

10

Life Skills WORKSHOPS

to Support Students'
Mental and Emotional
Health and Well-Being



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Life Skills WORKSHOPS

to Support Students' Mental and Emotional Health and Well-Being

10 Workshop Topics

This resource contains 10 detailed workshops to help your students:

1. Develop Grit and Resilience
2. Feel Comfortable Seeking Help
3. Overcome Resistance to Change
4. Become Critical Thinkers
5. Confidently Make Decisions and Competently Solve Problems
6. Handle Stress in Healthy Ways
7. Develop Empathy and Emotional Intelligence
8. Focus and Gain Self-Control
9. Communicate Effectively
10. Maintain Healthy Friendships and Relationships

SAMPLE

Introduction

Today's students are struggling. Mental health concerns, like anxiety and depression, can derail them from getting the most out of their college experience. For some, it can also impact whether they persist to graduation.

Developing a culture of caring and compassion where students feel supported is part of the solution. Focusing on life skills, in particular, can greatly help students cope with the stress of college life and positively benefit their emotional well-being. And this focus on life skills is where your campus gatekeepers — the peers, advisors, RAs, staff and faculty who spend the most time with students — can also have a great impact.

This *10 Life Skills Workshops to Support Students' Mental and Emotional Health and Well-Being* Binder is filled with 10 comprehensive workshops you can use to prepare students to cope with real-life struggles. As a result, they'll gain confidence about facing their own issues, the tools to help friends in distress and knowledge about resources available to them.

The materials within this binder can be used with student groups such as...

- Student leaders
- Graduate student assistants
- First and second year experience groups
- Greek communities
- Residence life staff
- Orientation leaders
- Retreat participants
- And more!

And, within each of the 10 Workshops, you'll receive...

- **Prep Pages** – Get trainers in tune with the topic by exploring what's being discussed, recent research, facts, key points and more.
- **A Sample Workshop Agenda** – Provide guidance and action steps regarding possible ways to use the Workshop materials.
- **Active Elements** – Get participants interacting through materials such as activities, self-work, role-plays and case studies.
- **Handouts & Worksheets** – Provide supplemental information that's ready to distribute and use on the spot.
- **Resources** – Deliver additional materials that can bring the topic to life such as TED Talks, quizzes, articles, websites and more.
- **Discussion Questions** – Give trainers a place to start when initiating group discussions.
- **Audience Adaptation Tips** – Help trainers determine how best to approach the topic with varied audiences.

We wish you the best as you put students' mental and emotional well-being front and center.



DECISION-MAKING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING

This workshop will help students gain the skills associated with problem-solving and decision-making.

Prep Page

Making good decisions and learning to problem solve are two key skills for today's students. After all, a typical day consists of a series of decisions, from when to get up to what to eat, when to study, how to handle workplace issues, whether to visit a professor after class and much more. And problems pop up that need to be solved, from a mistake on a bill to how to get home for break, what to do about a missing textbook, how to address a disagreement and beyond.

Decisions and problems that don't go away can take a heavy toll on our well-being. Some may become larger problems if left unresolved, while others hover over us, often leading to anxiety, frustration and stress. When we address problems and make decisions, our self-esteem gets a boost, we function more effectively, our relationships flourish and we have higher life satisfaction.

In addition, decision-making and problem-solving are two workforce skills that employers really do look for. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers' (NACE) *Job Outlook 2019* survey, problem-solving skills were the second-most sought after attribute on students' resumes. And, since both big and small decisions need to be made every day in the workplace, employers want to know that prospective employees can identify the options, consider all the angles and determine probable outcomes, according to The Balance Careers site. So, using the time in college to practice and hone these skills makes good sense!

Defining the Issue

Before plunging into any problem-solving or decision-making scenario, it's important for students to learn to define the issue at hand. This requires focus and observation so the problem is the main topic, *not* the solution. That'll come later.

For instance, "I need to get better grades" talks about a solution before even defining the problem at hand. Identifying a specific issue like, "I'm having difficulty understanding how to write papers for this class" or "It's tough for me to keep up with the readings in this class" instead speaks to what the problem is. This makes figuring next steps more manageable.

Taking Responsibility

A key challenge for many young adults is taking responsibility for their decisions. Some have had parents making their major decisions for them up to this point. Others have deferred decision-making by just going with the flow. And others have made decisions — sometimes good, sometimes bad — yet haven't quite learned to take full responsibility for their outcomes.

It's not an either/or, cold-turkey kind of situation when it comes to problem-solving and decision-making, however. There are resources students can turn to as they learn to take responsibility for their choices. Trusted others can help them brainstorm solutions, serve as sounding boards and support them as they implement their decisions. The key is not turning over control to others; it's critically important that students make the final decisions and learn to see them through.

Sources: NACEWeb.org, 12/12/18; TheBalanceCareers.com, 5/31/19; CareerBuilder.com, 6/13/17; "Wellness Module: Problem-Solving." HereToHelp.bc.ca

HANDOUT: Problem-Solving

When addressing problems, generally it's important to...

- Dig in, define and address them
- Take a measured approach
- Be thoughtful
- Employ logic and gather data/facts
- Incorporate different perspectives
- Not take things personally
- Look at a problem from all angles
- Listen actively to others
- Brainstorm
- Think creatively
- Analyze the data
- Identify needs
- Implement the final decision

Four Stages of Problem-Solving

More specifically, there are typically four stages to work through when problem-solving, according to CareerBuilder.com. They include...

- 1. Defining the Problem.** Identify the issue at hand by observing the problem closely, from various angles, to see what's wrong. Focus on the problem first, rather than jumping ahead to a solution.
- 2. Brainstorming Alternatives.** Think logically and creatively about possible solutions, taking into consideration things like time, resources and the expected return from various strategies.
- 3. Choosing the Best Strategy.** Then, tap into your decision-making skills to consider the options and commit to the best one.
- 4. Implementing Your Solution.** Create an action plan and then follow through with the approach you've chosen.

A Positive Spin
Problems = Challenges!

Problem-solving can be done individually and in teams. If you're trying to figure out something on your own, you may want to bounce ideas around with a trusted other who can lend you a different perspective. Remember to also trust yourself as you actively work to solve problems thoughtfully and thoroughly.

Catastrophizing

This is a cognitive distortion that can get in the way of problem-solving and well-being. Those who catastrophize tend to predict a negative outcome and then jump to the conclusion that if that outcome came about, it would be a catastrophe.

For example, you predict that a relationship will end and then jump to the conclusion that, if that occurs, you'll never be loved for the rest of your life. Tending to catastrophize involves overthinking or rumination, magnification of issues and helplessness, according to *Psychology Today*. It is treatable and can be overcome.

Source: *Psychology Today*, 1/10/13

Sources: TheBalanceCareers.com, 5/31/19; CareerBuilder.com, 6/13/17

WORKSHEET: Decision-Making Steps

We make hundreds of decisions every day. Think about it... what are just 8 of the decisions you've had to make today?

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 8. _____ |

Chances are that your decisions range from the everyday (what to wear) to the more complex (how to determine your options for summertime employment).

To make good decisions, we often need to take some simple steps. Consider these as you go about intentionally working to make a good decision about something in your life.

A Decision I Need to Make: _____

Determine Your Desired Outcome. There's a term: "Start with the end in mind." By looking at where you'd like to end up, you can better align your efforts with getting there.

What's your desired outcome? _____

Take Stock of the Information at Hand. What facts do you know? What data do you still need to dig up? Gathering pertinent information will poise you to make solid, well-informed decisions.

What information do you have? _____

Consider Your Options. This is where good old pro and con lists can come in handy, as you consider various scenarios. A S.W.O.T. Analysis that measures Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats can also be very helpful. *(See the S.W.O.T. worksheet for more S.W.O.T. specifics.)*

What options are available to you? _____

Commit to a Decision. Now, it's time to visualize the best outcome and make your decision. You may feel 100% sure about some decisions, while others may take some time to grow on you. Nevertheless, do your best and keep practicing those decision-making skills. They'll continue to improve as you learn, listen and come to trust your instincts.

What decision will you make? _____

Source: Captterra.com blog, 12/18/17

WORKSHEET: Conducting a S.W.O.T. Analysis

S.W.O.T. stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats and is a type of compass for making intentional, informed decisions. Conducting a S.W.O.T. Analysis is a way to gain a fuller awareness of a situation to match strengths with opportunities. It can be used with both personal decision-making and in the organizational realm.

Use this template when you need a decision-making boost. And refer to the boxed example to see how it can work for you!

EXAMPLE - Decision to Be Made:
Should I join an intramurals team?

Strengths	Opportunities
1. <i>Get regular exercise</i>	1. <i>Meet new people</i>
2. <i>Engage in campus life</i>	2. <i>Improve cardio</i>
Weaknesses	Threats
1. <i>Not very coordinated</i>	1. <i>Could hurt myself</i>
2. <i>Don't know the rules of the game</i>	2. <i>Can't do other things at that time</i>

Decision to Be Made: _____

Strengths	Opportunities
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
Weaknesses	Threats
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

Sources: Capterra.com blog, 10/9/17; The Community Tool Box, Center for Community Health and Development, University of Kansas

WORKSHEET: Asking Open-Ended Questions

When other people are trying to make decisions or solve problems that they face, they may turn to you for assistance. This can be flattering! However, keep in mind that it's never your job to decide for them or to give specific advice for them to follow. Instead, your role is to help them figure things out for themselves by listening, posing questions and giving them the confidence to make good choices.

One key way to go about this is to ask open-ended questions. These are the gently probing questions that can get to the root of an issue because they can't be answered with a simple "Yes" or "No." They require the person being questioned to critically think about their answers, to explore options and to, ultimately, come to their own conclusions.

Some examples of open-ended questions that could serve you well include...

- "What are you hoping to gain from (This decision? This strategy? Etc.)?"
- "What are you feeling right now?"
- "Beyond your own thoughts, how are other people influencing your decision?"
- "What makes you nervous/excited/hopeful about this decision?"

Giving Advice?

If someone needs guidance, it's natural to want to give them advice to help "fix" things. Yet, that can be dangerous territory! For instance, if you give someone advice, they follow it and it results in a terrible outcome, you're easy to blame. On the flip side, if they follow your advice and it results in a wonderful outcome, it can just make them dependent on you rather than helping them gain confidence in their own decision-making and problem-solving skills.

So, keep that in mind the next time someone asks, "What should I *do*?"

Your Turn

Now, you try! Consider an open-ended question or two that you could ask if someone came to you about...

Changing Their Major

1. _____ ?
2. _____ ?

Taking a Campus Job

1. _____ ?
2. _____ ?

Ending a Relationship

1. _____ ?
2. _____ ?

Campaigning for a Student Leadership Position

1. _____ ?
2. _____ ?

Dealing with a Health-Related Issue

1. _____ ?
2. _____ ?

HANDOUT: The Procrastination Problem

Many students are afflicted with the procrastination tendency. Up to 70 percent identify as procrastinators, according to *Psychology Today*. It's what keeps them up all night cramming or finishing papers. It's what causes them to say they'll do something but not follow through. And it can cause them to put off important problem-solving or decision-making tasks.

Procrastination is an affliction with both mental and physical impacts. It's not necessarily a form of laziness. It comes about for a variety of reasons, including...

- Avoiding negative experiences
- Depression
- Self-judgment
- Anticipating the worst
- A need for love
- Perfectionism
- A rigid identity
- Fear of others' response/evaluation
- A lack of training
- Low tolerance for frustration
- Being passive
- Hostility
- Not feeling like life is fair
- Being overextended

Excuses, Excuses...

Do any of these sound familiar?

"I'm not feeling well."

"I'm not in the right mood."

"I do my best work when I'm under pressure."

"It's not coming to me now — maybe I'll be inspired later."

"This is too hard — my professor is being unreasonable."

"I can't focus... I have too many other things on my mind right now."

If you're hearing these excuses over and over from a friend — or yourself — it could be time to face those procrastination tendencies head on.

Telltale Signs

While many of us have procrastination tendencies, it doesn't always mean we are full-fledged procrastinators. Some of us may simply be putting way too much on our daily To Do lists. Dr. Joseph Ferrari, an associate professor of psychology at DePaul University (IL), told *Psychology Today* that real procrastinators do five telltale things:

1. Underestimate how much time it'll take to get something done.
2. Overestimate the amount of time they have left to get something done.
3. Overestimate how motivated they'll feel the "next time" when they expect they'll get something done.
4. Mistakenly believe that working when they're not in the mood is less than optimal.
5. Mistakenly believe that, in order to succeed at a task, they need to feel like doing it.

HANDOUT: The Procrastination Problem (continued)

Helping a Problem Procrastinator

We've all seen procrastinators do everything but what they need to be doing, whether it's checking messages, going out, taking on other projects or finding people and tasks to distract them. This can really derail college students who need to keep on track with their studies and other commitments in order to succeed. Chronic procrastinators even risk dropping out of college.

If you are really concerned that someone has taken procrastination tendencies to the extreme, confront the issue in a caring way. Share your concerns and why you are worried by using "I" statements. Identify what you have noticed. Perhaps the student is just going through a rough spell. If not, and you think the person needs assistance, direct him to the appropriate resource on campus, such as an academic advisor, counselor or learning center staffer. Addressing the problem early on will enable the student to develop better habits for the future.

Sources: "Ending Procrastination," *Psychology Today*, 10/28/03; "Procrastination and Time Management," University of Oregon Counseling and Testing Center

Case Studies

Putting Off Big Decisions

Cole is a sophomore marketing major who lives in your residence hall. You've become friendly playing on an intramural volleyball team and enjoy each other's company.

It's November and you're currently making plans for an internship that will start next summer. You're excited because it's in your field and will give you an opportunity to gain great experience. However, when Cole finds out he teases you about being "so prepared and ambitious," encouraging you not to take life so seriously. "Don't lock it up now — something even better will come along," he tells you.

You know that Cole has no job plans for the summer and has been putting off creating a resume. He seems to think things will just fall in place for him without any effort, yet you're worried that putting off these types of career-related decisions will harm him. Plus, his go-with-the-flow attitude isn't necessarily what employers are looking for.

You'd like to encourage him not to put off important decisions like this, yet he always responds in ways that put down your ambitions. What might you do?

Discussion Questions:

- Why do some people put off important decisions?
- What kind of push might Cole need?
- How might delayed decision-making impact Cole in this situation?

Avoiding a Looming Issue

Susannah is in a complicated relationship with her boyfriend, Len, who she has dated for two years. They are both starting their senior years and trying to figure out what will come next.

Susannah wants to work for a local non-profit where she has been interning this past year — and the organization has told her she's a shoo-in to be hired. She believes in their mission and is excited about how she can contribute once she's able to go full-time.

Len, on the other hand, is applying to grad schools on the other side of the country. If he gets into any of his top picks, he and Susannah will be separated by hundreds to thousands of miles.

This impending separation is looming over them, yet Len and Susannah haven't talked about it. Neither of them wants to broach the subject because it seems sad and impossible. Yet, they're both thinking about it and it's eating at them, taking more energy to avoid than to face head-on.

Discussion Questions:

- How can avoiding problems be more detrimental than facing them?
- What experience have you had with a decision or problem hovering over you for a prolonged period of time?

ACTIVE ELEMENT: Creating a Mind Map

A mind map is a visual thinking tool that can help when brainstorming solutions to a problem, identifying new opportunities, making decisions, studying and more. Mind mapping lays out your thoughts using keywords and images to trigger further ideas.

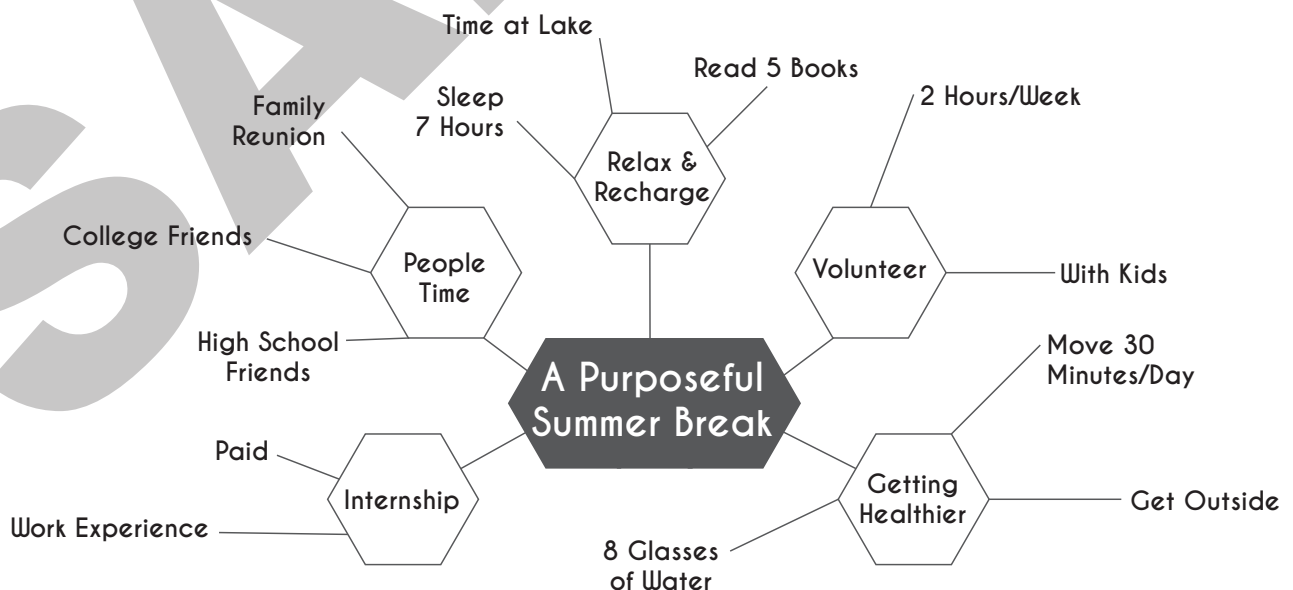
Mind Mapping Steps

- 1. Create a Central Idea.** In the center of the page, draw an image or write words that represent the topic you're going to explore.
- 2. Add Branches and Keywords.** These are the key themes flowing from your main topic. Feel free to add smaller branches from your initial ones as you explore the topic more in-depth. This can trigger connections in your brain and help you remember more information.

To make a mind map more appealing and effective, you can also color code it and add images to convey information.

To Do

- Grab a large piece of paper and some colored pens or pencils.
- Think about an issue you'd like to brainstorm as part of solving a problem or making a decision.
- Place the main topic in the middle of your paper, using words and/or images.
- Add branches and keywords stemming from that middle topic as you brainstorm key ideas. Add branches off your branches, if needed.
- Remember that there's no "right way" to mind map! Just use this tool to brainstorm visually as you work things out. The sample below can help you see the possibilities.



Source: "How to Mind Map," AYO.com

Discussion Questions

To have further in-depth discussions on the topic of Decision-Making and Problem-Solving, here are some questions to get you started...

- What holds you back from making decisions in a timely way?
- How do others' expectations impact you when it comes to decision-making and problem-solving?
- What techniques do you use to solve problems?
- What techniques do you use to make decisions?
- How can you take more responsibility for your decisions?
- What problem-solving situations are you currently dealing with?
- How can you help create a positive decision-making environment for others?
- How do you react when asked to make a decision on the spot?
- How do you feel about using pro and con lists when solving problems or making decisions?
- How do you like to make decisions when you're doing so with a group of people?
- What are some problems that may be facing adult student learners?
- What are some problems that may be facing traditional-aged students?
- When you look at problems as challenges instead, does that affect how you act and react? Why or why not?
- If someone asks you for help solving a problem, how can you avoid just giving them advice?
- How do you prevent yourself from catastrophizing when faced with a difficult problem?

"As students think about who they want their friends to be as they go through college, there are lots of decisions there about figuring out who they want to stay friends with. Those are decisions they'll go through as adults, figuring out who they'll share parts of their life with."

~ Suzanne Lovett, co-author of *Practice for Life: Making Decisions in College* (2016) and associate professor of psychology at Bowdoin College

Audience Adaptation Tips

Here are some ways you can adapt Decision-Making and Problem-Solving topics to various audiences...

When meeting with first-year students...

- Focus on how to break free from relying on parents/family members to make decisions and solve problems for them
- Talk about technological distractions that can interfere with problem-solving and decision-making

When meeting with adult student learners...

- Discuss how it feels when they allow problems or decisions to hover instead of addressing them head-on
- Consider resources on campus that can help them address larger problems like child care, basic needs insecurity, financial concerns, etc.

When meeting with student leaders...

- Explore what resources fellow students may need to feel more comfortable making decisions and solving problems
- Discuss how to help fellow students get past what's holding them back from making decisions so they can take more responsibility and grow in their confidence

What's Working on Campus

"Your Student's Sexual Decision Making" at Kent State

At Kent State University (OH), their Sexual and Relationship Violence Support Services offer a webpage about "Your Student's Sexual Decision Making." This page is filled with tips for parents and families. "By supporting your students, communicating with them, and offering facts and education, you can have a positive influence on their sexual decision making. It's never too late to start an open dialogue with your student about sex," the page says.

Kent State offers W.I.S.E. Tips for Talking that include Welcome, Interest, Support good goals and Encourage. They also provide Conversation Starters to help discuss topics like thoughts and feelings, STIs, condoms, pregnancy, and sex and alcohol. A N.I.C.E. acronym is also provided to help students learn to say "no."

10 Life Skills WORKSHOPS

Decision-Making and Problem-Solving

Resources

Here are some resources you can use to supplement this information on Decision-Making and Problem-Solving...

- *Practice for Life: Making Decisions in College* by Lee Cuba, Nancy Jennings, Suzanne Lovett and Joseph Swingle, 2016, Harvard University Press
- “How Good Are Your Decision-Making Skills?” An 18-question Quiz
<https://bit.ly/1Ym0dtv>
- Conducting a S.W.O.T. Analysis, including a Checklist, Examples, Tools and a PowerPoint Presentation
<https://bit.ly/2O11c8x>
- “Your Student’s Sexual Decision Making,” Kent State University’s Sexual and Relationship Violence Support Services
<https://bit.ly/2XQqyun>
- The DrawToast Exercise as a Way to Address Problems
<https://www.drawtoast.com/>
- “10 TED Talks to Make You a Master Problem Solver”
<https://bit.ly/2Y5wIWU>
- 6-Minute Problem Solving Video from the Khan Academy
<https://bit.ly/2zs6uRe>
- “10 Best TED Talks to Help You Make Hard Decisions”
<https://bit.ly/2YYm3uj>
- MindTools’ Team Building Exercises – Problem Solving and Decision Making
<https://bit.ly/21Pntq2>
- A Problem-Solving Worksheet from BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions
<https://bit.ly/2JEc2x4>

What Do You Do With a Problem? by Kobi Yamada

This #1 *New York Times* Best Seller children’s book by the same author who wrote *What Do You Do With an Idea?* offers an interesting perspective on problem-solving for anyone who has had a problem that they wish would go away. According to Amazon, “This is the story of a persistent problem and the child who isn’t so sure what to make of it. The longer the problem is avoided, the bigger it seems to get. But when the child finally musters up the courage to face it, the problem turns out to be something quite different than it appeared.”

This book could provide a good, simple segue into a discussion about Problem-Solving.

Sample Workshop Agenda

Here is a sample workshop agenda that uses the available pieces in this section...

- Introduce the topic using the **Prep Page** information about...
 - The importance of decision-making and problem-solving skills
 - How delaying decisions can take a toll on well-being while facing them can benefit your confidence, relationships and more
 - They are desired workforce skills
 - Learning how to take responsibility for decisions and the resources available on campus to help
- Distribute the **Problem-Solving Handout** to introduce participants to the different stages.
- Ask participants what types of decisions they made during the last 24 hours. Then, give them the **Decision-Making Steps Worksheet** so they can practice the steps with an upcoming decision.
- Also distribute the **S.W.O.T. Analysis Worksheet** to practice this tool for making intentional, informed decisions.
- Discuss the **Case Studies** in small groups as a way to put what's been learned so far into practice.
- Distribute the **Procrastination Problem Handout** to discuss signs, reasons, campus resources and more.
- Then, use the **Asking Open-Ended Questions Worksheet** to practice tools participants can use if people come to them looking for advice.
- Tap into the **Creating a Mind Map Activity** so participants walk away with another tool to use when brainstorming ways to handle challenging decisions and problems.
- Then, use the **Discussion Questions** to follow up and wrap up!

*Note: Consider using some of the tools listed on the **Resources** page, such as the 18-question quiz about decision-making skills, the DrawToast exercise, the Khan Academy and TED videos and the problem-solving worksheet, to help emphasize certain points.*