

## ***Relationship Communication Blocked? — Play the Brainstorming Game***

Do you and your partner ever feel that you're stuck, getting nowhere with an issue? There are too many sacred cows, taboos, unsaid thoughts. Or the same flawed ideas are churned over again and again with no result - you feel desperate, hopeless - mired in relationship communication breakdown.

We live much of our days in a state of planning, projecting, corner-casing, if-then thinking. The logic tree has many branches. This sort of thinking makes us good at solving discrete problems, re-engineering the way we maintain the car, house, or projects at work. But what about when we really need to get out of what's familiar and bring a fresh perspective to something. How can we bring a "beginner's mind" to something that is not working in our lives or relationship?

This is an ideal time for brainstorming communication techniques with your partner. You may wonder how this is any different from a typical conversation. Well, there are guidelines — you will be specific and focus on only one problem, there will be no wrong answers and no editing each others' suggestions, and you will write down **all** answers tendered (preferably somewhere all can see - white board, sticky notes or a shared piece of paper). Also, the process has to continue until you and your partner or team mate have generated **at least** 10 possible solutions to the issue you're taking on. You are going for quantity, not quality.

For example, rather than "How are we ever going to balance time with our relatives?" the question becomes "In how many ways can we balance time with our relatives?" Now you are entering the twilight zone - where you are free to generate crazy, wishful, and heretofore "impractical" ideas:

1. We put their names in a hat and draw them in order of priority
2. Disown half of them and focus on the rest (just kidding...)
3. We divide our vacation into quarters and travel to four cities
4. Rotate by year and occasion for visits
5. Make a drawing, like "secret santa" and rotate which relative we're each responsible for connecting with
6. Invite everyone to our place and let them decide
7. Figure out the best method for each (letter, call, visit) and focus our efforts by method
8. Create clones and send them as ambassadors on our behalf
9. Focus on quality of closeness/connection and forget about divvying up time equally
10. Write an annual letter and whoever responds gets a visit

As you read this, did other ideas come to mind? The season for family holidays **is** coming up. The example above may give you and your partner or teammate some ideas. If that

above list pertains, you are welcome to go back through and objectively discuss what you think is workable and appropriate.

Here's the kicker - after all that creative momentum and follow-up discussion - pick one solution and do it! Each of you can offer one step that you will take in the next 1-2 weeks to pursue the chosen solution. Set a date to check in on your progress. Then repeat with a new solution or step. Try this out and see how sticky problems get unstuck - one creative idea, one helpful step at a time.

Consider bringing in a facilitator or neutral third party, if you find that you and your partner or teammate need more support to feel you will not be shut down, criticized, or otherwise discouraged from sharing your ideas by your partner. This technique works well in couples counseling and a moderator can help to keep the discussion on track.

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What helps you get into a creative zone? What do you think about building on your partner's ideas? How can you notice and reward each other's progress on this issue? Please share your questions and comments through the website below.

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### **Sources:**

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