



Exploring Leadership

PROBLEM SOLVING: BRAINSTORMING

Brainstorming is an informal way to solve problems by encouraging people to share ideas—even ones that might seem a little crazy. These unexpected ideas often lead to the best solutions. By letting creativity flow, brainstorming helps you approach problems in new and effective ways.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

Discuss the old proverb: “There’s more than one way to crack a nut.” When was the last time you faced a problem that required a new solution? How many ideas did you come up with to solve it?

When you brainstorm with others, every idea counts—no matter how unusual it seems. The key is to avoid judging anyone’s contributions because the goal is to get as many ideas as possible on the table. Sharing freely creates a safe space where everyone feels comfortable, and often, the best solutions come from ideas that seemed impossible at first.

KEY OBJECTIVES:

- Practice brainstorming imaginative solutions to problems.
- Recognize situations where brainstorming leads to better results.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- A random household item
- Paper
- Pens or pencils
- A whiteboard or large paper
- Markers

EXPLORATION ACTIVITIES:

In this engaging lesson, you’ll do two creative activities designed to boost your brainstorming and problem-solving skills. You may pause between activities to reflect on the first, or reflect on both at the end to see what you’ve learned about thinking outside the box.

FACILITATOR TIPS:

- Encourage participants to think creatively and outside the box.
- Remind the group that this is a no-judgment zone, where all ideas are welcome. Judging ideas too early can limit creativity and block new possibilities.

Activity 1: Many Uses Challenge - Brainstorm creative ways to use a common object and think outside the box.

- Hand out a sheet of paper and a pen to each participant.
- Show a random household object, like a fork, shoe, or rubber band.
- Ask everyone to brainstorm all possible uses for the object. For example, a fork can be used to eat food, comb hair, mix ingredients, or even create art.
- Write down as many ideas as you can think of.
- After a few minutes, invite everyone to share their ideas.
- Discuss how thinking outside the box can lead to surprising solutions.



EXPLORATION ACTIVITIES (CONTINUED)

Activity 2: Word Chain Challenge (Shiritori) -Work as a team to build a word chain.

- Shiritori is a fun and fast-paced Japanese word game where players build a chain of words—each new word has to begin with the last letter of the word before it.
- Form teams to build word chains together.
- Assign a starting letter. For example, Team A starts with “apple,” and Team B starts with “banana.”
- Rules: Start with the assigned letter, and each new word must begin with the last letter of the previous word.
 - (e.g., donkey → yacht → trip → parent → tea).
- Take turns writing words, building the chain on the board or large paper.
- Set a time limit, and have teams write as many words as possible before time runs out.
- Count the words. The team with the longest chain wins!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- How did brainstorming help you during this activity?
- What did you learn about the brainstorming process?
- What was challenging about this activity, and how did you overcome it?

APPLICATION DISCUSSION:

- Where will you use brainstorming in your life?
- Why is it important to share all your ideas, even the crazy ones?
- How can you practice brainstorming?
- When is it most important to use this skill?
- What jobs require brainstorming, and how can this skill help you succeed?



CONCLUSION:

In life, you'll face many challenges that need creative solutions. Brainstorming with friends, co-workers, or team members can make solving problems easier and more enjoyable. One key is to avoid judgment while generating ideas—just let them flow! As a leader, fostering a brainstorming environment not only inspires creativity but also empowers others to contribute their best ideas. By practicing brainstorming, you'll build stronger problem-solving and leadership skills, setting yourself up for success in any situation.

Utah State University is an affirmative action/equal opportunity institution and is committed to a learning and working environment free from discrimination. For USU's non-discrimination notice, see equity.usu.edu/non-discrimination.

REFERENCES

- Mind Tools: Brainstorming: <https://www.mindtools.com/brainstm.html>
- 10 Brainstorming Activities for Kids, Adults and Anyone: <https://allesl.com/brainstorming-activities/>