

# Creative Problem Solving and Zombies: A Work Study Training

---

## Background

This required training was facilitated with a group of 17 undergraduate work studies whose responsibilities include running a billiard/games room, helping guests at the Student Life Center desk, and planning small events within the Student Union Building.

The focus for the training was problem solving and critical thinking, one of the learning objectives for students in ASU's Department of Student Life and Recreation. The department defines problem solving and critical thinking as:

- Using discretion when dealing with liability, suitability, or matters of confidentiality.
- Diagnosing problems, generating multiple solutions, and evaluating outcomes.
- Analyzing budget constraints and making appropriate use of funds for programs.

## Getting Started: Splitting the Group

Ask students to line up according to their birthday (January birthdays go to the far left, December birthdays to the far right). Walk down the line and have students count off alternating as a 1 or a 2.

Have 1's and 2's split up and meet at opposite ends of the room. Sheets of paper with instructions, posters, and markers should already be set up in each corner.

## Group 1 Activity

Group 1 will begin by watching a clip from the movie *Shaun of the Dead*. In this clip, Shaun and his friend struggle to fight off zombies by throwing records at them. Because of the urgency of the situation, the two friends are forced to come up with a plan on the spot. They are also delayed when it comes to executing their plan to throw records due to some disagreements regarding which albums can be kept and which can be discarded.

Once the clip is complete, ask the students to discuss whether or not Shaun and his friend were effective with their problem solving skills given the unexpected circumstances of a zombie apocalypse. Were they able to come up with an effective solution given their circumstances and resources? Why or why not?

Throughout the discussion, have at least one member from the group write down responses or key conversation points on a piece of poster board.

## Group 2 Activity

Group 2 will start off by going in a circle and briefly sharing one challenging situation or problem they have encountered during one of their shifts as a work study. Once everyone has shared their situation, the group will select one or two stories to discuss in more detail.

# Creative Problem Solving and Zombies: A Work Study Training

---

Discussion prompts on their instruction sheet are almost identical to those given to the *Shaun of the Dead* group, and include what action wound up being taken and whether or not that approach was effective. Group 2 will also make a poster summarizing the conversation at this time.

## Have Group 1 and Group 2 Swap Activities

Group 1 will now discuss a challenge during one of their shifts while group 2 watches *Shaun of the Dead*. Allow time for both groups to have discussion and make posters. Once discussion starts to wind down, give the groups two minutes to identify a spokesperson and prepare a quick presentation of what they came up with for each activity.

## Discussion and Wrap-Up

Bring all of the students together and allocate three minutes for each group to discuss their findings. Encourage presenters to expand on their answers and allow other group members to pitch in their thoughts and ideas as well.

## Student Response

Overall these activities received a positive response from the participating work studies. According to their feedback, they enjoyed being able to tie a movie they were familiar with to their own personal lives and problem solving skills.

Conversely, a select number of the students stated that while they enjoyed the activity, it was challenging for them to connect *Shaun of the Dead* and a zombie apocalypse to the problems they have encountered during their work study shifts. They considered both activities to be beneficial, but saw them as two unrelated discussions.

## Changes for the Future

If I were to run this training again, I would encourage all of the students to ask questions and participate in the final group discussion. Group 1 and group 2 did an excellent job chipping in and adding new thoughts and ideas to their own group's presentation, but not so much with the other group. Letting both groups know that it's okay to ask the other groups questions before presentations begin may help with this.

In addition, I think it would be helpful for me to have a list of pre-thought out questions to ask both groups during or after their presentations. Asking about the relevance of the *Shaun of the Dead* clip and the struggles of coming up with on the spot solutions to problems would be a powerful discussion point, and something that might stick with the students longer if they are able to form their own connections.