Three-Way Problem Solving

**Timing is Critical for this Activity**

This exercise takes no less than fifty minutes and can take up to ninety minutes.

Participants take turns. Keeping to the schedule ensures that everyone derives the same benefit.

**Space Needs**

A large, open space without tables works best using chairs that can be easily moved. Arrange the chairs into groups of three facing each other.

**Supplies**

Index cards and pens for note taking. Those with a vision impairment can use their appropriate notetaking tools.

A bell or anything that will be loud enough to signal that time is up for each step of the exercise.

**Facilitator’s Tone and Approach**

A warm inviting tone works best while adhering strictly to the time limits set for each step of the exercise. This may require the facilitator to interrupt and re-direct the participants who are not following along with the prescribed time limits, which can present a challenge.

Explain to participants that if anyone takes up more time than allotted it means that their partners will not receive their share of the time and attention.

**Adaptations**

Time adaptations are included in parentheses for each step in the instructions.

**Purpose**

This activity is designed to offer peers an opportunity to serve as consultants for each other. Working in teams of three, each participant will come away with individualized strategies and ideas for solving a problem they face.

**Explain Exercise to the Group**

You will be broken up into teams of three and take turns acting as a ‘peer consultant’ for your two partners and one turn where you will be the ‘client’.

You will be moving around quite a bit. Position your chairs so that you are facing each other knee-to-knee; this way you will be able to hear each other.

Note that timing is crucial; we want to make sure everyone gets his or her share of time and attention. It may feel awkward at first. By the end of the exercise, you will understand why it is important to adhere to the allotted time.

**Step One**

The exercise begins with one minute of silence for everyone to consider a challenge or problem you are facing. You will each have an index card to jot down any thoughts or notes. We encourage silence because it allows us all time to think and process.

I will ring a bell.

**Step Two**

Your team will decide who will be the first, second, and third ‘client’.

The client will have **ONE MINUTE** to explain their challenge or problem to their consultants. Just the facts, please! Consultants just listen. You can ask questions later.

I will ring a bell.

**Step Three**

The consultants will have **TWO MINUTES** [can be expanded to three minutes] to ask any clarifying questions. Find out what strategies the client may have tried in the past.

I will ring a bell. Everyone will stop talking.

**Step Four**

The client will turn their chair around and not face the consultants. The consultants will have **FIVE MINUTES** [can be expanded to six or seven minutes] to discuss ideas and strategies that the client can try without having to worry about the client’s reactions.

Client, turn ALL the way around. You should be close enough to your consultants that you can hear what they are saying. Jot down any ideas or strategies your high-priced, expert consultants have to offer.

Consultants, you will share your best thinking with each other. Be brave. Be creative. Be thoughtful. Avoid asking the client any questions, if possible. This is a time to think aloud, uninterrupted.

**Step Five**

Clients will turn their chair around and thank and appreciate their consultants for one minute [can be expanded to two minutes].

I will then ring the bell, and it will be the next client’s turn.

**Final Step**

We will have a large group discussion where participants will share a highlight from the exercise.

**FACILITATOR’S NOTE:**

1. You will have to get the group’s attention. Folks will be tempted to continue the conversation at the end of each round, but this will cut into the other partners’ times. STICK TO THE TIME.
2. Feelings can come up for people; have tissues ready. There should be some agreements in place, one of which includes the statement that feelings are okay. Working to address the many problems that plague our society is arduous. It is inhumane to expect that those of us working to change those conditions will not have feelings.



The Center on Domestic Violence, University of Colorado, Denver adapted the instructions for this activity published in [Liberating Structures](http://www.liberatingstructures.com/8-troika-consulting/). This site provides free facilitation resources groups can use to think critically about their work. Contact the Center at 303-315-0241 if you have any questions regarding the facilitation of this exercise.

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