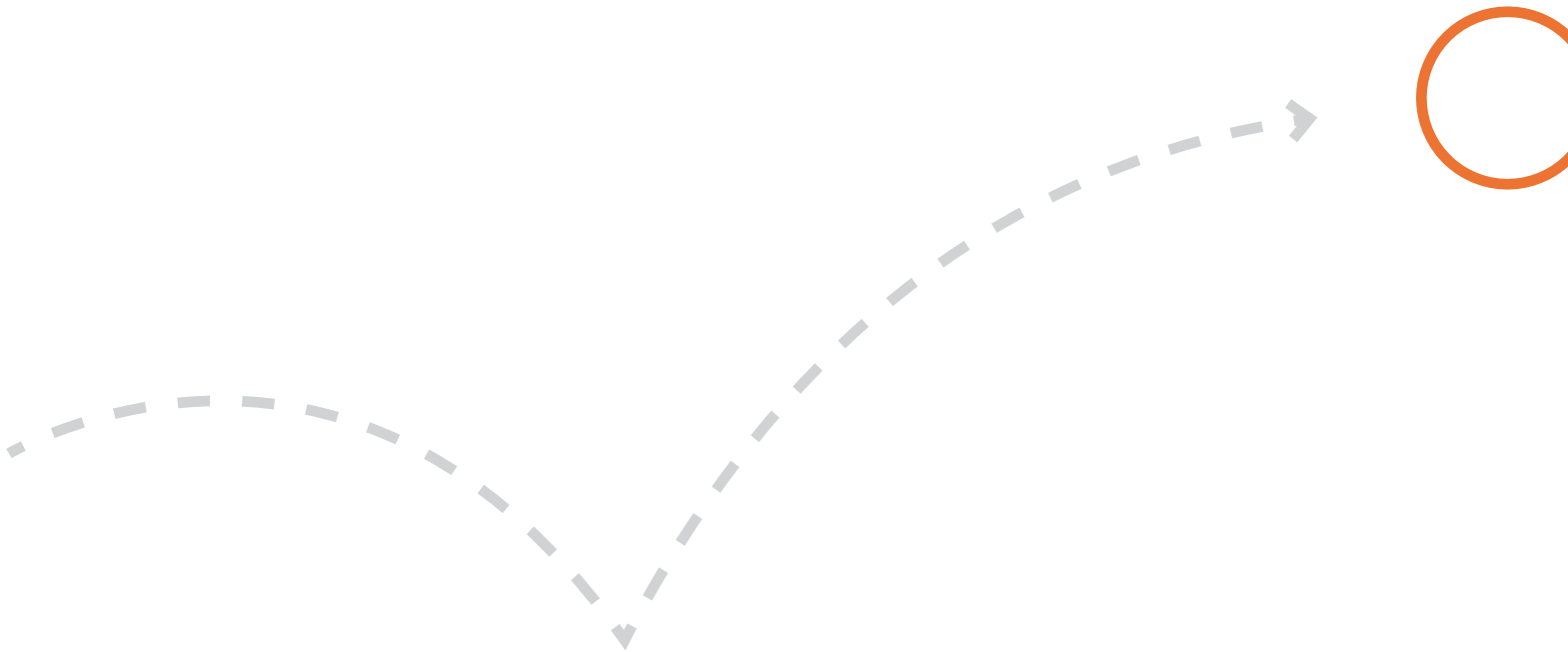


Effective Brainstorming



Brain-storm-ing

Function: noun

A group problem-solving technique that involves the spontaneous contribution of ideas from all members of the group.

No matter what the problem is, the size of your organization or it's hierarchical structure, effective brainstorming can help you get unstuck. Out-think your competition, create a positive work environment and find new solutions to old problems...

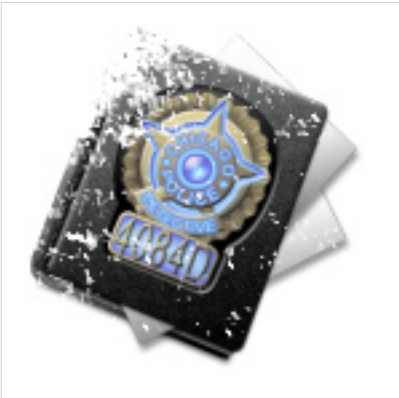
Effective: Brainstorming: A Few Tips before you begin.

Before you begin, here are a few tips to consider even before beginning the magical process of brainstorming. And if this is a 'real' brainstorm is a trail-blazing idea within your organization, expect resistance.



> Prepare.

Your idea to brainstorm may be met with skepticism, and looked upon as just another long meeting in disguise. Your preparation can not only help the brainstorm process but the supplies you collect will help it be perceived as 'different'. You will need Post-it's, lots of paper — letter size note pads and easel paper (the Post-it Easel pads are great), pencils, and snacks/drinks. Your meeting room should ideally have blank walls that you can paste paper on (That's why the Post-it easel paper is good, it doesn't stain walls). If possible record the brainstorm (video is great, audio is OK too).



> No cops invited.

For a brainstorm to be effective you need a flat hierarchy. You don't need nay-sayers. There will be plenty of time later for reality checks. For now, people should be able to express ideas freely, and not feel censored or judged. There are no stupid ideas and sometimes the best ideas hide themselves in a 'weird notion'. So make sure everyone knows that they need to bring along their positive attitude and be prepared to work together to generate a multitude of ideas. 'And' is a better word than 'But'. Mornings are usually best for brainstorms. Afternoons after lunch are the worst!



> Speedy Gonzales.

Ever been to one of those meetings that seems to go on forever? One thought keeps getting regurgitated till everyone in the room has a glassy eyed look? A brainstorm should not be one of those meetings. Let people know that the aim is to generate lots of ideas, really fast and then end the meeting when the pace starts to slow down. Even better, have a goal in mind. One hour is usually enough. This does not mean mayhem for that one hour! One thought, one voice at one time. Your job as the facilitator is to make sure people respect this rule.

Effective Brainstorming: The Process.

Notice how the line on this page moves in one direction...it bounces up from one idea to the next till it finds the good stuff? No doubling back, no looping back, it just keep going till it rises to the place that we would have not got to alone.

1) State the problem that you want to solve

Let's make sure everyone is on the same page. Clearly state the problem that you are trying to solve today. This brainstorm has only item on it's agenda.

2) Define the ground rules

One voice, one idea at one time. This is the most crucial ground rule. To keep things from deteriorating into a rant or a heated argument, it is important that all stay focussed on the topic and are allowed to speak their idea out fully without being interrupted. Encourage people to write down ideas on their note pads so they can refer back to them when they get an opportunity to speak. You can come up with more ground rules if you like. The end objective is to create a positive, structured environment for idea generation.

3) Ready, set, Go! (umm...Go where?)

No one likes to go first. So instead of making anyone go first, get people to write down their thoughts, ideas even keywords that come to mind on the note pads in front of them. Assign an allocated time for this. Five minutes is good, it creates a healthy sense of urgency! Once the five minutes are up, invite people to share their first idea.

4) Keep 'em coming

As much as possible, every idea should naturally lead to the next. This is what creates that 'heat' that is so valuable in brainstorm. Building upon people's ideas takes us places that we hadn't thought of going to before. Note pads become almost redundant. Encourage people to draw and use the big Easel post-it papers. Your job is to write down the ideas as a numbered list.

5) Leave them wanting more...almost

To make this a positive experience for the attendees, know when to stop. You don't want people to leave the room exhausted or thankful that the ordeal is over. You'll have a harder time getting them back in again! So end before that happens. . Repetition and awkward silence are good indicators that you have gone on too long!

Effective Brainstorming: Go get 'em tiger!

The only way to get better at brainstorming is to break a few eggs so to speak. Try brainstorming with your co-workers on a small problem, before you head off to invite the big wigs for an all out, lets-change-the-world brainstorm.

We have worked with several companies on helping them get unstuck, out-think competition and even enjoy the process of brainstorming.

Visit us at www.designstamp.com.

Learn more:

This little how-to document borrows heavily from the IDEO method of brainstorming. A really good book to read about brainstorming and IDEO is **'The Art of Innovation' by Tom Kelly**.

Email us at info@designstamp.com and we would love to share our ideas, or have you tell us yours.

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Effective Brainstorming: *The outtakes.*

We have some 'interesting' experiences conducting brainstorms. Here a few of those that we cannot erase from our memory. Hopefully they will help you, not make the same mistakes we made!

x The cookie conversation

Snacks are a great pick-me-up. But we have now learnt that they need to be non-controversial and generic. Get too "new-agey", and serve up wheat-free, sugar-free cookies and they become the topic of conversation instead of the problem on hand. We now stick to donuts and M&M's.

x Color phobia

Too many choices of colors of markers becomes confusing. Try and stick to two. One to write words with, another to circle good words. Don't get fancier than that, it becomes counter productive.

x Don't shoot the Doodler

You might have one person in your group who always draws constantly. Even when they really should be looking up and paying attention to the topic on hand. Turns out they are. It's their way of processing and thinking. But then again maybe not. Just don't jump to conclusions about your neighbourhood doodler.

x Brand brainstorms are hard!

Maybe you are one of those lucky organizations that has got their brand message down to a tattoo on everyone's forehead. But if you are having a brand related brainstorm where you need to define your corporate or product brand, expect conflicting statements and thoughts. If things get really messy, bring the brainstorm down to just coming up with keywords (those that need to be associated with the brand, it's energy and emotions). From there, build back up to making sentences and complete thoughts. Or if you have a really tough crowd, keep the first brainstorm limited to generating lots of keywords and then distilling them down to a shorter list (10 words maximum is a good number).

x No one owns the marker

Some people love to write big words on big paper. And sometimes they hog those markers. Look for opportunities to transfer ownership of the marker from the hog (is the hog... you?). Encourage everyone to pen their thoughts, draw a diagram or just take the floor. Sometimes an idea may be better expressed with a diagram or wild gestures done standing in front of the crowd! Getting everyone involved and moving around gets the blood flowing, things fresh and also gives you, the facilitator, a break!