9 – CREATIVE THINKING (CHAPTER 5)

Overview Statement: For creativity to be meaningful, it must produce results. A creative leader will always have contempt for the "we've always done it that way" attitude.

Connection to the Curriculum: Ties in with a central theme of chapter five in *Learn to Lead*, Team Leadership.

Estimated Time: 25-30 Minutes

Resources Required: *Learn to Lead*, Module Two; Whiteboard (or chalkboard, butcher paper or easel pad).

Key Term:

***Creative* –** "Making imaginative use of the limited resources available." Encarta Dictionary

INTRODUCTION

Attention: Imagine that you are leading seven cadets and only have three apples to share. Decide how you are going to fairly distribute all apples to all cadets. Explain your decision and why.

{If no one mentions it, point out that there are a total of eight cadets – the seven that you are leading and you, the leader.}

Motivation: In CAP, our Core Value of Excellence requires us to think creatively. Just as there is more than one way to distribute apples equally, there is many ways to develop creativity in decision-making.

Overview: Today's lesson will define critical thinking and show how to become a more creative thinker.

Your role in this discussion is to be an active participant. You are free to share your views with each other. Please be involved and considerate of one another. My role will be to take notes on what you say, and I may occasionally ask a question or two. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. I am simply interested in what you have to say.

MAIN POINT 1: CREATIVE THINKING DEFINED

Creative thinking is concentration plus imagination. It is the habit of trying to see ideas or objects in a new context. Creative thinking is an attempt to grab hold of an invisible thread connecting two concepts. It requires us to overcome how we are constrained by culture, tradition, or circumstance. But for creativity to be meaningful, it must produce results.

Even if you develop the habit of thinking creatively, there is no guarantee that your ideas will be welcomed. People often resist change, and the status quo is a comfortable place in which to live. The experiences of Billy Mitchell, Galileo, Emily Dickinson, Martin Luther King, and others illustrate this point.

Take, for example, Apple and IBM. Back in the 1980's these two companies produced very different computers. Apple computers had a new concept called a Graphical User Interface along with a mouse, IBM computers had neither but still won most of the market share. Sometimes it's not who has the best product that wins, but who has the best marketing plan. IBM allowed others to build compatible computers while Apple did not. The result: while Apple had better technology at the time, the IBM compatible systems quickly dominated the market.

Question: Think about competing products like VHS vs. Beta, or High Definition vs. Blu-Ray. Why do some products succeed while others don't?

Question: If the most creative leader isn't guaranteed to win, then why bother being creative?

MAIN POINT 2: TOOLS FOR CREATIVE THINKING

Nobel Prize-winning scientist Albert Einstein believed that "Imagination is more important than knowledge." The *Learn to Lead* textbook describes several tools to generate thinking, like brainstorming, flowcharting and mindmapping. Let's examine a couple of additional tools mentioned in our textbook:

Review:

Reversal ~ Reversal is brainstorming backwards. Instead of coming up with answers that would solve a problem, reversal comes up with answers that would cause the problem. Let's try reversal on a common problem for CAP.

Suppose that your average weekly attendance is under 12 cadets.

Question: What can we do to help cadets lose interest in CAP? {Write the answers on the board.}

Now that we know how we can help cadets lose interest, let's reverse the answers.

Question: What can we do to help cadets keep their interest in CAP?

It's amazing how using reversal typically generates a number of positive solutions to a problem. But sometimes it is helpful to know which solution is actually the best one among many great answers. A leader can discover the best of popular choices by using another tool for creative thinking called Multi-Voting.

Multi-Voting ~ To find which idea has the greatest consensus when the team has several options to choose from. Multi-voting is a democratic process, but instead of "one man, one vote," everyone gets to cast several votes. It's recommended that participants be given about half as many votes as there are options. For example: All twenty cadets in the squadron are working together to choose goals for the coming year. They've made a list of 10 possible goals, and now want to identify the four goals that are most popular. Let's give Multi-Voting a try.

State: Write down 15 things that you think will make our weekly meeting nights more interesting. {Allow time for thinking and writing.}

State: Now work as a group and consolidate your individual lists into what the group would consider the top 10 or so. {Allow time for thinking and writing; write this top 10 list on the board.}

State: Now that we have our top 10 or so list, please rank order these top items in order of importance to you. A ranking of one means that this item is the most important in your opinion, while 10 would be among the least important. You cannot have ties (for example, three equally important first place answers). {Allow time for thinking and writing.}

State: Finally, let's determine the three most popular answers. {Ask cadets to raise their hands if they chose the first item on the Top 10 list as their first choice. Write the total number of hands raised. Asked how many selected this item as their second choice and write down the total. For the third choice do the same. Simply repeat as you go down the Top 10 list. {For example:}

Top 10	1st	2nd	3rd	Total	Rank
Example A	1	2	3		
Example B	0	4	3		

State: Now that we have our rankings, let's do the math. We will assign a value of 3 points to all first place answers, 2 points for all second place answers, and 1 point for all third place answers. {For example:

Top 10	1st	2nd	3rd	Total	Rank
Example A	1	2	3	10	
Example B	0	4	3	11	

Here's the math for Example A: (1 * 3pt) + (2 * 2pt) + (3 * 1pt) = 10
Here's the math for Example B: (0 * 3pt) + (4 * 2pt) + (3 * 1pt) = 11
In this example, B is slightly more popular to the group than A.}

Question: Now that we have collectively identified the three most popular answers to make our meeting nights more interesting, what do you recommend that we do? {Remember to think creatively!}

CONCLUSION

Summary: Everyone can think creatively because everyone can think! Leaders rely on their own creativity and the creativity of their teams to make the best decisions.

Remotivation: Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds."

Closure: Don't allow the hobgoblins rob your creativity!

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Note to the instructor: Every informal discussion should be followed by one or more hands-on activities that reinforce one or more of the concepts being discussed. These activities should last 25-30 minutes, giving about one hour total block of time for the leadership session at a typical CAP meeting (25-30 minutes for the informal discussion, plus 25-30 minutes for the activities).

Along with any questions found in the activities themselves, you should be sure to ask, **"How does this activity tie in with our discussion?"**

CAP recommends activities from the *Learn to Lead Activity Guide* by Rob Smith (published by the Civil Air Patrol). You are free to substitute another activity, or create your own, as long as you tie in with one or more concepts of the informal discussion.

Main concepts for this lesson: **Creative thinking; making good choices.**