STARCLUB NT

How to hold a Problem Solving Meeting

How it works

As many ideas as possible are recorded but NOT debated.
- Display the ideas put forward
- Ideas that are not clear to the group should be clarified
- Ask the meeting group to do this, not just the person who put the idea forward.

The leader's role

Leaders must be enthusiastic about brainstorming and the positive results it may generate. They should be prepared to share enthusiasm, be able to generate noise, laughter and offbeat ideas, while not imposing their own views.

They must be able to write quickly and clearly as the ideas flow or alternatively a scribe may be appointed.

They should be uninhibited and accept and record all ideas.

They should be able to persuade the group to accept that any judgement of ideas will be deferred until after the brainstorming session is completed.

If your problem-solving meetings often get off on the wrong foot and end with no benefit to your club/group, then this resource is for you.

Three Ways to hold a Problem Solving Meeting

There are three easy ways these problem-solving meetings can be conducted, by:
- Brainstorming;
- Discussion group; or
- Working group.

Though these meetings may not be formally chaired, leadership is essential if they are to achieve the results you want.

NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is quite different from the formal debate of business meetings.
It is used to search for as many ideas as possible – quantity before quality.

What it achieves

Brainstorming is simply getting the greatest number of ideas from a group of people in a short time. It encourages everybody to contribute ideas uninhibited by formality. Participants can put forward unusual proposals for initiatives or problem solving without the fear of ridicule or embarrassment.

Quite often, worthwhile ideas surface in such a relaxed forum where they would not in a more formal environment.

Steps to follow for successful brainstorming:

1. State the topic

2. Outline the rules
   - Concise statements are required (6–8 words)
   - No discussion or debate, apart from clarification of ideas
   - All ideas are written, so all members can see their contributions
   - Strict time limit is stated.
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3. Start
   - Facilitator invites members to put forward ideas
   - Don't push at the start
   - Encourage and praise contributors
   - Be aware of repetition
   - Don't allow debate at this stage.

4. Stop
   - Finish on an 'upbeat'
   - Don't drag it out.

5. Getting Consensus
   There are many approaches. For example:
   - Put the members into small groups and ask each group to select its four priorities. Then get a report from each group. Put aside the least favoured and vote on the top four
   - Vote by a show of hands and by this means put aside the least favoured
   - Allow each member four votes. Each member then writes 4-3-2-1 against their top four priorities. In this way, you can identify the most favoured ideas.

6. Summary
   Clearly write up the group's final consensus in words they agree to.
   If a specific action is proposed, identify a person to follow it up and when.

Discussion groups

Discussion group meetings differ from formal business meetings in the way they are conducted and what they achieve.

They are in fact 'ideas' meetings in which high levels of motivation are maintained. Special care must be taken to see that the problem, and not any individual, is tackled. Formal debate is not used to reach decisions.

What they achieve

- Involvement by your members
- A sharing of ideas
- Identification of specific club/group issues
- A free flow of thoughts
- Members' pleasure in contributing
- Better understanding of club/group problems
- New approaches to club/group projects
- Enjoyment of a firm 'closure'.

How they are run

The meeting is structured so there is continual focus on the problem or problems you are there to solve.

It is important to:
- identify specific problems;
- maintain a high level of motivation; and
- ensure the problem is tackled – not personalities.

Participants should emerge with a better understanding of issues within the organisation.

The leader's role

As in all meetings, the leader's role is crucial.
He/she must pick a group with the skills and ability to work together to reach a solution.
The leader is a contributor and records and reports ideas.
An effective leader/coordinator must be able to move the group towards action.
Discussion groups will not be effective if you don't have the right leader.

Working groups

Working groups find solutions to problems and then set about implementing them.

Not as free-ranging as brainstorming sessions, nor as ideas-driven as discussion group meetings, they achieve measurable results.

Participants take an issue or problem, examine it, provide a written answer, which is discussed, voted on and then – if appropriate – acted upon.

What they achieve

Working group sessions:
- provide the opportunity to explore any issue fully and establish the mechanism to deal with it;
- involve each and every member of the group in providing an answer, without pressure;
- overcome the common hurdle of dominant, vocal group members inhibiting the contributions of others; and
- emerge with a firm action to be followed.

How they are run

Up to nine people are chosen to form the working group – any more than this is unwieldy and often counter-productive.

The leader identifies the issue or problem in a single sentence on a whiteboard or butcher's paper.

Each member records his or her solution/s on notepaper. The working group reports in rotation and solutions are written on the board or butcher's paper.
Potential solutions are then discussed, put forward for preliminary vote, clarified with further discussion if necessary, voted on again and accepted as a point for necessary action.

The leader's role
- Plan the meeting.
- Have the ability to involve all the participants.
- Have the skill to draw discussion to a 'closure'.

He or she will structure the meeting so it can focus on key issues and engage in creative problem-solving.

Other resources
Find more information Committee Management and Growing Your Sport click here.