

Communication Skills: Brainstorming

Description

Brainstorming is a technique used to encourage group creativity and to generate ideas or new bits of knowledge.

Learners

Ideally learners will sit in a semi-circle or other configuration that allows everyone to focus on a chalkboard, flip chart, or other central location where ideas will be posted.

Equipment

A flip chart with markers; overhead projector or ELMO, or chalk board is needed to record ideas. A clock or timer is helpful.

Facilitator

The facilitator has three responsibilities:

1. To ensure that everyone has an opportunity to participate
2. To ensure that the generation of ideas keeps moving
3. To ensure that ideas are offered in a nonjudgmental environment

Instructions

1. The facilitator announces the goal of the brainstorming session.
2. The session can be timed to last a set period of time, generally a shorter rather than longer time is best. If brainstorming still occurs when time is up, it can be extended. Also, when ideas begin to lag, the facilitator can call a half.
3. The facilitator reviews brainstorming rules:
 - a. ideas should be suggested quickly
 - b. “piggybacking” is encouraged; that is, an idea stimulates another idea
 - c. no criticism of ideas is allowed during the brainstorming process
 - d. bizarre ideas are welcomed; the crazier the better
4. To begin brainstorming, ask “Who would like to begin?” Go around in a circle the first time and then open up the brainstorming to anyone who wishes to contribute.
5. As ideas are thrown out, write them in a central visible location
6. At the end of the brainstorming session, distill the list: delete repetitive and frivolous ideas; prioritize remaining ideas and select the best choice(s).

References

Osborn, A. (1959). *Applied imagination*. NY: Scribner's.

Hurt, F. (November 1994). Better brainstorming. *Training and Development*, pp. 57-59.