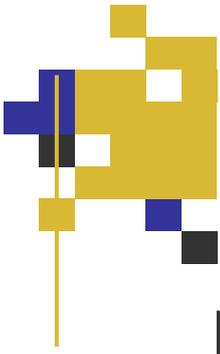


# Better Brainstorming

ACHIEVING THE IMPOSSIBLE

**Timothy Hyde**

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## Intro

One of the classic and most widely known Creative Thinking techniques for groups is Brainstorming. (see note below). It is a simple technique, yet it has the power to unleash a torrent of great ideas to both solve problems and make the most of opportunities. But how much do we really know about the technique and how much has changed in the method over the nearly 70 years since it was developed?

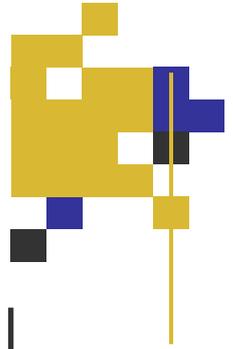
It is a very powerful technique and used by many companies and groups, yet it is sometimes seen by some people as a bit old fashioned. A poorly run Brainstorming session can in fact lead to this impression and sometimes our quest to pursue the latest fad creativity techniques leads us to overlook it.

It is also sometime assumed that people know the technique. I often read books and manuals that ask you to brainstorm around something but fail to offer much help past that.

There is of course a lot more to Brainstorming than just ordering in pizza and a few beers and tossing some ideas around. There are rules to start with and it could well be argued, if you are not following the rules, then you are not brainstorming.

This little ebook is designed to give you a brief background to the technique, the basic rules, some additional tips and techniques, a couple of variations to the technique and a listing of some other resources.

(Note – There has been some discussion over the last few years, particularly in the UK, about the word Brainstorming itself. Some people feel the word is somehow offensive to people with brain disorders, eg sufferers from epilepsy. If you feel this way, please feel free to substitute the word Thought Shower or Word Shower throughout the document, or contact our office for the Politically Correct version.)



## Background

*“It is easier to tone down a wild idea than it is to think up a new one”*

Alex Osborn

Alex Osborn was a New York advertising executive with the firm of Batten, Barton, Dunstine and Osborn, and developed the basic Brainstorming technique around the years 1939 -1941.

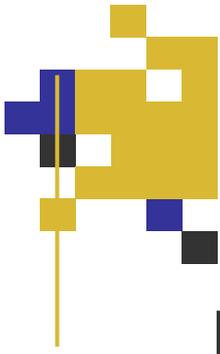
Obviously his aim was to help generate better quantities and quality of advertising ideas. By 1953 the techniques and rules had been both defined and refined further, and they then appeared in his ground breaking book – Applied Imagination, published by Charles Scribner & Sons.

In a nutshell the technique creates an environment that encourages a group to express ideas freely, while deferring criticism, judgement or evaluation until the end. The power of the technique is in the group synergy, where ideas are sparked and grow from previous ideas.

A point worth remembering also about the technique is that it is multi functional. Most people tend to use it in one particular context, perhaps the one in which they were first introduced to the concept. I like to remind people it is just as useful for exploring - Problems, Challenges and Opportunities.

*“All men dream but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find it was vanity, but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act on their dreams with open eyes to make it possible.”*

T.E. Lawrence



## GUIDELINES

### ■ Have a clear purpose

What are you trying to achieve? What's the outcome you want from the session?

The more specific the goal you have the better. Don't say "how do we do better" but narrow the focus to "how do we double our sales?"

#### ■ Tip

Restate the Problem, Challenge or Opportunity in different ways. Different views of the challenge will produce a wider range of responses and concepts.

This preparation can be done before the session.

### ■ Group selection

5 to 11 people make a good size group.

Smaller groups can't create the buzz or momentum; larger groups mean either fragmentation or some voices not being heard.

Draw members from different fields, experience levels and points of view.

#### ■ Tip

Important – Leave Titles, Roles and Ranks at the door. Team leaders and managers can sometimes dampen the enthusiasm and creative flow of a group if they retain their role.

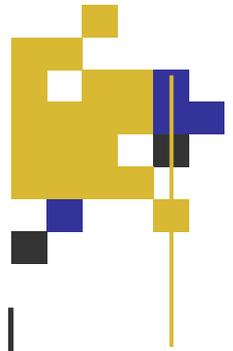
### ■ Establish Rules

Make sure everyone knows the guidelines and framework.

Set a time frame or the number of ideas you want to generate.

### ■ Scribe

Get everything down. Nothing should be rejected. Number the ideas as you write them up. Not only does this help facilitate the final discussion phase but it also measures progress towards set number goals. Ideas should be written up so everyone can view them on flip charts, white boards, Post It notes etc.



## ■ Quantity

As they say, you have to open a lot of oysters before you get a pearl. The more ideas you can generate the greater your number of useful ones will be. The person driving the session should be ready with a few “idea triggers” to inject if there is a lull in proceedings.

### ■ Tip

Check out the Advanced Ideas section for some “Triggers”

## ■ Suspend Judgment

Don’t judge ideas as they come up. This is VITAL. Dismissal or rejection of ideas at the moment they are generated will severely disrupt the process. Likewise, don’t stop on the perfect idea where everyone says “wow, that’s it!” Keep going and build on it. Another terrific idea is just around the corner.

### ■ Tip

Some brainstorm leaders have been known to arm themselves with a water pistol to enforce this important rule.

## ■ Encourage wild and wacky ideas

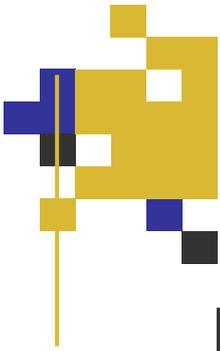
As Alex Osborne, the father of Brainstorming himself said, “It’s easier to tame down a wild idea than to think up a new one.” Crazy ideas will spark enthusiasm and generate the energy required to produce more and more. They will also be the basis of workable ideas.

### ■ Tip

Some groups give a prize for the craziest idea of the session!

## ■ Schedule

It’s usually better to have a specific Brainstorm session, than to tack it on to another meeting. This way people can come prepared and fresh, rather than be faced with the question “so, who’s got any ideas?” at the end of a long meeting.



## TRIAGE / ANALYSE

Once your goals are met in terms of duration or number of ideas created, it's time to do some triage.

A useful approach is to judge each idea quickly and place it into one of three categories.

Two ticks for Useful

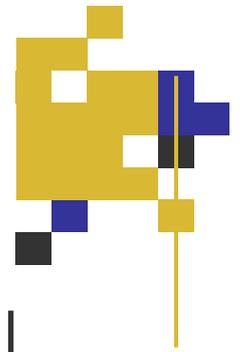
One for Interesting

Cross out the Rejects.

Transferring the Useful ideas onto a fresh list is good at this point.

Another useful technique to hone down the list or to evaluate your shortlist is to give each team member a set number of points, (5 works well), to allocate how they wish. This will get you a good consensus of how the group is feeling about the ideas generated. With this technique it is important you followed the advice to number the ideas as it aids in the collation of the allocated points.

Once you have generated a short list you are ready to move on to feasibility evaluation. This of course will be dictated by the individual situation and is beyond the scope of this publication, but I guarantee if you follow the steps outlined above you will have generated more useful ideas in a shorter time than if you had used an unstructured approach.



## ADVANCED IDEAS

Brainstorming has not just sat still for the last 70 years. Different techniques and enhancements have been added. Here is a sampling.

### Kaleidoscope Brainstorming

Kaleidoscope Brainstorming takes the technique to a whole new level!

Developed by Dr KRS Murthy, it is also referred to as 'Multiple Mind Conferencing' and not only produces vastly more ideas than conventional brainstorming, but also acts at a deep level to build teams and harmonious work groups.

It does require a deft touch as a facilitator and probably best with smaller sized groups.

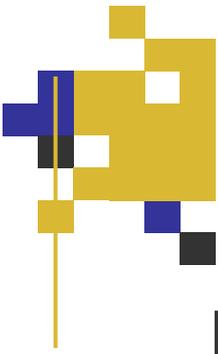
I learnt of this technique from the fabulous <http://www.businessballs.com> site and suggest you go there for a full description.

In a nutshell, not only do you create your own ideas, but after a period of silent contemplation, you suggest what new ideas each of your fellow team members will come up with in the next round! This multiplies the number of ideas and also allows you to "think like someone else," unleashing a torrent of new concepts.

The "Thinking like someone else" or "How would..." method is one I teach in my workshops and in the 7 Day Challenge course.

For a full description of Kalidescope Brainstorming, follow this link.

<http://www.businessballs.com/kaleidoscopebrainstorming.htm>



## Warm up ideas

I always like to throw in a quick word game or puzzle to get peoples brains “sparking” before we get into the real process. Here are a few examples.

How many parts of the body are 3 letter words? Either singularly or work this as a group, writing up the answers. (Without slang words 10 = arm, ear, eye, gum, hip, jaw, leg, lip, rib, toe.

Magnetic Poetry sets, the type that can be stuck to your refrigerator door, are great. Give 5 – 10 words to each person. They have to form a sentence. Then combine with their neighbour etc.

Small Metal puzzles, the type you have to separate. But make sure they are fairly easy to solve, we don't want people frustrated before they even start!

We have a collection of other Puzzles available via our Resource section.

## Practice session

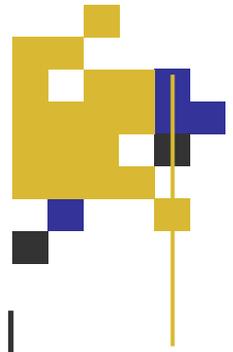
With groups who are new to real Brainstorming, I also sometimes run a trial or practice exercise before we tackle the main topic. I often pick something silly or perhaps a topical issue from the news.

How can we encourage children to eat vegetables?

How could we encourage people to stop smoking?

How could we make the inner city safer at night?

How can we eliminate grumpy people?



## Creativity Triggers

At some point in every Brainstorm session the ideas will dry up. A good Brainstorm leader will be prepared for this moment with a few Idea Triggers. These should allow you to look at the task from another perspective and get the flow happening again.

**Magazines** - Random pages from different magazines are handed out. Relate something on your sheet to the challenge you are facing!

**Random Word** – Open a dictionary and pick a random word. Relate the word to the brainstorming. It can be either a noun or a verb.

**Random Word Attributes** – This is a more powerful version. Pick a word and list the attributes or association of that word. Then use these attributes against your challenge. (I have included a sample list of words on the next page.) This is actually a great technique for Solo Brainstorming.

Eg. The word you pick is River. Attributes – Wet, Swift, Cold, barrier, trade, fish etc

**Reversal** - Another powerful technique is to Reverse the Problem. State the problem in reverse. Come up with ideas to solve the new problem. Then Reverse those solutions! Sometimes you don't even need to do the final step as the initial reversal will make solutions so apparent.

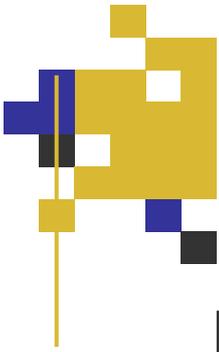
Eg. Let's say you were Brainstorming ways to attract customers to your shop. Rather than that discuss ways to drive people away from the shop. Ideas might include – removing signage, leave rubbish in the doorway, unfriendly staff etc.

**Go for a walk.** Observe and report back one thing that relates to what you are working on.

**or**

Go for a walk and bring back an object. The other people must use the object in relationship to the challenge.

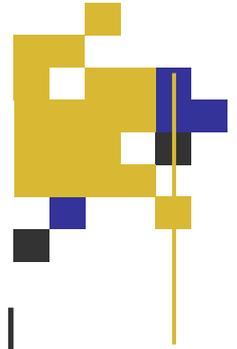
**Target.** Simple encouragement sometimes works. "OK, just 10 more ideas!" and then we will move on!"



## RANDOM WORD LIST

Here's a couple of different word lists for the Random Word method. Pick from either list, or one from each.

Apartment	Accelerate
Blossom	Budget
Chocolate	Cover
Daughter	Divide
Ecology	Eliminate
Fox	Flatten
Galaxy	Glow
Hazard	Hire
Italic	Illustrate
Jackhammer	Judge
Keyboard	Kill
Lollipop	Lift
Military	Monitor
Nurse	Narrate
Olive	Observe
Photo	Perform
Queen	Quiz
Raspberry	Relocate
Secret	Superior
Tandem	Thicken
Umbrella	Upgrade
Voyage	Volunteer
Watermelon	Wind
X-Ray	Xenophobia
Yogurt	Yell
Zebra	Zillion



## FURTHER RESOURCES

For further Resources to help you create Fresh Ideas Faster

Please visit our Resource page at <http://www.TimothyHyde.com>

and our frequently updated Blog at <http://www.timothyhyde.typepad.com/>

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Timothy Hyde is a Corporate Creativity Catalyst, helping people accelerate innovation in their business and in their lives via creativity.

To engage him for a Keynote or Workshop at your next event, to conduct a facilitated Ideas Session or to see the other Creativity Tools available, please visit his website

Website <http://www.timothyhyde.com>

His recent Australian clients include –

**University of Newcastle (x5), CPA Congress, Queensland Government Senior Officers Forum, Qld Libraries Assoc, InsuranceAdviserNet, Qld Tafe, First National Real Estate, Institute of Accountants, MBF**