

Skills 360 – Facilitating a Brainstorming Session (Part 2)

Discussion Questions

1. What do you do to help yourself be creative or get new ideas?
2. Do you feel comfortable speaking out and sharing your ideas in group settings?
3. What are some ways we can encourage quiet people to share their ideas?

Vocabulary

To conduct: to organize and do something such as a workshop, survey, research, experiment, or study; “Many marketers conduct online surveys to test responses to their advertising ideas.”

To go nowhere: to fail, not move ahead, or not progress; “Unfortunately, our efforts to find an overseas partner went nowhere.”

To throw out: to offer or produce suggestions or ideas; “throw out” can also mean to get rid of or reject; “Okay everyone, let’s just start throwing out names of possible celebrity spokespeople and then discuss who might be best.”

Uninspired: not feeling interested, creative, or excited; “Whenever I feel uninspired at work, I go for a short walk and just try to clear my mind.”

To kickstart: to give the energy for something to start or become more active; “The president hoped that his stimulus package would help kickstart the struggling economy.”

To get juices flowing: to give creative energy; “Lots of new tech companies provide fun activities and interesting work spaces to help get employees’ juices flowing.”

Spark / to spark ideas: a “spark” is something that begins a process, and when something “sparks ideas”, it activates or inspires ideas; “We watched videos of New Years Eve parties to spark ideas for our annual company event.”

Visual stimulation: pictures, videos, paintings, or other things we see that make us feel or think; “I like to work beside a window with a good view for some visual stimulation while I work.”

To pass around: to give something to someone, who gives it to someone else, and so on; to distribute something; “The customer service manager passed the complaint letter around the entire office so we would all know about the issue.”

To trigger: to make something happen or start to happen; "The government's tax increase triggered an immediate angry response from taxpayers and consumer advocate groups."

Associations: a connection of thought or feeling between two things; "Studies have shown that Americans feel a strong association between Thanksgiving and football."

To get ideas flowing: to help people have many new ideas and thoughts; "It can be hard to get good ideas flowing at a meeting held right after lunch, when everyone's tired."

Reinvigorating: helping to give new energy or activity; "Professional development opportunities can be reinvigorating experiences for busy workers."

Flipchart: a large pad of paper, used for taking meeting notes or showing images and diagrams to groups of people; "The facilitator wrote our ideas down on the flipchart and posted the sheets around the room for everyone to see."

Perspective: a way of looking at or thinking about something; "We hired a business consultant for a fresh perspective on our company's goals and strategies."

To inspire: to make someone excited, motivated, or energetic about something or to do something; "Zane's visit to Silicon Valley inspired him to pursue his own dreams of becoming an entrepreneur."

To lag: to fall behind, slow down, or lose energy; "With too little investment in R&D, we are starting to lag behind our competitors."

"Say": when we want to talk about an imagined or hypothetical situation, we can begin our explanation with "say"; "Say you were appointed CEO for a day. What is the first thing you would do?"

Talented: very good at something, or highly skilled; "Gretchen is certainly a talented designer, but she's hard to get along with."

To scratch one's head: to be confused, to not understand, or to not have any ideas; "Even after their month-long investigation, our accountants are still scratching their heads about how the mistake happened."

To change tack: to change direction or the way of doing something or dealing with a situation; "If customers aren't drawn to our social media campaign, let's change tack and try reaching them through TV and radio."

To turn something around: to make something into its opposite or to reverse something; "Smart PR people know how to turn negative media attention around into a marketing opportunity."

To go over: to review or cover in discussion; "Okay folks, we've gone over the causes of the problem, now let's talk about solutions."

To speak out: to express your ideas or opinions, especially publicly or in a group; "Representatives of several companies have spoken out against the government's proposed changes to banking regulations."

To draw something out: to encourage or help something be expressed or spoken; "Our workplace psychologist is very good at drawing out employees' feelings about their work and performance."

Non-verbal input: ideas or opinions about something that are expressed without speaking or discussion; "For those uncomfortable speaking at meetings, the union invites non-verbal input on their negotiating position through email."

"Good old": we use "good old" before something or someone that we think is reliable, familiar, or liked; "I've tried some of the new presentation software, but I think I'll stick with good old PowerPoint."

To write up: to record or report in writing what others have said; "Jonah, I'd like you to write up the key points of our discussion on the whiteboard."

To assign: to give someone a task or job; "The project manager on the new video game project assigned me the task of writing the intro scenario."

To reassemble: to bring together again, often in a new way or place; "Let's all take a half hour break for lunch and then reassemble in the staff room."

Intimidated: scared of or nervous about someone or something; "I feel rather intimidated when I have to do business in Spanish, but in social settings I feel pretty confident."

To change up: to change or make different for variety; "An interior designer helped us change up our workspace, and everyone thinks the results are really fresh."

Elements: basic parts of something, especially something non-material or not physical; "The call to action is one of the most important elements of a sales pitch."

Vastly different: very or totally different; "Our TV spot produced vastly different responses from adult viewers and teenagers."

To invite: to ask people to give or submit something; "We are now inviting bids from contractors on development of the new shopping mall."

To foster: to help something develop or provide the right circumstances for something to develop; "Here at BigTech, we support our workers and try to foster their talents and ideas."

Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm your host, Tim Simmons, and today we're going to have a look at some great tips for running an effective brainstorming session.

Have you ever **conducted** a brainstorming session that simply **goes nowhere**? A few people **throw out** some ideas, but most participants seem **uninspired** or bored? You ask questions, but people don't answer? Well, today I want to give you some tips for **kickstarting** the process and **getting the juices flowing**.

Okay, so you need to provide some kind of **spark**. But just saying "Okay everyone, we need to get the ideas flowing" is *not* actually going to inspire anyone. You need something different. One idea is to use **visual stimulation**. Bring a box of random objects that you can hold up or **pass around**. Or show the group random images, either ones you've chosen that relate to the topic or on sites like Pinterest and StumbleUpon. Looking at images or objects can send our thinking in new directions and **trigger** creative **associations**.

Another way **to get ideas flowing** is to get the *room* flowing. Try telling the group that every time you say "move!" everybody needs to stand up, walk around the room, and find a new seat. This gives people a very short break and a tiny bit of physical activity, which can be **reinvigorating**. Moving seats also means that people are looking at the room, the **flipchart**, and everyone else from a new **perspective**. And finally, participants may find themselves sitting beside and talking with different people, which can **inspire** different ways of thinking. So every time you see people **lagging** a bit, yell "move" and see what happens.

Now, sometimes if you want *good* ideas from a group, you can ask them to think of *bad* ideas first. Yes, I'm serious. Sometimes we don't know what we want or need, but we can figure it out by talking about what we *don't* want or need. Here's an example: **say** you're with a group brainstorming better ways for your company to attract **talented** workers. A few good ideas have come out, but not nearly enough, and people are **scratching their heads** and getting frustrated.

This might be a good time to ask for "opposite thinking." Try putting this question to the group, "Okay everyone, let's **change tack** here and think of reasons people would *not* want to work for a company. What are things that talented workers *don't* like in a job?" Believe me, when you ask questions about *bad* ideas or the *worst* examples, a lot of people suddenly have a lot to say. And once you've got those bad or opposite ideas, you can just **turn them around**. So if someone says, "people really don't like a work environment that is ugly and boring," then you can turn it around and make "inspiring and clean workplace" one of your new ideas.

Okay, we've **gone over** some ways to get a whole group thinking, but there are some people who just don't like working in large groups. They might not **speak out** confidently in a brainstorming session, but that doesn't mean they don't have good ideas. In fact, these quiet thinkers might be hiding some of the most fantastic ideas. So how do you **draw** those ideas **out**? Well, one way is by providing a **non-verbal input** option. I'm talking about **good old** pen and paper. Make sure everyone has

something to write with and on, and tell them that they're free to provide their ideas that way. Or you can ask *everybody* to do this at certain points in the brainstorming. Then you collect the papers and **write up** the ideas on a board or flipchart.

You may also find that a great way to draw quiet people out is to reduce the group size. Break the larger group into smaller ones and **assign** them a task. When people **reassemble** in smaller groups, you may find they talk much more naturally and easily. And those thinkers aren't as **intimidated**. You can conclude this small group work by having one person from each group report what they discussed. And every time you do this small group work, **change up** the groups. You'll find that group work is like a chemistry experiment. Combine different **elements**, and you'll get **vastly different** outcomes.

Okay, so if you want those outcomes to be useful, there are several ways to get a group going and spark good ideas. You can use visuals, move people around, and ask for bad ideas. And to draw out even more ideas and get the quiet people going, you can **invite** written input and break the room into smaller groups. This all goes back to the idea of **fostering** creativity, energy and enthusiasm. And with these elements in your brainstorming session, you should get some great results.

That's all for today. If you'd like to test yourself on what we've just covered, have a look at the **myBOnline.com** website. There you'll find a quiz about today's show as well as a complete transcript.

So long. And see you again soon.

Review

1. According to Tim, what can showing objects and images to a brainstorming group do?
 - A Inspire quiet people to talk.
 - B Help reduce irrelevant ideas.
 - C Trigger creative associations.
 - D Demonstrate an idea you have.

2. Which of the following is NOT mentioned as a benefit of moving to a different seat during a brainstorming session?
 - A Reinvigorating the group with physical activity.
 - B A different way of looking at the room.
 - C Reduction of conflict between participants.
 - D Inspiration from talking to new people.

3. According to Tim, sometimes if you want *good* ideas from a group, you can start by asking them to think of _____ ideas.

4. Why does Tim discuss asking a group of people why workers might NOT want to work for a company?
 - A To illustrate the idea of "opposite thinking".
 - B To emphasize the importance of creative work environments.
 - C To explain how not to conduct a brainstorming session.
 - D To suggest that not all brainstorming ideas are constructive.

5. What point does Tim make about people who don't naturally like working in large groups?
 - A They can be challenging to work with.
 - B They may have very valuable ideas to contribute.
 - C They should be consulted in separate small-group sessions.
 - D They can reduce the level of creativity in a room.

6. Which of the following does Tim suggest as ways to draw ideas out of quiet people? [CHOOSE 2]
 - A Invite ideas in writing.
 - B Be very careful with your choice of language.
 - C Call on them by name.
 - D Conduct small-group activities.

Review Answers

1. According to Tim, what can showing objects and images to a brainstorming group do?

C Trigger creative associations.

2. Which of the following is NOT mentioned as a benefit of moving to a different seat during a brainstorming session?

C Reduction of conflict between participants.

3. According to Tim, sometimes if you want *good* ideas from a group, you can start by asking them to think of **bad** ideas.

4. Why does Tim discuss asking a group of people why workers might NOT want to work for a company?

A To illustrate the idea of "opposite thinking".

5. What point does Tim make about people who don't naturally like working in large groups?

B They may have very valuable ideas to contribute.

6. Which of the following does Tim suggest as ways to draw ideas out of quiet people? [CHOOSE 2]

A Invite ideas in writing.

D Conduct small-group activities.

Online Practice

Click the "Launch" button to open the **online practice**:

