

Guidelines For Problem-Solving Meetings

J. Scott Armstrong

Maier, Norman R. F. (1963), *Problem Solving Discussions and Conferences* (New York: McGraw-Hill, out of print) still gets my vote as the best book ever published on how to run groups. It contains sane advice for effective meetings. I summarize it here.

- *Be problem-centered.* Keep any discussion problem-centered and avoid looking for excuses or seeking to blame others for a problem. Avoid saying things like, "That's a really stupid idea."
- *Explore alternatives.* Do not accept the first answer you hear as *the* answer. Ask, "What else should be considered?" "What else might we do?"
- *Record suggestions.* Keep track of all suggestions for solving a problem or making sense of an issue so that each may be explored fully.
- *Explore.* Explore a number of suggestions for addressing an issue, then probing and evaluative questions can be asked. These might include: "How would that work out?" "Do I understand the issue or do I need to search out more information?" "Am I mistaken in my assumptions about the issue?" "What are the advantages or disadvantages of each proposal?" "Is there a way to combine suggestions to generate an even better solution?"
- *Protect people.* Protect individuals from personal attacks and criticism, especially if they present minority or divergent viewpoints.
- *Understand and resolve differences.* Understand differences of opinions in the group and attempt to resolve them.