Title:
Brainstorming Techniques

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449

Summary:
A group of people arguing and defending their ideas, is not effective
brainstorming. How do you keep this from happening with your brainstorming
session?

Keywords:
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Article Body:
Have you been in a "brainstorming" session where each person just defended their
own ideas? Worse is when people don't suggest ideas at all, for fear they'll be
attacked. That's no way to brainstorm. Brainstorming is using the power of many
minds, and ideas should flow freely and trigger other ideas. How do you make
that happen?

The Key To Good Brainstorming

You have to have a good leader to have good brainstorming. The leader isn't
there to impose his will, though, but to stop the imposition of anyones will.
His role is to stop criticisms, arguments, and even strong opinions, at least in
the first part of the session.

A brainstorming session needs to be spontaneous, open and uncritical. "Bad" or
"silly" ideas can lead to helpful ones, so suggestions have to be left un-judged
at first. To brainstorm effectively, you can't stifle the creative process. The
leaders job, then, is to make everyone feel free to suggest any ideas.

An Example Of Good Brainstorming

The scenario: your business needs to cut delivery costs. The group throws out
ideas and thoughts. "Let's not deliver," someone suggests, and when another
starts to criticize, you remind him of the rules. "Negotiate lower rates,"
somebody says, "Or just find a company with lower rates," another adds. Ideas
like reducing package weight and charging customers more are suggested, and lead
to other ideas.

You keep it civil, take notes, and eventually call a halt to this free-for-all part of the session. Now it's time to evaluate and develop the ideas for whatever usefulness they may have.

To keep the creativity flowing in this stage, have participants defend or develop ideas that are not their own. This brings new insight to the idea, and prevents the problem of ego-identification that causes people to get "stuck in a rut" with their own ideas.

For example, ask the man who was critical of the idea of not delivering to work with that idea. "We have to deliver," he might start with. Then he thinks for a second and says, "I suppose we could deliver to central distribution points instead of to the individual customer. The customer could drive a short distance to pick up their order. That might save us on shipping."

Someone else suggests that the customers may like the arrangement. They would be able to return the product immediately if they were dissatisfied, with no need to pack and ship it. You assign a couple people to look into it, and move on to the other ideas.

Good leadership keeps the whole process working. In the last example, you've even used a "bad" idea to come to a possible solution. That's good brainstorming.