



THE TOOL:

BRAINSTORMING

EFFECTIVELY USED FOR WHICH OF THE SMART RECOVERY® FOUR POINTS?

Building Motivation Coping with Urges Problem Solving Lifestyle Balance

EQUIPMENT REQUIRED: Post-it Notes or Flip chart/Markers or Blackboard & Chalk

WHAT IT IS: Brainstorming is an excellent process often used by many groups (both SMART Recovery® groups and other corporations and organizations) who wish to seek fresh solutions to problems.

WHEN IT IS USED: (Common question or statement that may prompt using this tool)

When a member of the group has a particularly challenging problem – one for which there isn't an obvious answer. This problem or situation may fall within any of the four points of the SMART Recovery® program.

EXAMPLE OF ITS USE IN A SMART RECOVERY® MEETING:

The idea behind brainstorming is to encourage thinking – thinking which should include the notion that ***no suggestion is too wild or unwanted***. And... there is to be ***no criticism of any suggestion***, regardless of its perceived lack of merit. Suggest to individuals that they plug their minds into a light bulb socket – to go beyond common thinking.

When the challenging problem has arisen, and when all participants are seated and comfortable, the process is explained which includes the following:

1. There's a designated leader (the Facilitator can fill this role).
2. The leader identifies the problem for the group's consideration.
3. The leader goes around the room asking each participant to share an idea (regardless of how wild it is, or how "out of the bounds of normal thinking" it may sound – encourage creative thinking – remember, people thought the Wright Brothers were crazy).
4. Each participant may provide an idea or pass.
5. The leader writes down each idea (post-it notes are great, but a chalkboard or flip chart will do).
6. No one may comment or criticize any idea which is shared. (It's fun to have wadded paper handy – if someone criticizes your idea, you may carefully launch the wad their way.)
7. Continue to go around the room until no additional ideas surface.
8. The leader reads through the list, and if anyone needs clarification on the idea, it is provided at this time.

This process is designed to be fun, and to encourage creative thinking!

Once all of the process steps are accomplished, you will likely have a number of ideas documented. It's useful to take an additional step, referred to as "affinity analysis" to help the individual leave the meeting with some ideas to put into play to overcome the problem or situation. Here's how affinity analysis works:

1. The Facilitator reviews all of the ideas and clarifies the idea, if necessary.
2. Usually the ideas will fall within some major themes or issues. Group commonly-themed ideas together. (This is where post-it notes come in handy...you can stick the common post-it notes together, but if you used a flip chart or blackboard, you can write down headings and place common ideas beneath the heading.)
3. Creative thinking continues to be encouraged – you may find that Betty and John disagree into which category the idea fits. If no agreement is reached, duplicate the idea in both categories.
4. Once everyone agrees with the categories and corresponding ideas, you may wish to ask the group to identify the area that they collectively believe will be most useful to the individual – a starting point that he/she may use when leaving the meeting to overcome the problem or situation.

Remember, the results of brainstorming are dependent upon the individuals gathered and their frame of mind. Two separate groups would likely come up with two sets of unique results. There is no "right" or "wrong" set of recommended solutions/grouping of ideas.

Note: Post-it notes work well with small groups, where individuals can gather around and see the ideas of the other participants. The advantage is that participants can build on each other's ideas.

Acknowledgments: Thank you Team Member Bob Long