



CPS Tools in Action

By Keith Kaminski

As I continue to learn and deepen my understanding for making a difference with Creative Problem Solving (CPS), I am impressed with what people are able to accomplish while using this method. Through observation, and even some of my own facilitation, I often hear people say they could not have gone as far as they did without using CPS.

This article highlights two of the most basic CPS tools in action, Brainstorming and Selecting Hits. These vignettes come from my portfolio of experience with facilitating groups. My hope is that you, the reader, are able to take some of the insights shared here and use them to make a difference with CPS.

Brainstorming

A small church was facing a financial crisis. To help overcome this challenge, the rector requested that a dinner be held for all congregation members to pledge their tithing (tithing is a percentage of income donated for congregation pledges) for the coming year. The planning committee also decided to use the dinner as a way to dedicate and celebrate the completion of the new church kitchen. (Resources for this kitchen were donated from the will of a recently deceased church member.)

A dedicated planning committee of three, with facilitation support, came together to develop an action plan to help ensure the dinner was a success. Brainstorming was used to generate the action steps needed to host a successful dinner. During the meeting, a synergy was discovered to help promote this fundraising event. In addition, a follow-up plan was developed to visit congregation members who were not able to attend the dinner.

If you were to have walked into this room during the meeting, you might expect to see the walls covered with flip chart paper filled with post-it® notes. Actually, this team used Brainstorming as it was used before Post-it® notes. They had a conversation. The facilitator recorded action steps, reinforced the guidelines for generating options, and made sure only one person spoke at a time.

When it came time to focus, the members of the group were more interested in deciding who would do what, rather than figuring out when “what” needed to be done by. The group members went through all the actions that they had generated and volunteered for the actions that they would be

responsible to complete. Within 45 minutes, a plan of action, at an appropriate level of detail for the group's needs, was in place.

Having the actions listed, the group committee went to work to follow through on what they planned and, as a result, the dinner was a huge success. The congregation pledged more than what was expected. This dinner also helped to bring the church community closer. With the implementation of some additional programs, the Church's finances are now stable.

Key Insight from the experience:

- Many times, Post-It® notes can enable a more productive application of Brainstorming. However, it's very important to always take into consideration the needs of the client(s), the people involved, and situational factors such as time available and climate when using tools. Each CPS application is unique in its own way. What worked in a similar application may not be the best approach for the upcoming application.

Selecting Hits

The Brand Development Manager of a publishing company was running out of new product concepts. All of the promising ideas were already in the development pipeline. The client brought together a cross functional resource-group of nine to come up with more new product concepts. In just over two hours, over 500 new concepts had been generated. This group had no previous experience using CPS. To focus and select from the most promising ideas, the Selecting Hits tool was used.

After being briefed on the guidelines for focusing options, the client and resource-group members each received ten red "dots" to identify which options were on target. The group narrowed down from 500 to roughly 100 new product concepts. All of the "Hit" options were separated from the other options and placed together on a large board.

Another round of Hits began, only this time each person received six blue "dots". The group focused down from 100 options to the top 20 new product concepts.

In the final round, each person received one orange "dot" to select the best from the top 20. At the end of this meeting, the client had six promising new product concepts for further exploration.

Using multiple rounds of Hits during this particular meeting helped to make focusing more productive. The group members had enough Hits in each round to take the guidelines for focusing options seriously.

After the meeting, the facilitator worked with the client to develop the six promising concepts (using the ALUo). As a result, one of these concepts is now

under development. The others have been included in a reader survey to gauge interest.

Key Insight from the experience:

- There's no one-for-all solution or formula for deciding how many Hits to distribute to a group. Through some observation and my own experience where people have too many Hits (i.e. 35 Hits for each person with a menu of 500 options), they tend to squander their Hits, in that they don't spend the time to really think about what they are selecting. If focusing stops here, there's often too many options left to think about and as result, very little happens. In the opposite situation where people do not have enough Hits (i.e. three Hits for each person with a menu of 500 options), they tend to get frustrated at the large amount of time they have to spend carefully reviewing each option. This also has implications for the amount of time scheduled for the meeting. Again, it all comes down to considering the needs, the people, and the situation to be in the position to take the most appropriate approach.