

Problem-solving Story Circle

It is surprising how often our own past experience can help us solve really difficult problems – although it does take a little work to see the lessons clearly. Here is a simple approach to using experience to help resolve stubborn issues and problems.



- **SURFACE THE TOPIC**

5 min.

What dilemmas are you currently facing in your work? (People call out dilemmas and others raise a hand if they share them. Can be done as a game similar to “musical chairs” where people state a dilemma and those who share it must stand and find a new seat.)

Summarize the common themes and ask the group to choose one as a topic.

- **REFLECT & REMEMBER**

15 min.

What comes to mind when you think about _(the topic)_? What ideas does it bring up? (Give them a minute to think.) *(Let's use “convincing people” –getting buy-in, etc. – as an example.)*

What experiences have you had with “convincing people” or being convinced, in your life? What images does it bring to mind? Draw on your experiences at work, in school, at home – from current, recent or long past events. Consider successes, challenges, or situations that still puzzle you. (Allow a minute or two.)

Select one image or experience and re-create it in your mind in as much detail as you can. Where are you? Who else is there? What are you wearing? Try to recall all 5 senses. You might notice certain feelings, or that the situation meant something to you. Make a few notes if you like. (Allow another minute or two.)

Take another moment to recall the experience, then come back to the group. (Allow 30 seconds or so.)

- **EXPERIENCE-SHARING**

40 min.

For those who wish to share, we have time for 3-4 minutes each. The goal is to bring us into your experience in as much detail as you can – don't worry about making it into a “story”. For the rest of us, the goal is to offer our undivided attention.

Also, we need to set some ground rules: First, please listen to your instincts about what you're comfortable saying in the group. Secondly, let's keep what is said here confidential unless permission is given. And finally, let's not give advice unless specifically requested. Can we agree to those?

Who wants to start?

- **DIALOGUE**

25 min.

What did you notice? What themes or insights did the stories bring up? Please remember the ground rule about not giving advice. (Ask follow up questions as appropriate to surface themes, insights, and implications.)

- **CLOSING**

5 min.

What questions come to mind now?

What actions or commitments might make sense for you, based on what we learned today?

This same approach can be easily adapted for team transitions, kickoffs, etc.