



Better brainstorming

How to generate more great ideas

If only all we had to do was have someone say “Ok, time to come up with some great ideas - go!”

But most of us need the right conditions, time, and concentration to come up with creative suggestions. With long to-do lists, calendars full of meetings, and wider life priorities on your mind, it's hard to suddenly pluck inspiration out of the air - and for those ideas to be anywhere close to good enough for your boss to hear.

So, this is where brainstorming comes in.

Brainstorming was dreamt up by advertising exec Alex Osborn, one of the original 1940s ‘Mad Men’. He had four clear rules:

- 1 No negative feedback
- 2 Focus on quantity over quality
- 3 Use others’ ideas as launchpads
- 4 Encourage big thinking

And it worked for him. Generating ideas no longer just happened in the boardroom, and he saw creativity go up by **50%**.

However, most of us need a bit more than that. Structure and support for our brainstorming activities helps keep fear, hierarchy and/or inherent laziness from preventing us getting really creative and contributing our best ideas.

So, what's the solution? Here are five tried and tested methods you can use to help people have better ideas, whether working solo or as a team.

1. Rolestorming: What would Taylor Swift do?

The theory behind this technique - developed in the early 1980s by Rick Griggs - is that if you pretend to be someone else, you'll let your guard down and feel more comfortable sharing ideas. By taking on another persona, you're distanced from owning the idea, and are more likely to come up with original concepts.

Draft a list of celebrities, fictional characters, friends and family and consider how they would approach the problem. Why not take it one step further, and print out a mask for your new persona?

2. The Stepladder Technique

This technique encourages everybody in a group to contribute on an individual level before they can be influenced by anybody else. Devised by Rogelberg, Barnes-Farrell and Lowe in the early 1990s, here's how to apply the Stepladder Technique:

- ✓ Issue the problem to all players at least two days in advance, giving them time to mull it over and start forming hypotheses.
- ✓ Bring two members together to discuss the problem.
- ✓ Invite a third group member to present ideas to the core group, before hearing what is already on the table. Then, open the discussion.
- ✓ Repeat with all remaining team members.
- ✓ Make sure everyone shares their ideas, before reaching a final decision.

3. Silent storm

This is a handy tool to ensure everyone's ideas get out in the open, allowing quieter voices to be heard, based on Rohrbach's 365 Brainwriting technique.

Each team member (four - seven people works best here) is given a blank sheet of paper and five minutes to write or draw up to five solutions to the given problem. Sheets are then passed to the right and the process repeated, with the next participant free to draw inspiration from their neighbour's ideas.

4. Bring in some fresh faces

Your ideas will only stretch as far as your experience, so adding novel minds, with novel experiences will help grow the idea bank. Who can you bring in from another team, department or even another organization to get their take? You could do a swap with a client or acquaintance - have them join your brainstorm, and then go along to one of their ideas meetings to see how you can help them too.

5. Get away

A change of scene can make all the difference. Depending on how limited your options are, this could be anything as simple as changing rooms, going outside, or working at a different time of day. Or where your options are broader, think about where you could take a trip as a team to immerse yourself in a different place or culture, and see what benefits it brings to your thinking.

What else would you add? **Join the conversation**

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