

Beyond Brainstorming *By Floyd Hurt*

Brainstorming generates an enormous number of ideas in a very short time, with even the best of sessions producing the unexpected to the absurd ones with no apparent merit. This sometimes makes the effort seem ridiculous and wasteful. It's not.

What you want to create is an environment and a session that allows the brain to jump into completely new arenas, hoping to find anything but the same old expected and hackneyed ideas you've heard before. It's the freedom and lack of restrictions that powers brainstorming. Brainstorming doesn't judge ideas or even take them into action. A

lively, invigorating brainstorming session will gather plenty of wild, interesting ideas for you, but then no action results. This is why so many people who participate in these sessions become disappointed and disillusioned.

In order to move beyond this phase

of the creative process and translate great ideas into real actions, explore the following four important steps:

Brainstorm Freely. As you begin the session, make it clear to all that you ultimately want an idea you can act on, but that this goal shouldn't interfere with flights of fancy along the way. Then, as facilitator, it's your responsibility to stop any attempt by the team to judge, reel in, or limit thinking until you have a hefty pile of outrageous, fun, and supposedly impractical ideas.

Review & Winnow Down. Once the brainstorming has ended, look over your list of wild, seemingly unrealistic

ideas and ask your group to single out those with the greatest potential. If no clear leaders emerge, you can always vote. Tip: Give everyone \$100 in play money to spend on the idea(s) they like best. The ideas that receive the most dough are the winners.

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Dialogue and Discussion *By Kristin Arnold*

Everyone is entitled to an opinion, but there are limits to how far team members can take their opinions. All too often, team members forget to encourage a healthy dialogue among team members and conversations become debates of one idea versus another. Taken to the extreme, they can dominate the discussion, as each proponent hopes to gain support from the majority.

In his groundbreaking book *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, Peter Senge makes a powerful distinction between dialogue and discussion:

In a discussion, opposing views are presented and defended, and the team searches for the best view to help make a team decision. People in a discussion want their own views to be accepted by the group. The emphasis is on winning rather than on learning.

In dialogue, people freely and creatively explore issues, listen deeply to each other and suspend their own views in search of the truth. People in a dialogue have access to a larger pool of knowledge than any one person enjoys. The primary purpose is to enlarge ideas, not to diminish them. It's not

The primary
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Bush's Ground Rules

A sampling of the rules of President Bush's White House, as explained by Andrew Card Jr., the chief of staff:

Attire. Men must wear ties and jackets at all times in the Oval Office. Women must wear proper business attire. "I have not seen the president in the Oval Office without a suit and tie on."

Brevity. Briefing papers should not run over a page or two—at most.

Punctuality. Be sensitive to the clock. Staff members must be on time for meetings—or be early. "The president begins meetings on time and ends them on time."

Respect. Staff members are told to respect each other, and return each other's calls promptly. "I remind everyone that we are just staffers—no more important than anyone [else]."

Work Habits. Don't be a workaholic. The president leaves the office by 6:30 usually and expects his staff to spend time with their families—and enjoy their weekends. "He knows how to get that all-important battery recharged."

New York Times, March 11, 2001

“Brainstorming is a necessary and invigorating first step in an effective and creative process. But, without a firm commitment to turn your ideas into action, brainstorming will never deliver the desired results.”

Floyd Hurt, Author of Rousing Creativity

A newsletter designed to facilitate discussion and share tips and techniques to help your teams to be extraordinary.

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Beyond Brainstorming *(cont'd from page 1)*

Modify These Ideas. Explore ways to make your crazy ideas more doable. (Remember: it's always easier to tone down a wild idea than to build up a tame one.) Take, for example, this off-the-wall idea to raise money for a nonprofit organization: "Turn everyone you can find upside down and empty their pockets."

Although seemingly silly at first glance, this idea might lead to an ad that shows someone upside down, pockets turned out, with the caption: "Have you dug as deeply as you can?" Or, it might lead the staff to think about where money falls out of people's pockets (easy chairs, car seats), along with a campaign that gives people a small coin bank to collect and donate all that found money. Or, it might lead to a corporate event/campaign with the theme, "Your participation just might turn the world upside-down." Hold the event at an amusement park and get sponsorships for every time someone goes upside-down on a ride. As you can see, the

possibilities are endless- and a lot of fun.

Act On Your Ideas by Developing a Detailed Action Plan. To formulate a detailed action plan, design a chart with four columns: action, person, material, and time, with about 10 rows below each.

In the action column, list the specifics you need to undertake in order to make your idea a reality. In the person column, note the name of the person (not a committee) who will take responsibility for that action. Under material, list all the materials (money, computers, tables, etc.) that the person will need to complete the action. Finally, in the time column, record the exact date (June 3, not just early June) when the person has to finish the action.

In the final analysis, brainstorming is a necessary and invigorating first step in an effective and creative process. But, without a firm commitment to turn your ideas into actions, brainstorming will never deliver the desired results.

*Floyd Hurt is the author of
 "Rousing Creativity: Think New Now!"*

Dialogue and Discussion *(cont'd from page 1)*

about winning acceptance of your viewpoint, but exploring every option and agreeing to do what is right.

Dialogue helps teams to open closed subjects, remove blocks to communication and heal rifts. To build a climate that supports dialogue:

Ask Questions. Clarify what others are saying and ask others if they understand what you are saying.

Make Suggestions. Build on your teammates' ideas. Acknowledge their contributions and integrate their ideas into your suggestions.

Encourage Others. Not only have the courage to express your opinions, but the consideration to listen to others. Make it a point to encourage others to contribute one idea before the team makes suggestions.

Ask for Feedback. Ask others what they think of your ideas and give constructive feedback on other people's ideas.

Look for Common Ground. As people share and build on their ideas, look beyond the positions to the deeper issues. Identify areas of agreement or "common ground" to serve as a foundation for positive discussion.

Teams must balance dialogue with useful discussion. In dialogue, different views are explored. In a healthy discussion that follows, those different views easily converge into a common decision about the right action to take.

"Microsoft has had its share of flops in the employee-recognition area. One year, thousands of employees who had worked to build products received identical plaques that were inscribed, 'To honor your individual achievements.' Many plaques ended up as doorstops."

Julie Bick

Author, *All I Really Need to Know in Business I Learned at Microsoft*

extraordinary team

What's New at QPC Inc.

It has been a busy and rewarding past few months, and a special thank you to many of our wonderful clients and the diverse, challenging work:

Baltimore Gas & Electric—facilitating and consulting a breakthrough team on renovating a major business process.

Emergency Physicians of Tidewater—facilitating the Board's annual "strategic thinking" retreat.

Girl Scout Council of the Colonial Coast—training leadership and staff on extraordinary team skills.

Hampton Roads Partnership—facilitating a lively discussion on regional workforce development.

ITT Night Vision—facilitating strategic planning for new business.

NASA's Chief Information Officers—facilitating a groundbreaking team workshop focusing on team interaction.

NASA Langley's Chief Counsel Team—facilitating a team workshop including the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.

T. Rowe Price—training project team leaders and managers how to be "extraordinary" team facilitators.

Western Union—team building and facilitating the development of an aggressive short-term marketing plan.

We have also been featured in several publications, including *Bottom Line Business*, *Sharpman.com*, *Professional Speaker* magazine as well as a featured guest on Jim Blasingame's national radio-talk show, *Small Business Advocate*.

I hope you find this newsletter to be interesting and informative. It's my small way of keeping in touch with you—the people who helped build my practice.

Give Credit

Jon Reingold, Excel's general manager, presents "Rheiny" awards at his business-unit meetings - small plastic rhinos for a job well done. When Vice President Brad Chase headed up Windows marketing, he gave "Wild Goose" (chase) awards. As head of the Kids software group, Charlotte Guyman gave out "Char-latte" awards—certificates for a free latte for employees who had gone above and beyond.

One manager totaled up his product's sales, estimated his team's weight, and announced in a meeting, "I always knew you were a great team, but today you are officially worth your weight in gold." Sales continued their uptick, and a few months later, he proclaimed they were now worth their weight in platinum.

What reward(s) are you known for?

From Julie Bick's book, All I Really Need to Know in Business I Learned at Microsoft.

Practical Team Activities: Follow the Process

Follow the Process

To demonstrate the importance of clear process instructions.

Time - 5 minutes

Any Number of Participants

Give each person one sheet of colorful paper (e.g. fluorescent yellow paper). As the instructor, do not pick up a piece of paper – or else the participants will pick up the paper in the same direction you do!

Ask the team to follow your directions: "First, please close your eyes."

"Please fold your paper in half." Note: some participants may want to question you, but don't answer them. Just repeat your instruction. Once they have completed the procedure, move on to the next

instruction:

"Please tear off the upper right hand corner of your paper."

"Fold the paper in half again."

"Please tear off the lower left hand corner."

"Fold the paper in half once again."

"Please tear off the upper right hand corner."

When all have completed this last instruction, ask the participants to open their eyes and open their papers. Look shocked, absolutely shocked at the different results. Hint: some papers will have one, two or three holes in the middle of the paper, etc.

In a middle-manager questioning tone ask, "What happened? I gave pretty specific in-

structions – and yet you came up with different results!" Let the team tell you what went wrong, for example:

You didn't let us ask questions/ answer our questions.

We couldn't see what others were doing.

We didn't know what you wanted or what the end product was.

Agree that you probably could have done a better job communicating the instructions. Ask the team, "What would have helped to make the instructions better and receive a more consistent result?"

Use these comments to help improve the team's communication process and to communicate instructions and procedures more effectively.

"If you are looking for something that will provoke thinking about your work and your life, this might just be the book for you."

Jeff Anthony
President, Anthony Consulting

extraordinary team



From the Bookshelf

By Jeff Anthony

In his book, *The Future of Success* (ISBN 0375411127), Robert Reich, former Secretary of Labor, succeeded where many "business" authors writing often fall short. Not relying on traditional anecdotal visits and platitudes from the usual suspects, Reich offers a unique perspective driven by his own personal experiences. The result is a more powerful story of his discovery of the difference between making a living and making a life, and a portrait of this thing called "success" and how it might be measured in the future.

I liked the author's ability to provoke me into a discussion with him about his thoughts versus my own. In some cases, I felt like he was talking not to me, but about me. In other cases, the ideas seemed well out of sync with where my thoughts were heading on a particular subject. But after more careful consideration, I could see and understand that, he was describing things I just couldn't "see" yet – a technique that is particularly appealing to me since, in the consulting business, we are often "listening for things our client just can't hear yet."

If you are looking for a one-minute "how-to" book, or a recipe book with the "Top 10 Secrets of...", you will be disappointed. If, on the other hand, you are looking for something that will provoke thinking about your work and your life, this might just be the book for you.

Team Rituals

Extraordinary teams typically have customs, traditions or "rituals" that define who they are as a team, reinforce positive team behaviors and contribute to the team's culture and philosophy. Rituals often celebrate exceptional contributions, additions, promotions and retirements from the team, or the accomplishment of critical milestones.

Traditions include casual Fridays, pot-luck lunches, pizza parties, family picnics, birthday and holiday celebrations, team outings, and other activities that the team expects on a regular basis. One of my favorites is "tea time" at 3pm, every day. For ten or fifteen minutes, we grab a cup of tea, coffee or soda and gather together to share what's going on with us at work, home or leisure. When starting my consulting practice, I recognized the importance of "connecting" each day—regardless of what's going on in the office—because we are often going in a million different directions. Tea(m) time allows us to focus on the people side of teams, not just the great work.

When employees join DonateTo.com, they receive a "toolbox" that that general manager puts together. There's Krazy Glue to represent the team sticking together and Tylenol for the inevitable headaches! Each week, she stocks the toolbox with something new. The bigger symbolism is that the DonateTo.com team is creating a toolbox for people who want to help other people in need - the team's mission!

Mark Zagorski of WorldNow, started a monthly "drill." Every month, someone is presented with The Team Drill, a clunky old tool that he picked up at a garage sale. The monthly winner is expected to perform a few simple tasks: Personalize the drill in some way, and devise a new rule for how to care for it. One team member added a Bart Simpson trigger. Another made the drill wireless by adding an antenna. At the end of the month, the current winner passes the drill to next star. The dented old drill captures their unofficial mantra of "drilling down to solve problems."

Adapted from Dec 2000 & Jan 2001 Fast Company.

Creating a Heavy Burden By Dakota Livesay

A father and his son were taking their donkey to sell at an auction. Along the way, a man criticized the father for not adequately utilizing the carrying capacity of the donkey. So the father put his son on the donkey.

They then encountered another person who chastised the son for riding when his elderly father walked. The father and son exchanged places.

Another person later said it wasn't proper etiquette for a son to walk behind his father like a servant. So they both got on the donkey.

Now they were criticized for overloading the donkey.

In frustration, the father tied the four feet of the donkey together; stuck a pole between them; and he and his son carried the donkey on their shoulders. Trying to please everyone creates a heavy burden.

When we in danger of trying to please everyone, ask each

other "Are we trying to carry a donkey, here?"



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