LEADERSHIP INSPIRATIONS

Wordsmithing

Make as many words as possible

TIME
20-30 minutes

MATERIALS
Index cards, paper, writing utensils

TEAM STAGE
Storming, Norming, Performing

SUMMARY

This activity is a great way to have participants start to think about brainstorming, ideation, and problem solving. They will be tasked with making as many words as possible using a set of letters written on index cards. This activity comes with a twist that may add stress or conflict, providing an added layer to debrief.

SET UP

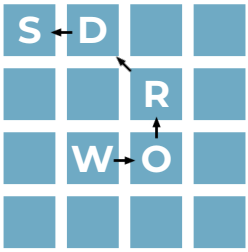
- Break your group up into smaller groups of four or five people each.
- Pass out 26 index cards, one blank piece of paper, and writing utensils to each small group.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Have each group set aside one index card to be used later.
- Tell groups that they will be writing one letter on each of the remaining 25 index cards. They can choose any letters that they think will allow them to form as many words as possible.
- They will only be able to use an index card once in any given word, which means they may decide to write down multiples of certain letters.
- Give groups five minutes to decide what letters they want to write on their index cards.
- After they have written down a letter on each index card, have them agree on a goal for how many words they think they can make out of their letters. They should write this goal on the last (26th) index card that they had set aside.
- Then, have groups put all of their cards together in a stack with the goal card on top.
- Collect the stacks and pass them back out to different small groups.
- Once everyone has a new stack of cards, tell groups that they will have seven minutes to try to reach their new goal with their new stack of cards.
- All words must be actual, known words (no acronyms, slang, etc.).
- Have them record the words they create on the blank piece of paper.

VARIATIONS

- For a second round, the facilitator can collect all index cards from the teams and lay them out in a grid pattern. Groups must identify as many words as possible in five minutes. The cards cannot be moved and all letters in the word must be connected. For example, the second letter would need to be above, below, to the left, to the right, or diagonal from the first letter.



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VARIATIONS *(continued)*

- Have the entire group agree on one set of 25 letters to use in this activity. Then use a random letter generator to choose one final letter for the group. Tell participants that this letter will be the letter that all words that the group creates must start with. Give participants five minutes to come up with as many words as possible using the 25 letters they agreed on and that start with the final letter from the generator.
- Lead this activity like a big crossword puzzle. After everyone has written down their 25 letters, let them know those will be their game pieces. One group will start by making a word on the floor with their index cards. Play will continue to the left and the next group will need to try to build a word off of the first team's word. If a team can't make a word they will be skipped. A team can only make one word per round. The first team to use all of their index cards wins.

Small Group: To facilitate this activity for a small group, have all participants agree on one set of 25 letters to use in the activity. Then have participants try to make as many words as possible in five minutes with those letters.

Online: To facilitate this activity virtually, create shared whiteboard spaces with a board for each group. Prepare each board with 25 digital sticky notes or spaces of the same color for groups to put their letter choices. Have a 26th space of a different color available for groups to put their goals for their number of words. Put participants into breakout rooms to agree on their letters and goal. Then, bring participants back to the main session room to assign each group a new board to work with. Put participants back into their breakout rooms to try to reach their new word goals. ***[click here for video]***

Asynchronous: To facilitate this activity asynchronously, have participants come up with their letters and goals on their own. Have them submit these to a shared folder in a digital file. Then, assign each participant a new set of letters and goal from another participant. Give them a certain amount of time to try to reach their new goals and submit their list of completed words to the shared folder.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- What:
  - How did you decide on the letters to write down on your index cards?
  - How did you approach the task of brainstorming words with your new letters?

- So What:
  - What helps a group to be able to brainstorm effectively?
  - Why is it important for us to be able to brainstorm?

- Now What:
  - What can we take from this activity to improve our own brainstorming processes?
  - What can we do as a group if we feel like we are stuck when brainstorming?

Facilitator Note: These questions can be used to guide your debrief, however, pick the questions that best match your group's experience and add or change questions as needed.

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