



# STATE OF NEW JERSEY CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

January  
2024

## EMPLOYEE ADVISORY SERVICE NEWSLETTER

*The New Jersey Civil Service Commission's Employee Advisory Service (EAS) Newsletter contains useful articles and information for managing various well-being and work-life issues in order to create a healthier, happier, and more productive workplace. EAS is committed to improving the quality of life for all New Jersey Civil Service employees by encouraging a good work-life balance.*



### UPCOMING WEBINAR

#### HOW TO WORK MORE COLLABORATIVELY WITH YOUR TEAM

##### *About the Webinar:*

This practical presentation will cover the benefits of collaborative communication including proactively connecting with colleagues to learn their communication style, approaches for soliciting more input from others, and how to better utilize brainstorming to encourage people to share their thoughts and ideas during conversations and meetings.

**Date: January 25, 2024**  
**Time: 2:00-3:00 PM**

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# REAPING BENEFITS FROM BRAINSTORMING

*"It is easier to tone down a wild idea than to think up a new one." —Alex F. Osborn*

More than 60 years ago, advertising executive Alex Osborn (the "O" in New York ad agency BBDO Worldwide) developed the concept of brainstorming as a group technique for producing creative ideas and new solutions.

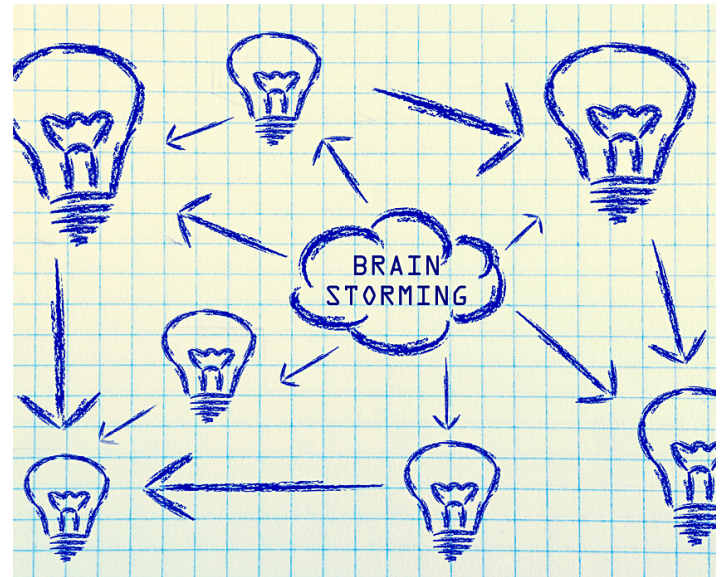
Since then, brainstorming techniques have been widely adopted and expanded. But effective brainstorming still stands on two basic principles:

- **Judgment is suspended.** Ideas spawned in brainstorming sessions aren't judged or analyzed until all ideas have been collected. This frees your creative juices from the evaluation and censoring that your analytical mind instinctively brings to bear. In the early stages of problem solving, this freedom lets you get wild and crazy enough to entertain possibilities you might otherwise never consider.
- **Quantity breeds quality.** An array of options lets groups look beyond ideas that are obvious, safe and stale. If you generate a plentiful supply of ideas, you can sift the fool's gold to find the real thing.

When a brainstorming opportunity arises in your organization, be sure everyone knows that they should shift into this distinct process, which differs from normal discussions. Say: "Let's take time out to brainstorm some ideas about how we might market this new service."

Write a problem statement to identify the focus of the brainstorming session. For example: "How can we create a more empowering work environment?" or "How can we ensure that best practices are shared across departments?"

Write the problem statement in a way that encourages ideas rather than opinions or choices. "Which site do you prefer for the kickoff reception?" isn't suitable for brainstorming, because it simply asks people to choose. On the other hand, "What kinds of things could we do to make our young leaders' program unique?" is more likely to trigger a wealth of novel ideas.



If possible, try to incubate ideas by giving participants advance notice of topics. This can help focus the session and make brainstorming more effective.

Designate someone to facilitate the process. Let the facilitator list ideas, as they're generated, on a flip chart or white board so they remain visible to the group. This will stimulate new ideas and make it easier to sort out things later.

Next, encourage the group or team to call out as many ideas as come to mind while observing these rules:

- **Avoid criticism and evaluation.** Every idea has value at this stage.
- **Think outside the box.** The more outlandish the idea seems initially, the more likely it is to spawn an innovative solution.
- **Go for quantity.** The more ideas you have to work with, the more likely you'll find creative and feasible solutions.
- **Build on others' ideas.** Combining or improving on what others contribute enhances ideas and reduces concerns about offering possibly silly or ridiculous suggestions. It also encourages a collaborative spirit.

Protect the integrity of a brainstorming session by enforcing the rules. Ring a small bell or make some other signal if someone criticizes an idea. This will help people become skilled and disciplined in the technique and ensure a safe atmosphere for creativity.

Finally, you'll need to follow up brainstorming with a process for sorting and evaluating the ideas that have been suggested.

### Choosing the Best Format

Simply letting group members call out ideas randomly—known as freewheeling—is the most common type of brainstorming. It's not the only method, though. Here are several brainstorming formats, with the pros and cons of each:

- Freewheeling generates spontaneity and energy, because people feel unrestrained. On the other hand, aggressive group members may shut out introverts and those who need more time to process ideas. Also, there's a risk that ideas can get lost in the commotion if too many people talk at once.
- A round robin is a more orderly method in which group members take turns offering their ideas, and everyone is allotted a period of time. The risk, however, is that order takes the place of spontaneity, and some ideas lose energy or get lost because they must be contained until the appropriate time. Taking turns also limits the ability for one person to build on another's ideas.
- A written format can allow sensitive issues to be tackled by brainstorming on paper, rather than out loud. However, participants can't build on each other's ideas.



It's also possible to combine formats. For example, if a freewheeling session overwhelms some group members, follow it with a round-robin session. Or if you're dealing with sensitive issues, use the written method first to identify issues, and then switch to freewheeling as people become more comfortable talking openly about solutions.

The format you choose may also depend on the number of people involved. The written method can accommodate a big group, but the freewheeling and round-robin methods work best with a group of 15 people or fewer. To use those interactive methods with a large number of people, divide participants into smaller groups and assign to each group a facilitator who will also keep notes.

The length of time you devote to a session can also vary. Brainstorming can be a spontaneous, 10-minute interlude within a structured meeting, or a scheduled session lasting much longer. A good rule of thumb is to allow at least 20 to 30 minutes, so participants have sufficient time to get into the flow and to tap their creative reserves. A longer period of time allows for the use of multiple formats.

If your team members are highly technical people, you may need some warm-up exercises to get them out of the analytical mode of thinking and into a brainstorming mode.

To prime the pump, try this: Take a common object—a paper clip or a coat hanger, for instance—and ask the team to quickly call out ideas for using the item in novel ways. To get them started, ask for ideas in a specific category—related to food, for example, or clothes. Shift categories every minute or so to maintain high energy, encouraging them to stretch their minds.



# FINDING FULFILLMENT

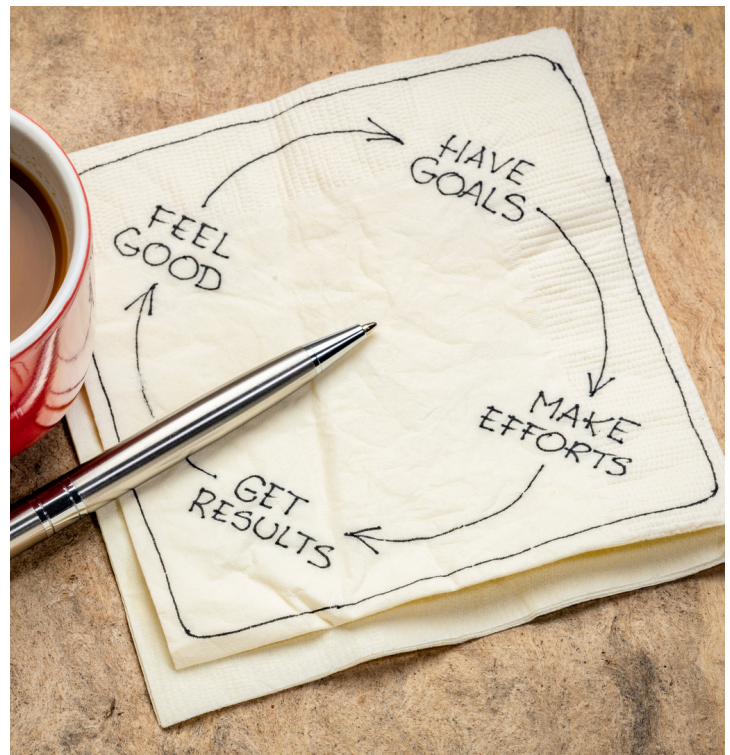
The experience of happiness can be short-lived, and even significant achievements can leave you feeling empty and disappointed. A more enduring approach to seeking satisfaction in life is to strive for fulfillment.

## What is fulfillment?

While success can be seen and judged by others, fulfillment is an internal experience. It's the feeling that comes from living by your most important values and following a path in life that has meaning to you and brings you joy. Only you can know when you feel fulfilled.

Striving for fulfillment can bring success; the two objectives can be complementary. But achieving success can leave you without feelings of fulfillment or real happiness if your achievements aren't grounded in your values and what's most important to you.

Life has its ups and downs. It's healthy to experience a wide range of emotions in response to the circumstances of your life, from happiness, excitement, and comfort to fear, disappointment, and grief. Seeking fulfillment isn't the same as striving for happiness. Finding fulfillment takes the maturity to accept and appreciate all your emotions while dealing with what life brings to you by acting as the best version of yourself.



## How can you find more fulfillment in life?

Finding fulfillment is a process that begins with self-awareness and can require a shift in priorities and new habits of thinking and behavior:

- **Consider what's most important to you.** Think about times in your past when you've felt deep joy and a sense of fulfillment. Were those experiences related to particular activities, the people you were with, or a challenge you met that was tied to something you found meaningful? These experiences of fulfillment can be clues to your values, what's important to you, and what brings you joy. Exploring your values is another way to think about who you are at heart and what's important to you. Find a list of personal values online, and choose five to ten that describe what's unique about you. Feelings of fulfillment come from living by your values and being true to yourself.



- **Notice what brings you joy.** You probably spend much of your time doing what others expect and need from you. Sometimes those activities are deeply satisfying, and sometimes they aren't. Even when you're very good at something, you may find it boring or even unpleasant. Notice when something you're doing energizes you and brings you joy. Think back to times in the past when you've also had those feelings. Find time for activities that bring you joy and are connected to your values.
- **Spend time with people who bring out the best in you.** Pay attention to how you feel and act when you're with other people. Who makes you smile and feel good about yourself, and who makes you feel worse? Who inspires you to be the best version of yourself, and who brings out traits you're not proud of? Cultivate your most positive relationships. Mutually rewarding human connections are important to experiencing a sense of wellbeing and fulfillment.
- **Be open to change.** Notice and look for opportunities in changes in the world around you. Work on changing yourself for the better, too. Be a lifelong learner and try new experiences. Learn better ways to communicate and manage your emotions. Feelings of fulfillment can come from self-improvement and discovering new interests and abilities.
- **Help others.** Give something of yourself to improve the lives of others. You might do that by mentoring a work colleague, volunteering in your community, helping an older neighbor, or doing simple acts of kindness. It's human nature to feel good when you help others in meaningful ways.
- **Connect with something larger than yourself.** While a sense of fulfillment is an internal experience, it's often fueled by recognition that you are part of something bigger than yourself. You might get that by experiencing awe in nature, from looking at the night sky, being in the mountains, or appreciating the wonder of a tree. You might get it through your faith or by being part of a group effort that has meaning to you.
- **Seek help.** A professional counselor or life coach through the EAP can help you clarify your values, identify what's most important to you, and change patterns of thinking and behavior that are preventing you from experiencing greater fulfillment.



# COPING WITH LONELINESS

## What is Loneliness?

Loneliness is an emotion that comes from a lack of social connection. Find resources below for people experiencing loneliness.

## What You May Be Experiencing

Loneliness is an emotion that comes from a lack of social connection. You might feel disconnected and isolated from others. Maybe you haven't seen your loved ones or friends in a while, or you just miss hugging someone. You might feel as if nobody understands you and there is no one to turn to.

Most people are experiencing some level of loneliness at this time. Loneliness may affect your concentration, how you sleep, your appetite, or energy level.



## What You Can Do

- *Start a conversation.* Call, video chat, or text message friends, family, neighbors, and coworkers. Write a letter or postcard.
- *Use social media and virtual technology.* Use your time online to connect and interact with others instead of scrolling through posts. Set limited timeframes for reading the news.
- *Try virtual volunteering to provide support in your community.* Many organizations, including faith-based organizations, offer online/virtual volunteer opportunities, which can give you the chance to contribute to something that you find important.
- *Practice self-compassion and self-care.* Be gentle with yourself. Take time for yourself. Read, listen to music, exercise, or learn a new skill. Acknowledge your successes, and give yourself a break. You are doing the best you can.
- *Seek help.* Seek help from a professional if your loneliness becomes overwhelming or feels unmanageable:
  - Talk to your doctor about how you are feeling.
  - Contact Employee Advisory Service (EAS).
  - Find mental health services on the Mental Health America (MHA) website at <https://www.mhanational.org/choosing-provider>.



# Employee Advisory Service

*Support - Empowerment - Growth*

## EAS IN ACTION!

**NJ State Parole Board (SPB) in Trenton, NJ.**



On Thursday, December 7th, 2023, Mien P. Mombo and Tamara Samuel visited the NJ State Parole Board (SPB) in Trenton, NJ.

Captain Aaron Smith invited the EAS Outreach duo to speak to 20 New Lieutenants about the benefits that Employee Advisory Service offers to employees and members of their households. SPB employees were fully engaged and enjoyed the presentation.

The EAS Outreach Program is designed to inform Supervisors, Managers, and Human Resources staff of the mental health support that our EAS program offers

How Can  
We Help  
You?

### DID YOU KNOW?

Employee Advisory Service provides free and confidential services to statewide employees, local agencies and household members of their families. Services help to restore the health and productivity of the employees and their workplace as a whole.

**NUMBER:**  
1-866-327-9133

**EMAIL:**  
EAS\_HELP@CSC.NJ.GOV

**24 HOURS A DAY  
7 DAYS A WEEK  
(EMERGENCY  
MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES)**





# Employee Advisory Service

## UPCOMING WEBINARS EMPLOYEES

### Employees

#### How to Work More Collaboratively with Your Team

Date / Time

- January 25, 2024
- 2:00 - 3:00 PM

**About this webinar:**

This practical presentation will cover the benefits of collaborative communication, including proactively connecting with colleagues to learn their communication style, approaches for soliciting more input from others, and how to better utilize brainstorming to encourage people to share their thoughts and ideas during conversations and meetings.

Register Today!



### Employees

#### Managing the Stress of Relationships

Date / Time

- February 22, 2024
- 2:00 - 3:00 PM

**About this webinar:**

This session will discuss the stress caused by the relationship challenges in our lives, and suggest several strategies for improving the quality of our relationships to reduce both stress and conflict

Register Today!



### Employees

#### 4 Steps to Maximizing Your Potential

Date / Time

- March 28, 2024
- 2:00 - 3:00 PM

**About this webinar:**


This practical presentation will provide a roadmap to help individuals focus on further developing their unique strengths and abilities, including: assessing their talents; embracing the full value of them; identifying opportunities to use them in greater ways; and, planning for their use in meeting the needs of others.

Register Today!



Employee Advisory Service (EAS)  
Support - Empowerment - Growth

 [EAS\\_Help@csc.gov](mailto:EAS_Help@csc.gov)

 1-866- 327-9133 ( Toll FREE)

 [www.nj.gov/csc/employees/programs/advisory/eas.html](http://www.nj.gov/csc/employees/programs/advisory/eas.html)

How Can We Help You?

Your privacy is important to us. Your confidentiality is protected by state and federal law and regulations. All of the services offered are guided by professional and ethical standards. Contact us to learn more.