

Build Your Brain Power and Change Your Life

Overview

This icebreaker is designed for forum members to reflect on the activities in their life that are rote, passive and comfortable, and imagine new opportunities to engage in activities that are complex and novel – and how to shift the balance. Novel activities that have greater complexity are good for building neural pathways in the brain, which in turn benefit your short- and long-term brain health.

Instructions

1. Make two columns on a sheet of paper.
2. In Column 1, list three activities you engage in regularly that don't require much thought. They can be fun, enjoyable and comfortable, or just easily accessible and habitual in your day-to-day life.
3. In Column 2, list three activities you don't do often or have never done (but would like to do) that require a high level of engagement and complexity, or that seem too complicated or uncomfortable to begin.
4. Ask the group: "What would it take for you to replace an activity from list one with an activity from list two?" And then ask: "Identify an external structure in your life you would need to change or something you would need to do differently to make the trade happen."
5. Challenge the group to execute this trade (a comfortable activity, with an uncomfortable one) at least once before your next meeting. Pair the members up so they can keep each other accountable.

Setup suggestions for the moderator

- Have members work individually on creating their list and identifying an activity from column 2 to trade with an activity on list one. In a large group, share the list, activities you want to trade and what you need to change to make it happen. Pair group members so they can keep each other accountable for their changes.

Alternatively, forum members can make the two lists before they come to meeting,

At the meeting:

- In pairs, identify the two activities to trade. Interview each other to identify lifestyle changes and choices that would facilitate the trade. Engage your curiosity to explore opportunities and barriers to change.
- Report back to the larger group on trades and what you will change to make it a reality.

Introduction

Brain health is essential to being a high functioning person. Being brain-fit benefits the quality of life, interactions at home and work, and will contribute to overall personal and professional success.

In this exercise, participants will reflect on the habits and the choices they make that support brain health, share insights with forum mates and identify actions they can take to strengthen or improve their brain fitness.

Instructions

1. Explain the objective of the exercise to members and why brain health is important. List a chart of factors that contribute to brain health on a white board or flipchart:

- Social Life
- Exercise
- Mental Stimulation
- Stress Management
- Sleep
- Diet
- General health: Maintenance

2. Ask members to refer to the *Brain Health Recommendations Resource* below and identify three areas (one green, one orange, one red) in their life where:

- They are on track with brain-healthy habits and why (green)
- They are doing ok or are not interested in changing and why (orange)
- They are off track, have the most challenge, want to change, and why (red)

The 'why' could be structures in their life that reinforce behavior, or choices they make.

- The interviews are intended to help each person gain a deeper perspective on their insights and to uncover any blind spots.
- Be driven by curiosity and opportunities for growth - not judgment.
- Do not provide advice or ask leading questions.
- Be prepared to challenge each other's assumptions and beliefs.

3. At the end of the interview round, give participants time to reflect on what changed or shifted for them during the conversation and what they learned.

Ask forum members to:

- Take three sticky notes (one green, orange, and red) and write their name, where they are on track (green), doing ok (orange) and are challenged (red) in brain health factors and a brief 'why'.
- Place sticky notes on the chart with the brain health factors, the section(s) that correspond to their post-its.
- Take some time to step back and look at the chart and reflect on:
 - What are the patterns?
 - How are your challenges and opportunities the same or different than others in the group?
 - Are there any brain health areas where you are challenged, and other areas where you are strong? Explore why that may be the case.
- Invite members to speak briefly (2 minutes each) to their post-its.
- Ask members to develop an action plan (see plan ideas below) for changing their reds to greens. Encourage participants to identify resources in the group to help them with the change.

4. Explore the 15% solution

Ask the group: What can you do to shift this issue 15% toward your goal? What is immediate action you can take, that you have the freedom and resources to do, that is going to make a tangible difference and shift the issue in some way?

- Make a deadline for reporting back to group

Appendix 1: Brain Health Recommendation Resource

An Active Social Life

Recommendations

- Spend quality time with friends and family
- Volunteer in community organizations or activities
- Take time to actively appreciate people and things in your life

Regular Exercise

Recommendations

- At least 150hrs intentional exercise per week
- 30 minutes most days
- Play a sport/join a sports club
- Dance whenever you can

Mental Stimulation

Recommendations

- Regularly engage in activities that are novel and complex
- Learn something new and novel
- Solve complicated problems
- Meet new people or explore new places and activities
- Do puzzles and crosswords
- Read books and watch documentaries
- Learn to play a musical instrument

Stress Management

Recommendations

- Take time to relax and unwind
- Practice centering activities: Yoga, Tai Chi, deep breathing
- Pray, reflect or spiritual experiences
- Take regular holidays
- Turn off your phone and other electronics
- Get out into nature

Quality Sleep

7-8 hours of undisturbed sleep a night

Healthy Diet

Recommendations

- Eat fruit and vegetables, whole grains, lean protein and healthy fats
- Watch your portion sizes
- Keep well hydrated

- 2 cups of coffee a day
- Reduce or eliminate alcohol (4 drinks a week)

Maintain General Health

Recommendations

- Regular health screenings and exams
- Minimize prescription drug intake (consider natural alternatives)
- Manage weight, blood pressure and health problems like diabetes or high cholesterol
- Quit smoking

Appendix 2: Action Plan

Identify the change you are going to make to change your red factor to green

- What are the action steps you need to take?
- What kind of support systems need to be in place?
- Who are your resources? *Consider someone in your forum who is strong in this brain-health factor or who is having similar challenges.*
- What are the barriers to change and how can you address them?
- What can you do now to make a shift – what is your 15% solution?

15% Solutions

- What is an immediate action that you can commit to at this meeting that will shift this issue?
- Focus on what you have the freedom and resources to do now.

Identify:

What actions, however small, can you do immediately that will create momentum, and may make a big difference?

What can you do without more resources or without having to consult someone else?

For long term change consider:

Make it personal

Make it matter

How can you use it in your life?

Have fun with it

Commit to it