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INTRODUCTION

What a great joy it is to expand the mind so that it has a greater potential for processing information! Brainstorming is a unique procedure that stimulates the intellect. It is a learned skill—a cumulative process developed by practice over a period of time. Brainstorming involves the simultaneous processes of thinking, listening and responding.

Brainstorming teaches individuals to think comparatively, divergently and creatively. It is a technique to stretch the imagination and energize the mind. It becomes a challenging activity and a method for problem solving.

Actual measurement of mental growth is difficult; progress in brainstorming, however, can be observed over periods of time by working with the same group of individuals and video-taping or tape-recording sessions. These before-and-after recordings can be scrutinized for 1) variety of responses, 2) rapidity of responses, 3) uniqueness of ideas and 4) an increased complexity of ideas.

Who Should Brainstorm?

Brainstorming may be introduced to children as young as five. Brainstorming is also an appropriate activity for adults, and topics in this manual may be used for all ages. Even the easier Level I topics may generate innovative responses from adults, so these subjects should not be excluded as topics for mature brainstormers.

Level II topics are generally more difficult and are therefore suggested for older students. Keep in mind, however, that all topics in this book should be selected with knowledge of individual students and their abilities and interests. For example, you may find that some Level II topics are appropriate for primary age students, and that some Level II topics can be used successfully with older students.

Getting Started

Instructions for the Leader

Brainstorming may be a planned or spontaneous activity. Any group of three or more individuals may participate; an ideal group size is five to seven. If more wish to brainstorm, teams may be formed. (Read further for team guidelines.)

The leader should select a quiet place since music, passing people, traffic noise and conversations are distractors. A carpeted area is ideal to muffle chair and foot noises. Have participants sit in a circle to ensure equality and to enable individuals to see and hear each other.

Select the topic and announce it to the group. Repeat it—with clarification, if necessary. Allow a one minute thinking time of silence during which those participating stockpile ideas. Suggest that this thinking time be used to list mentally five or six ideas so unique that no one else will think of them.

For example, if the brainstorming topic presented is to “name all the things you can think of that are green”, an individual should skip the obvious ideas that would come to him readily, such as “trees”, “grass” and a “magic marker”. He would be better prepared by focussing on responses such as “greenback”, “gangrene”, “green with envy” and the song title “Greensleeves”.

Ask participants to respond with one appropriate idea each time they have a turn. Participants are not to repeat what others have said or skip a turn. Once brainstorming has begun, all are quiet except for the one whose turn it is to speak. Each individual is to respond quickly and very briefly. Participants may not prompt one another. Each response should be only explicit enough to convey the general idea. Providing detail takes precious time from the timed activity.

If a participant repeats an idea previously mentioned, merely say, “Repeat,” indicating to the speaker that the idea has already been expressed. The participant then responds with another idea.

A Practice Session

To familiarize participants with the brainstorming procedure, the leader can try some practice sessions using the following format. A subject is introduced and the leader makes certain that everyone fully understands the topic. Allow a one minute thinking time and then have participants raise their hands when they have an idea. Merely nod toward the individual wishing to respond. The procedure encourages rapid, brief, specific responses, provides a relatively relaxed atmosphere, and builds both confidence and enthusiasm.

The following tape-recorded session demonstrates a typical presentation of directions by the leader and actual student responses for a class of year three students. Eight children participated.

Leader: Class, after I give you your subject, you will have one minute to think, and then you will have three minutes in which to share your ideas. Whenever you have an idea to share, raise your hand. Your subject today is to complete this sentence, "I promise I'll...". What do you sometimes use as promises? These can be promises you make at school, at home, to your parents, to your friends, and so on. Again, the subject is to complete this sentence, "I promise I'll...". Are there any questions about the topic? *(Pause for student response.)* You now have one minute for thinking time.

Mandy: Do we have to repeat the first words each time?

Leader: No, do not repeat the first words. That would take too much of your time.

Begin one minute quiet thinking time.

Participants may not help or coach one another.

Leader: Your thinking time is over. We are ready to begin.

The Leader sets the timer.