal. The standard format is a discussion by participants and/or facilitators, project managers, etc covering three questions

1. What went well about the meeting, project or event? For example hotwashing a short meeting might cover things like agenda, content, participation, actions recorded
2. What went less well? Again taking a meeting as an example reviewers might comment on things like not listening, talking over each other, paying more attention to BlackBerries than the meeting
3. What to do differently next time? The reviewers of a meeting might recommend things like shorten the meeting, have a timekeeper, 'have the meeting in the meeting' (that is don't leave the meeting and say something different outside it than you said inside it)

The film company Pixar hotwashings weekly during a film production and demands that each person in each review identify at least five things that did not go well in making the film that week, as well as five that did.

Why do a hotwash?

- It is a process used to review a task for purposes of quality assurance.
- It is also an opportunity to create an open space that is about honesty, learning, exploration, and sharing within the organization.
- It is an opportunity and mechanism for the best of GSA's culture and values to come alive.
- It is a chance to dig deep into an experience and sift out nuances and nuggets that can teach us about being effective professionals, teams, and collaborators.

NOTE: Hotwashes are only as effective as the participants. Each individual in each hotwash has both an opportunity and a responsibility to fill the created open space with value and significance. If this does not happen the hotwash is reduced to a pro forma exercise that catalogues cosmetic points.

Given the enormous value of hotwashing, ideally it should be a common GSA practice.

- ☑ Everyone should be familiar with the process and able to launch a hotwash.
- ☑ Everyone should be capable of taking hotwashing notes.
- ☑ All significant events should be hotwashed.

- ☑ There should be monthly business unit discussion of the health and lessons of hotwashing during the previous month.

Where does a hotwash originate?

All military members are familiar with using exercises as a training tool. It's a tool the military utilizes on a frequent basis to ensure personnel are prepared to defend, rescue, react and survive in a variety of scenarios.

After the exercise an evaluation is made to determine how well the exercise went. At Dobbins, a military establishment, this evaluation is commonly referred to as the hot wash.

"The hot wash gives units a means to get feedback on how they performed in an exercise or event," said Ms. Josephine Atkins-Scafe, Emergency Management acting chief. It provides the participants with "something tangible to take back to their units to correct any developing adverse trends that may impact resources and operations."

"The goal with any of our exercises is to train the way we fight and to assess our ability to respond to various emergency situations," said Lt. Col. John M. Vallrugo, 94th Airlift Wing performance planner and exercise evaluator team chief.

The hot wash usually occurs at the end of an exercise or operation. It can also occur at the end of each phase of an exercise or operation or at the end of each day or work shift.

"The main purpose of a hot wash is to identify strengths and weaknesses of the response to a given event," said Colonel Vallrugo. "This leads to another governmental phase known as lessons learned. This is intended to guide future responses in a direction to avoid repeating errors that were made in previous exercises."