

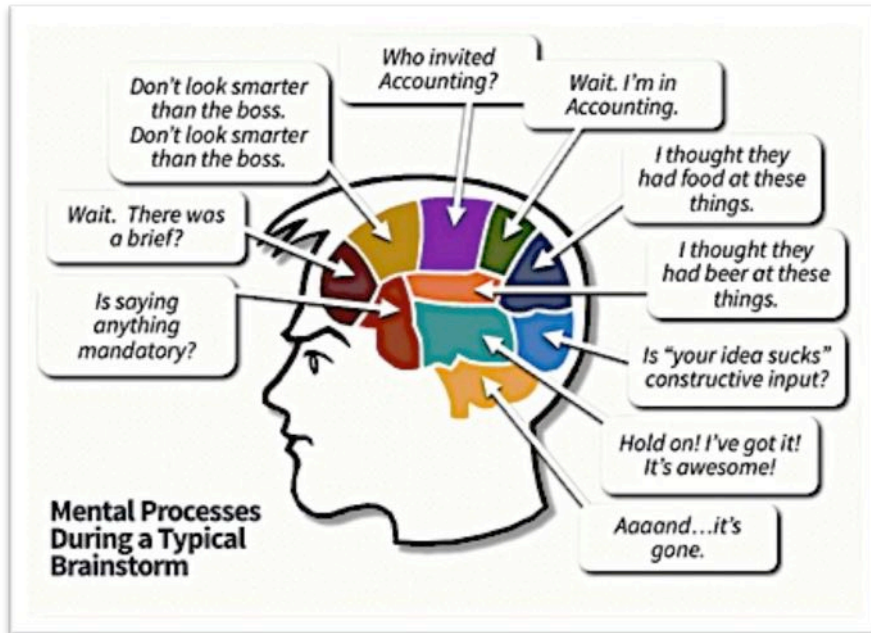
# BRAINSTORMING & IDEATION COLLABORATION

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# ARE YOU OPTIMIZING YOUR R.O.I.?\*

\* *RETURN ON IDEATION*



As a **trained brainstorm moderator** and **ideation process leader**, Michael Semer has spent **20+ years** leading groups in generating **award-winning business innovations** and **creative concepts** for some of the biggest brands in the world, from Coca-Cola to Microsoft, Frito-Lay to Kraft, BigMachines to Motorola – and for smaller companies, too, where R.O.I. is even **more** important.

Having an **expert** moderator on hand to lead your organization's brainstorming session **maximizes efficiency and results**, and can help you drive unleash innovation on multiple fronts:

- Concepting & Ideation
- Creative Culture Development
- Team-Building & Communication Enhancement
- Insight & Strategy Development
- Team-Based Problem Solving
- SWOT Analysis



**True or False?** It's better to brainstorm while sitting down, lounging or relaxing.  
**False!** Getting too physically relaxed can actually slow the brain; there are multiple studies suggesting that movement and standing are conducive to heightened brain activity!

# WHY HIRE A BRAINSTORMING PRO?

It's not enough to simply put people in a room and hope magic happens.

Their time is an investment. If they're a customer or important stakeholder, it's an especially **valuable** investment – one you don't dare waste!



Using an expert facilitator helps **avoid the problems a broken brainstorm** can create, issues that can be more serious than a few lost hours on a timecard...



## **AVOID WASTING TIME & SQUANDERING OPPORTUNITY**

Ever been to a brainstorm or strategy summit where the first hour...or *two*...is consumed with re-visiting the brief, or with introductions, or with simply trying to figure out the day's plan of attack? By pre-briefing, pre-planning and orchestrating a session where the energy and engagement stay high, you're getting the most out of those assembled minds.



## **DON'T WASTE DOLLARS**

You may think you're saving money by holding an *internal* brainstorm, but everybody there is costing the organization, per hour...and a bad brainstorm creates *opportunity* costs, as well, since they might be applying their time productively elsewhere.



## **AVERT ILL WILL**

If you've wasted people's time, that sends a message that you didn't respect it in the first place. That's a real problem if you're using brainstorming to drive an important initiative or culture change forward, and need to include senior leaders or stakeholders in the mix.



## **PREVENT PROJECT SLOWDOWNS OR STOPPAGES**

Getting the right people in the room may be a once-in-a-blue-moon opportunity, and if it's not an effective session, it may cost time – and status for your project – as you wait for the *next* chance to gather those contributors, assuming you get it!



## **THWART APATHY AND REJECTION**

If you've blown a brainstorm, why would participants re-up for the next one? Especially if they're from the C-suite, or are otherwise important to the organization? A well-run brainstorm moves people *away* from apathy and disengagement, toward evangelism and optimism.



**True or False?** There's no "right" way to run a brainstorm.

**True...to a point:** A brainstorm should be organic to the situation, whether it's company culture or the challenge to be met, but there are proven rules-of-thumb, methods and exercises that can maximize the output of *any* brainstorm.

# THE INSIDE TRACK FOR GOING OUTSIDE THE BOX

There's an **effective, proven process** for great brainstorming, and it's what we employ in helping clients optimize the output of their ideation sessions.

It's based on years of training in the nuances of creative coaching, experience leading brainstorms of all kinds, and witnessing and assimilating the inspiring work of people like the late Gordon MacKenzie and collaboration-driven firms like IDEO and others.

- 1. PRE-BRAINSTORM INTERVIEWS TO FIND FOCUS:** Meet with key personnel, management and other project stakeholders to determine what the real need is, whether it's about culture, communication or product
- 2. DEFINE & REFINE BRAINSTORM OBJECTIVES & LINES OF INQUIRY:** Determine the objectives: what's the work product we want from the brainstorm? Is the brainstorm meant to solve specific challenges, inspire a team, building employee/stakeholder motivation and morale? What areas make sense to explore, what guardrails should be observed?
- 3. DRAFT THE TEAM:** I'll work with you and your organization to draft the right session attendees, based on the criteria in #2; not everyone is a productive brainstormer, if maximum creative output is the key deliverable. Plus, the attendees at a "divergence" brainstorm (see below) aren't necessarily the same as for a "convergence" session.
- 4. PICK & PREPARE THE LOCATION:** The right venue can make all the difference, whether it's on-site or off-site, and preparing the environment with the right tools and stimuli is important, right down to what attendees eat and drink.
- 5. ASSEMBLE TOOLS, EXERCISES & BRAINSTORM AIDS:** Good tools and exercises drive optimum impact and output, and make the session inspiring and fun, "fun" being critical to idea generation.
- 6. PROVIDE THE TEAM WITH PRE-BRIEFING MATERIAL:** Give attendees briefing and backgrounding material at least a day before the session, and mandate they absorb it, so the sessions can be devoted to pure brainstorming. Adding a briefing to the front of a brainstorming session compromises the free flow of ideas and creativity of everything thereafter.
- 7. HOLD A DIVERGENCE BRAINSTORM:** The first brainstorm is "brain spackle," where wild ideas are welcome, and creativity should wander well outside the box, though I'll keep the session on track toward addressing the real objectives. Attendees for this session don't have to be included in the follow-up session...
- 8. HOLD A CONVERGENCE BRAINSTORM:** A "core" team of attendees who are close to the project and its specific requirements assemble to take "divergence" product and categorize, assemble and build viable concepts or platforms from it, or add new ideas that may spring from the divergent output.
- 9. COMPILE & DELIVER BRAINSTORM PRODUCT:** Convergence output is turned into actionable, practical program writeups for dissemination across the organization or for forwarding to a client or other stakeholder.
- 10. ASSESSMENT & SESSION EVALUATION:** Grading how well the brainstorming process succeeded, and extracting best practices and guidelines for future brainstorming or creative ideation.



**True or False?** The more people, the better the brainstorm!  
**False!** In most cases, keep it down to 6-8 focused contributors.

# 11 TIPS FOR A BETTER BRAINSTORM

- 1. TIME IT RIGHT:** The best time of day for a brainstorm? Start no earlier than 10 A.M., end no later than 4 P.M. Give folks a chance to settle into the day, then avoid their getting antsy and restive as quitting time approaches.
- 2. KEEP A TIGHT TEAM:** There's a technical term for brainstorms with more than 7-8 people in the room: *chaos*. Keep the number at a level where the group's attention doesn't splinter and people can listen, be heard and share more effectively.
- 3. SHELVES THE SUGAR:** Ever show up for a brainstorm where they've laid out candy and soda, like that'll drive kindergarten-style levels of hyperactivity? What happens is crash time. What's good brainstorming fuel? Moderate caffeine and lighter fare. Nothing that'll drain the circulation and concentration from anyone's grey matter.



- 4. NOT EVERYBODY BELONGS IN THE ROOM:** Some people just aren't good at brainstorming, and including them can actually sabotage the process. If your main intention is team building, then consider folks who might not bring anything to the mix. But if you're after creative productivity, limit it to those you know can make a contribution.
- 5. THINK IT OVER, OVERNIGHT:** Brainstorms suffer if you're spending the first hour briefing people on the project. Give participants a brief the day before or have a separate download meeting. It's a proven fact we brainstorm better if we data-dump a day early, giving the subconscious a chance to mull it over.
- 6. YES, THERE'S "NO":** There are *absolutely* bad ideas or suggestions that take you in the wrong direction, or down a rabbit hole of clichés and me-too thinking. Cut them off! A good moderator should guide the discussion back toward the light without summoning negativity or ridicule.
- 7. LET THEM DO HOMEWORK:** Feel free to ask invitees to bring thoughtstarter ideas to the session. Some say that's giving people the unfair advantage of a head start. So? There's nothing wrong with encouraging competition by giving everyone a chance to work up ideas beforehand so they can jump-start things. Just make sure they know their ideas are a start, not a finish.
- 8. HAVE THE RIGHT TOYS:** Kid's toys? Nope. Have the right creative and collaboration tools, meeting supplies and materials. One way to stall an ideation? Just run out of easel paper.
- 9. EXERCISE! EXERCISE!** Do a loosen-up exercise beforehand, anything from having people tell jokes to to reciting a mantra. Use other exercises during the session to disruptively generate off-the-wall ideas, from the classic 180° exercise to many others that make brainstorming fun...because without fun, you're likely not creating anything fresh.
- 10. GET UP, GET OUT, GET GOING:** One tactic that works? Take the chairs out of the room. *Whaaaaat?* Studies show our brains work better when we're on our feet. Better yet? Take the team for a walk. Go somewhere that'll stimulate invention. It doesn't need to be a museum or gallery, but the design-y boutique up the street or the retailer where your client wants to place some dazzling P.O.S. or packaging ideas.
- 11. GO WIDE TO GET FOCUSED:** Hold a *divergence* brainstorm first, where you can even bring in "outsiders" with fresh P.O.V.s, and get wide-open thinking. Follow it with a *convergence* session with your core team to refine those raw ideas into practical initiatives focused against the challenge at hand.



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Get in touch *today* for a quick estimate on how to get the best results from your next brainstorming or ideation session!

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