

## The origins of brainstorming

Brainstorming was defined in 1939 by Alex Osborn at the advertising firm BBDO. He saw that his creative teams were most productive when they followed four ground rules. He coined the term *brainstorming*, since the process felt like "storming a problem in a commando fashion."



See more of Osborn's ideas in *Your Creative Power*, and *Applied Imagination*.

## Fifty Phrases that Kill Creativity

Daniel DuFour

1. Our place is different.
2. We tried that before.
3. It costs too much.
4. That's not my job.
5. They're too busy to do that.
6. We don't have the time.
7. Not enough help.
8. It's too radical a change.
9. The staff will never buy it.
10. It's against company policy.
11. The union will scream.
12. That will run up our overhead.
13. We don't have the authority.
14. Let's get back to reality.
15. That's not our problem.
16. I don't like the idea.
17. I'm not saying you're wrong but...
18. You're two years ahead of your time.
19. Now's not the right time.
20. It isn't in the budget.
21. Can't teach an old dog new tricks.
22. Good thought, but impractical.
23. Let's give it more thought.
24. We'll be the laughingstock of the industry.
25. Not that again.
26. Where'd you dig that one up?
27. We did alright without it before.
28. It's never been tried.
29. Let's put that one on the back burner for now.
30. Let's form a committee.
31. It won't work in our place.
32. The executive committee will never go for it.
33. I don't see the connection.
34. Let's all sleep on it.
35. It can't be done.
36. It's too much trouble to change.
37. It won't pay for itself.
38. It's impossible.
39. I know a person who tried it and got fired.
40. We've always done it this way.
41. We'd lose money in the long run.
42. Don't rock the boat.
43. That's what we can expect from the staff.
44. Has anyone else ever tried it?
45. Let's look into it further.
46. We'll have to answer to the stockholders.
47. Quit dreaming.
48. If it ain't broke, don't fix it.
49. That's too much ivory tower.
50. It's too much work.

## Checklist for Transforming Ideas

Alex Osborn

- Put to other uses?**  
New ways to use as is?  
Other uses if modified?
- Adapt?**  
What else is like this?  
What other idea does this suggest?  
Does the past offer parallel?  
What could I copy?  
Whom could I emulate?

- Modify?**  
New twist?  
Change meaning, motion?  
Other shapes?

- Magnify?**  
What to add?  
More time?  
Greater frequency?  
Stronger?  
Higher?  
Longer?  
Extra Value?  
Plus ingredient?  
Duplicate?  
Multiply?  
Exaggerate?

- Minify?**  
What to subtract?  
Smaller?  
Condensed?  
Miniature?  
Lower?  
Shorter?  
Lighter?  
Omit?  
Streamline?  
Split up?  
Understate?

- Combine?**  
How about a blend, an alloy?  
Combine units?  
Combine purposes?  
Combine appeals?  
Combine ideas?

# Better Brainstorms

## How to have more productive brainstorming sessions

### Start with these four ground rules

SAY YES! SAY LOTS

#### 1. Defer judgment

Allow all ideas to come onto the board  
Save analysis and evaluation for later

#### 2. Go for quantity

Push for fluency - lots of ideas  
Reach for flexibility - lots of *different* ideas

GO WILD

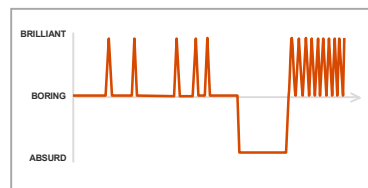
#### 3. Get radical

Encourage wild, crazy, stupid ideas  
It's easier to tone down than pump up

MASH UP

#### 4. Leapfrog

Build on others' ideas  
Let yours go freely into the mix and take on a life of their own



"...Out of a hundred ideas, the first sixty ideas produced five that were actually new or different, the next twenty produced nothing but laughter, and ideas eighty to a hundred produced another ten that were amazing. Thankfully, we didn't give up when the well ran dry around idea number sixty."

- Dev Patnaik, Jump  
*The Ebb and Flow of Ideation*

### Frame the question in generative terms

- A well posed question sparks ideas immediately on hearing
- A 'how to?' will inspire more readily than a 'why?'
- A less effective question stalls when the first response is, 'what does that mean?'

### Run structured ideation sessions for product teams

Include stakeholders and crossfunctional teams

Schedule half-day to two-day sessions

Format:

- Background briefing: users, context, goals, constraints
- Break into small groups (6-10) with facilitators
- Ideas on Postits; Postits on board
- 40-60 minutes of facilitated brainstorm
- Cluster Postits on poster boards
- Participants pick promising ideas & form xfunc teams around them
- Each team develops a concept and product story
- Stories presented to entire group in storyboard format

### Give a framework for product stories

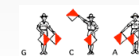
- User  
Identify the user, based on the target user group
- Context  
Describe context or situation in which the problem exists
- Problem  
Describe an incident or condition that motivates the use of the solution
- Solution  
Show how they access and use the solution to address their need
- Outcome  
Describe the outcome of the situation - the payoff, the problem solved, the happy user

### Watch for side effects of better brainstorming

- People feel empowered when their ideas are heard.
- Teams find a different way of relating to their project. They see where other ideas are coming from.
- People discover a different way of relating to each other. They gain experience in constructive collaboration.

### Sources

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Photo of Alex Osborn:  
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