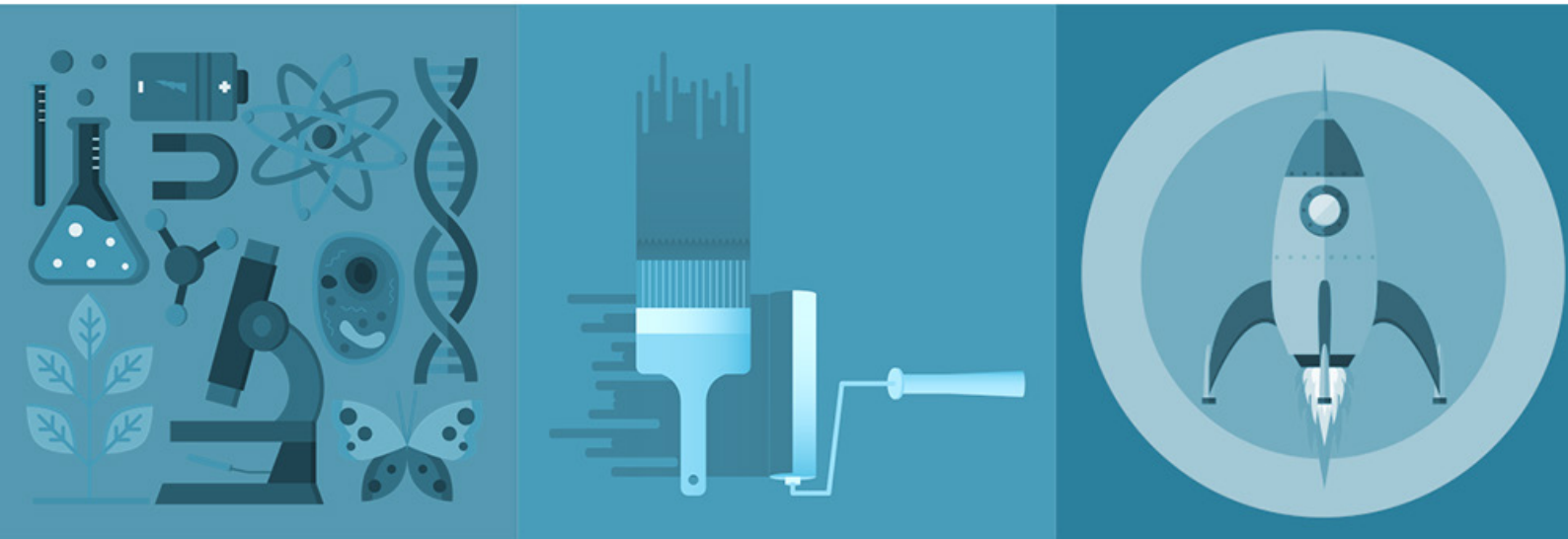




NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
Community Health Centers®

# LEADING CURIOSITY, CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

## Participant Workbook



***EXCELLING IN YOUR ROLE AS A HEALTH CENTER  
LEADER***

*Creativity requires the courage to let go  
of certainties.—  
Eric Fromm*

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## **LEADING CURIOSITY, CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION**

Look around. The pace of innovation and change has accelerated, driven by technology. Organizations seldom can be content with the status quo. But creativity is messy, at times irrational, and does not fit into a vision of operations that emphasizes order, efficiency, and control. It takes a strong leader to give up that control and allow team members to truly explore and share their sometimes wild ideas, even at the cost of failure. As Brene Brown has argued, “There is no innovation and creativity without failure. Period.” This course is designed to help you embrace a leadership style that allows for experimentation and creative thinking that radically rethinks what it is to fail and to succeed.

This workbook accompanies a self-paced lesson developed through a Johnson & Johnson Foundation grant as part of the “Our Race to Health Equity” initiative, and is based on the NACHC/Skill Path webinar of the same name which took place in Fall 2020.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

- Implement ways to foster creativity and innovation in your organization
- Model and implement a curiosity mindset
- Use various tools, including brainstorming, rapid ideation, and exploratory questions, to develop your team’s creativity

# Start with the Culture

## Asking Good Questions

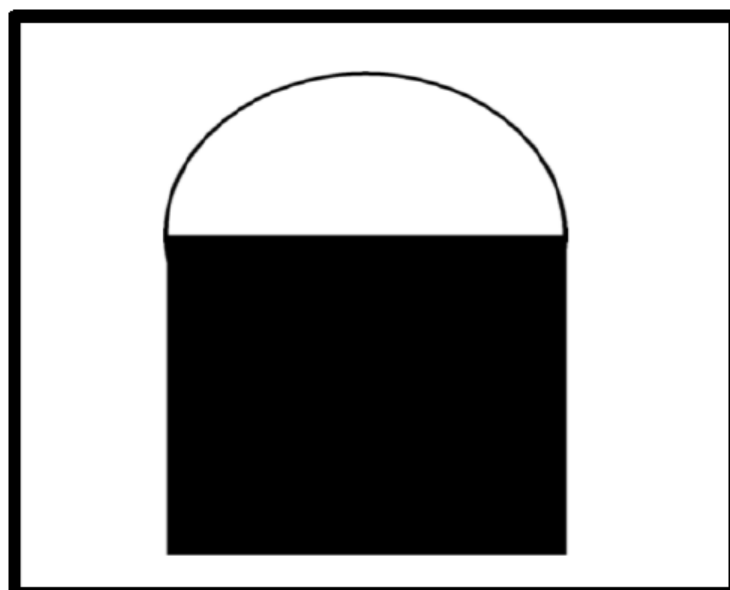
As a leader you may need to abandon traditional ways of gathering information from your employees. Creativity demands space to explore different possibilities, to be able to ignore how things have always been done. Emily Dickinson once wrote, “I dwell in Possibility / A fairer house than prose.” Leading curiosity is cultivating a sense of the possible. Or even better, the impossible. To include the impossible allows an organization to explore alternatives by shifting how it looks at a problem.

Here is a sequence that you could use to help your team think more creatively:

1. How do we normally do X?
2. What could make X less than optimal? What threatens the success of the organization’s traditional way of doing things?
3. What could we potentially do differently to meet these challenges?

## “What is it?”

The world is built on interpretations. Too often, however, we become stuck in one way of looking at the world. So as a leader you can create exercises that demand interpretation, that do not yield a stable meaning. For example, give your team something ambiguous and see what happens.



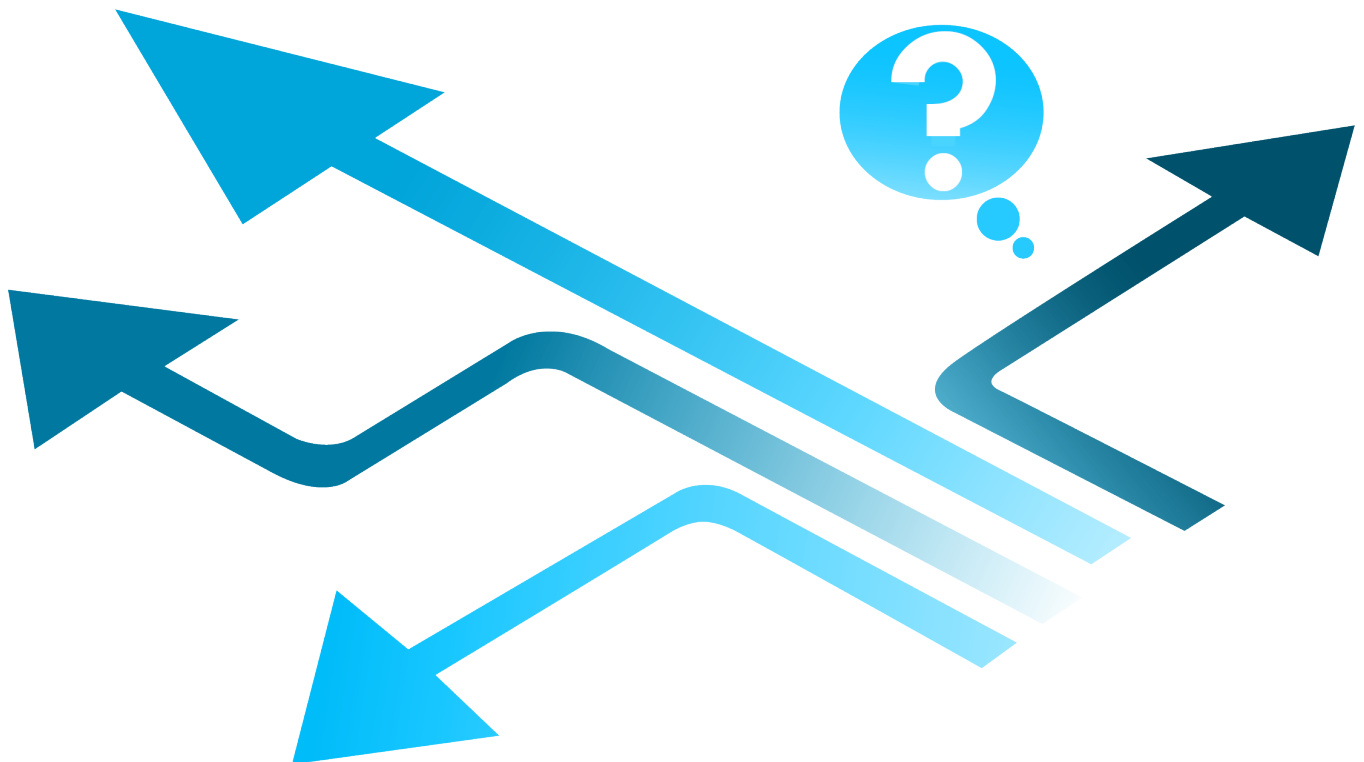
As the training recording plainly demonstrates, team members can feed off each other's energy. One adventurous answer leads to another and another until the room is a-buzz with really interesting ideas. Of course this exercise won't by itself improve this or that process or product. What it does, however, is give your team permission to think creatively, without censorship. And that is super valuable.

### **“What if...?”**

You can explore alternative worlds, so to speak, with your team. What if we gave ourselves permission to explore ANY potential solution to a problem? As Ray points out in the training, what if pose an issue like downtown traffic and then put no restrictions on possible solutions?

Downtown traffic in the city is exceptionally heavy in the morning and evening. Business traffic is preventing school buses from getting children to school on time.

You might get many responses that are not practical, but even those may shed some light on the problem and lead to a viable solution. The trick is not to censor your team. Give them time to explore ideas. Only when their creativity is exhausted do you then start sorting and judging those solutions with an eye to practicality. Be open to surprise!



# ACTIVITY

Follow the facilitator's instructions to answer the following questions.

1. What could you do to prepare your team to be more curious?
2. How can looking at new patterns (and disrupting the traditional way of doing things) help you develop and grow your team?
3. What objections do you anticipate?
4. What are some ideas to consider when communicating this new way of encouraging new thinking to prepare for those objections?

## Necessary Conditions for an Innovative Culture

Creativity involves risk. If your organization has not previously been open to creativity and innovation, you need to ensure that:

- Employees feel a sense of psychological safety and novel expression is actively rewarded
- The organization must embrace the philosophy of “failing forward,” using pilot projects and exploration as an incubator. Failure must be reimaged as a key learning experience
- The organization must build a sense of trust arising from equity and fairness exhibited in the workplace, not merely in company rhetoric

# ACTIVITY

## SELF-REFLECTION

Let's examine your own reactions to “failure.” How was your work received? Did you feel that you were encouraged to learn from your mistakes? If not, what would you as a leader do to allow that to happen?

Also reflect on how you can ask the right kind of questions in order to explore how to shape that “fail forward” mindset.

## NEXT STEPS

Here are some concrete ways to begin creating a culture of innovation:

- Know what makes your team tick. What inspires them? What do they need to feel comfortable?
- Start weaving in the techniques you learned in this training. Set aside time to practice.
- Get your manager to review your plan. This not only helps you, but also helps shape the organization as a whole.
- Be transparent with your team. Get them involved, and listen carefully to their feedback.
- Consider this as an ongoing project, with plenty of opportunities to adjust and adapt your approach.

## OTHER TRAININGS IN THIS SERIES:

[Being a Leader vs. Being a Boss](#)

[Applying Workplace Emotional Intelligence Tools](#)