

CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

Leadership Briefs and Reflections



Brainstorming - Rules of the Road

Applying some simple principles when brainstorming can make all the difference!

Leading a team in brainstorming is a powerful way to achieve creative energy...and solutions! A few simple "rules of the road" can ensure that brainstorming sessions are creative and productive. First, establish a few essential norms around brainstorming:

- Defer judgment by generating suggestions without any evaluation or limits (there will be time for that later, but it impedes good brainstorming);
- Stay with it, as the best ideas tend to come when the obvious ideas are on the table and a team is digging deeply to identify new thinking and ideas;
- Piggyback on others' ideas (but don't evaluate them);
- Encourage out of the box ideas;
- Stay focused on the topic or question at hand by thinking openly and expansively while staying focused on the target topic.

Reflection Questions:

- How can judgment get in the way of creative brainstorming?
- How can open-ended, creative brainstorming deepen creativity and problem-solving at a school, district, county office of education, or other organization?

Helpful Tips and Tricks:

- Loosen teams' creative muscles by brainstorming around a fun topic prior to the actual topic at hand (such as planning the perfect vacation, planning a staff retreat where there is an unlimited budget, or another fun practice topic).
- Establish the rules of brainstorming up front so that teams set aside their evaluative lenses for the initial brainstorming phase.
- Provide gentle reminders when team members begin to evaluate or limit responses (Example: "We can't do that" or "That solution would be too expensive"). There will be time for all those considerations when a plan is actually designed. Remember that the goal of brainstorming is to generate wild ideas – and as many as possible!
- After brainstorming, group or cluster ideas and look for the themes that emerged.