

## How to Brainstorm

Brainstorming was invented by Alex Osborne of the advertising agency BBDO as a means of enhancing the creativity of employees. Hence, the purpose of a brainstorming session is the generation of a significant amount of ideas.

We might plan our brainstorming session in the following way:

1. Determine the purpose of this session
  - a. Product development?
  - b. Problem solving?
  - c. Strategy?
  - d. Tactics?
  - e. Execution?
  - f. People challenges
2. Choose the team for this session
  - a. Cross-functional
  - b. Available
3. Choose a location for the session
  - a. Moderately isolated to avoid interference
  - b. Large enough to handle the team
  - c. White boards, easels, places for sticky notes
4. Determine extent to which we want to drive the session
  - a. How many ideas do we want?
  - b. What are stretch goals per person?
    - i. For example, 20 ideas per member
    - ii. 20 ideas times 20 members = 400 ideas!
5. Pick a time for the session that all team members can attend
6. Ensure that all participants have sticky notes and writing tools
7. Some admonishments for the start of the session
  - a. No negative comments
  - b. Focus on stretching to desired quantity
  - c. Wacky is good
8. Time the session
9. When the session is over, make sure to capture all the ideas in a permanent form
  - a. On computer
  - b. On paper
  - c. Digital photo of white board or easel
10. If desired, we can take the ideas and create an affinity diagram, in which we group ideas by similarity

Keep in mind that we can capture ideas during the session or after the session on an Ishikawa diagram, the instructions for which are in another white paper. We can use outlining tools,

graphical tools (mind mappers, Visio, Omnigraffle), and anything else that helps us to collect our ideas.

Once we have a collection of ideas preserved, we can proceed to filter our collection down using criteria that we establish. We design our criteria to deliver the results we want. If we are looking to penetrate a new market with an idea that is somewhat outrageous, this exercise would be the time to do so.

In addition to the above approach, we can also add more systematic ideas such as SCAMPER and TRIZ. These may, however, limit the imagination while simultaneously providing a basis for new ideas—a contradiction. Use these tools wisely.

Once we have selected our main idea, it should go through the same kinds of analyses we would use with any other idea that we pursue in our business: net present value, return on investment, benefit to cost ratios, and other tools that are part of corporate governance.

Some good resources:

Coyne, Kevin, and Coyne, Shawn. *Brainsteering: A Better Approach to Breakthrough Ideas*. HarperBusiness, 2011.

Miller, Brian Cole. *Quick Brainstorming Activities for Busy Managers: 50 Exercises to Spark Your Team's Creativity and Get Results Fast*. AMACOM, 2012.

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