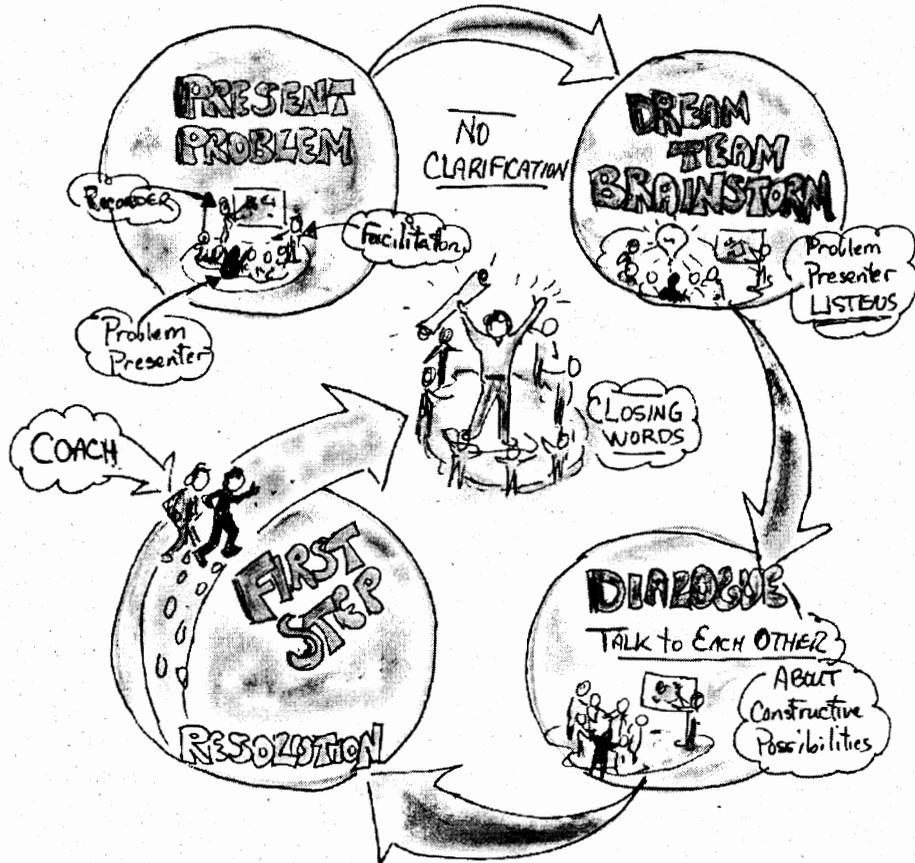


Solution Circles

SOLUTION CIRCLE GETTING UNSTUCK



A Solution Circle is a straightforward and efficient tool that helps people to get "unstuck" from a problem in life or work.

Time: 30 Minutes

Roles: Problem presenter; Process Facilitator to keep the process on task and on time; Graphic Recorder, and 3-9 amazingly creative solution team members. The more diverse the team, the better; sometimes people who know nothing in particular about an issue have ideas that spark real creativity.

Step One: (6 minutes)

The Problem Presenter will have six uninterrupted minutes to outline the problem. The job of the Process Facilitator is to keep time and make sure no one interrupts. Get people in a tight circle so they can hear and see each other.

The recorder takes notes. The brainstorm team listens. If the Problem Presenter stops talking before the six minutes elapse, everyone else stays silent until the six minutes pass. The Problem Presenter gets six uninterrupted minutes. The Process Facilitator holds the silent space for the problem presenter.

Step Two: (6 minutes)

This is a brainstorm. Everyone chimes in with ideas about creative solutions to the problem that was just presented. It is not a time to clarify the problem or to ask questions. It is not a time to give speeches, lectures or advice. The Process Facilitator must make sure this is a brainstorm. Everyone gets a chance to give his or her brilliant ideas. No one can dominate. The Problem Presenter listens - without interrupting. He/she must not talk or respond. We often give the person masking tape to seal their

lips (symbolically) and facilitate their listening. It's hard to just listen!

Step Three: (6 minutes)

Now the team holds a discussion with the Problem Presenter. This is the time to explore and clarify the problem. Focus on the positive points only and not on what cannot be done. The problem presenter leads off by identifying ideas that seem interesting, or different, or worth a try, or worth refining into possibilities for action.

Step Four: (6 minutes)

The Problem Presenter and the group decide on first steps that are possible within the next 3 days (and preferably within 24 hours). This is critical. Research shows that unless a first step is taken almost immediately, people do not get out of their ruts. The Problem Presenter chooses a coach from the group who volunteers to phone or see the person within the agreed time (1 to 3 days) and check if he/she took their first step. This creates a positive supportive pressure that helps people get into action.

Finally, the team does a round of words (each person uses one word to describe the experience) and the Recorder gives the completed record to the Problem Presenter. If the group is large, the teams return to the main group, debrief and continue.

Helpful Hints:

- * Obey the rules - it works for you.
- * The crisper the facilitation, the better the solution circle.
- * Don't let people 'clarify' between step one and two.
- * In Step Three, focus on the positive doable items -not what has already failed.
- * Insist that people listen.
- * Use the time pressure to push through - there is no time to waste.

Outcomes:

In our experience, people often find that this exercise generates action. It does not guarantee a solution, but often gets people unstuck, at least pointing to a different way to look at the situation or to a next logical step.

People sometimes discover that by following the rules of the exercise and focusing on an issue with a small group, breakthroughs can occur quickly. It is possible to move through heavy constraints and be liberated to try new options.

Caution: The Solution Circle a great tool to use when you aren't sure where to begin. It is quick and can get people focused constructively. However, if you know the problem you are dealing with is complex you may choose to move directly to a MAP, PATH or other more comprehensive tool.

Marsha's Challenge:

Are you trying fast paced group problem-solving techniques?

If not, why not?

If you are worried about using Solution Circles yourself, who in your team will you ask to initiate them?