Hands-on Learning Activity: Ladder of Inference

**Purpose:** To understand the thinking process we go through when making a decision and practice identifying when our internal processes may prevent us from taking rational action.

**Materials:**
- Ladder of inference slides
- Scenario Cards
- Pens/Pencils for participants

**Time to Complete:** 15 minutes

**Facilitator Instructions:**
Prepare ahead: Print and cut out Scenario Cards and organize by volunteer role prior to session beginning.

- Participants work independently and will share their reflections to the larger group at the end
- Play the video: Rethinking Thinking [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJLqOclPqis](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJLqOclPqis)
- Use a projector to display the Ladder of Inference and group instructions
- Summarize the information provided in the video:
  - The ladder illustrates what goes on in our thoughts from the time we receive information to the time we make a decision to act
  - What happens as we climb the rungs of the ladder is not visible to the outside; only “what happened” and the actions we take. Everything in between is an internal process
  - Today we will be reading some scenarios, and using the Ladder of Inference to identify how the information in the scenario fits into the Ladder
- Break the attendees up into groups according to role. Groups should have approximately 4-6 members
  - You may have more than one group representing each role
  - Volunteers with more than one role can decide which role they most closely identify with.
  - Volunteers who are they only representative of their role may choose to participate with another group. The skills being discussed are consistent across the groups; the scenarios are targeted but not exclusive.
- Pass out to each group a scenario card that fits their role. Groups will have two minutes to review their scenario card.
• Tell participants
  – In each group we will be working up the Ladder of Inference starting with selected reality. Your group will have three minutes to work up the ladder of inference using the questions on the slide.
  – After three minutes we will ask each group to share out the results of their conversation.
• When participants share out:
  – Each group selects on spokesperson
  – The spokesperson summarizes the group’s discussion, and what alternative courses of action may have been taken
  – Remind participants:
    – The Ladder of Inference helps us slow down our thinking so we can better reflect on our assumptions
• Ask participants:
  – What is a way you can see this applying to your Operational Volunteer position with GSSEM? Are there common conversations where slowing down your trip up the ladder can help you respond in a productive way?

**Conclusion:**
Jumping too quickly up the Ladder of Inference can prematurely shut down a conversation. When we take a moment to consider how our internal processes impact our actions we can identify opportunities to make balanced decisions.
Community Events Coordinator
I am a Community Events Coordinator presenting about our need for a girl-led events planning committee in our community. Doris, an experienced Troop Leader sitting at the end of the table, turns her morose eyes away from me and puts her hand to her mouth. She seems bored out of her mind. She doesn't ask any questions until I'm almost done, when she breaks in “I think we should wait until next year”. Everyone starts to shuffle papers and put notes away. Doris obviously thinks I'm incompetent – which is a shame, because our community is in need of new events! Now that I think of it, she’s never liked my ideas. Clearly, Doris wants to disrupt all of my efforts. By the time I take my seat, I’ve made a decision: I’m not going to propose anything again to any group that includes Doris.

Leader Support Coordinator
I’m the LSC of my district and I’m at yet another meeting where the same four people show up. I’ve sent multiple reminders about the meetings, it’s on Facebook, and I know it’s on the calendar too. But still, I get the same people—no one new ever comes. I don’t get it—we have such valuable information at these meetings, but people just don’t seem to want it. The leaders in my district are lazy and have no desire to learn more about Girl Scouts and how things are supposed to be done. I don’t even know who is going to step up to lead in the future if no one can seem to get it together now. By the time the meeting ends I’ve decided that if attendance doesn’t pick up, I’m not hosting any meetings next year.

Leader Support Coordinator
I am an LSC and I am running my District’s Cookie Meeting for the year. At this meeting I will explain the important dates for the season, this year’s resources and contacts. As I am explaining Sarah, a long term Girl Scout volunteer, and decides to take this moment to share how terrible her troop’s cookie experience was last year. Sarah’s statements have affected the energy of room, many of new leaders look confused and nervous. This type of thinking can tear Volunteers apart and cause more issues – what is Sarah thinking, trying to derail the meeting in this way? I decide that I am not going to call on Sarah in a meeting ever again, especially if this is the attitude she is going to bring to the situation!

Leader Support Coordinator
I am a Leader Support coordinator for a district. One Troop Leader rarely attends district meetings, and when she does she rushes in at the last minute. She spends most of the meeting preoccupied with her cell phone. When I ask the leaders for input about their upcoming community-wide troop service project, she only chimes in to respond that the proposed dates won’t work due to a school break. She’s obviously not interested in participating with her community. I know this type—she is probably one of those who gives the bare minimum to her troop because she’s taken too much on. I’m sure I’ll be hearing complaints from parents saying that all the girls do is color during meetings. They probably haven’t even learned the Promise & Law. Next time an older troop asks for suggestions of younger troops they can work with to earn their bridging award, I won’t even consider this troop, they’ll be too disorganized to be worth suggesting.
Troop Organizer/Troop Organizer Coach
I'm talking to families about Girl Scouting and I'm telling the very moving story of the girl with social anxiety and how she improved in our troop. A couple of the parents are sitting back with their arms folded and looking at the ceiling. It's like they can't wait for me to be done talking. I bet they'll leave without signing up. Or else they'll sign up and try to exclude girls who aren't comfortable in the troop. Maybe I shouldn't have told this story. I'd better hurry through the rest of the presentation and get done with it. These people don't want to hear about the benefits of Girl Scouting.

Troop Organizer/Troop Organizer Coach
I'm talking to the Recruitment Specialist about a flyer I put together. She's got a pained look on her face. She doesn't like my flyer. Who is she to criticize me? It's a decent flyer. I spent a lot of time on it. Now she tells me that I should go to the storefront and have THEM print the flyer, after all the work I did! She said my flyer isn't branded. What does that even mean? She clearly doesn't appreciate all the time I put into making this flyer. This is the last time I'm going to show her a flyer I made!

Adult Learning Facilitator
I was invited to present a learning module at a district meeting, and only two people showed up. This district reached out to me to put on this training, and they couldn't be bothered to tell the leaders about it. I don't get it—we have such valuable information at these meetings, but people just don't seem to want it. These leaders just aren't interested in learning; they want to do the bare minimum! That settles it, the next time an LSC reaches out to me about putting on a training, I'm just going to say “no!”

Volunteer National Awards Committee Member
Every year we get a pile of awards submitted at the last minute, and every year it's the same! Only a few nominators take the time to put together a quality stack of letters. Everyone else just puts in the bare minimum. They can't be bothered to proofread the letters, or to find letter writers who actually have something to say. It's like they don't even care if this person receives this award! I've already decided; the next time I hear someone talk about their awards, I'm going to tell them exactly what's wrong with this process!

Community Finance Coordinator
It's been two months since their event, but troop 12345 still hasn't sent in their financial report and receipts! How do they expect me to balance the bank account without that information? They obviously only wanted to host the event, and don't care at all about following the process. Since punctuality doesn't seem to matter to them, next time they want reimbursement, I'm going to wait two months before sending them their check!