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One of the most vexing problems for political organizers has been the prohibitive cost of contacting the faithful. It costs at least \$3 a person to reach loyalists by phone to get them to act quickly about a hot issue. Email has made it easier, but often gets lost in the vast sea of spam. Jed Alpert has honed the process: targeting mobile phones with text messages, which recipients are much more likely to open and act on. It began when he took a program he had developed to promote Britney Spears—texting her fans to ask them to pay to hear tapes of her reading their horoscopes—and rejiggered it for a People for the American Way push to get members to call their senators about John Roberts’s Supreme Court nomination. The result, Alpert says, was “the biggest response rate I’ve ever had for any campaign.” Since then, his New York startup, the Rights Group, has worked for the ACLU, Save Darfur, and the John Edwards presidential campaign. “We’re getting people involved at one-tenth to one-fiftieth the cost,” he says. One of his coolest efforts: a program that lets you type in your zip code and receive a text message about current local environmental problems—diesel fumes in Manhattan, say—and whom to call to complain. 46-Invisible Heating Systems 48-Poly Face Farm Remember when you were an employee? When-ever your computer hiccupped or the e-mail went down, it was someone else’s problem to solve. Now it’s your problem. Most startups can’t afford to bring a full-time IT person onboard, so entrepreneurs have to get creative and be resourceful. A smart first step is to ask other local small businesses about who they use for IT. Word-of-mouth is a good way to find a local, independent technology consultant. There are some nationwide companies you can turn to as well. One of the most well-known is the Geek Squad, located in Best Buy stores. It offers a variety of services, 24-hour support and an upfront standardized price list. Information for Groups and Organizations The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impose hardships, especially on people who face barriers to accessing services and benefits. These include people with low-income, limited English proficiency, facing homelessness, or with mental illness, who have historically relied on meeting with us face-to-face to get the help they need. Your voice makes a difference in the lives of people across America, and we ask that use your reach to make another positive difference. Outreach Materials for People Facing Barriers: An up-to-date list of resources and materials that you can use to learn about the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program and help spread the word in your community. We encourage you to share these materials widely, through external and internal websites, social media, blogs, and newsletters. People Helping Others: Helping someone in need is very rewarding. The help you provide, whether through your organization or directly to a family member or friend, can make all the difference in someone’s life. Our People Helping Others page shows how you can help someone apply for benefits and get other help from Social Security. We also offer additional resources for specific groups to increase awareness of our programs and online services. Educators We offer information and resources for educational professionals to teach school aged children about Social Security, and why it is important in people’s lives today and in the future. Employers We provide information and services to third parties who do business with us. Our business services provide employers access to Social Security’s web services using a secure website. Faith-Based and Community Groups Faith-based and community groups have an important voice in communities across our nation. We provide information and resources on initiatives to help people understand their Social Security protections. Financial Planners Social Security is an important financial component for tens of millions of people. We provide information and resources for financial planners to help their clients understand the various Social Security programs and Medicare, and plan for retirement or other life events. Human Resource Professionals Social Security doesn’t simply begin upon retirement. Planning is important. We offer information and resources for human resource professionals to help their employees plan for retirement or other life events. Tax Preparers Receiving benefits from Social Security doesn’t necessarily mean no more taxes. We provide information and resources for tax preparers about our online services and tools designed to help save tax preparation time and effort. Subscribe to our What’s New page for the latest information for Groups and Organizations. See What’s New The Wyanoke Group is the parent company for Heallo, Heallo LIVE, Heallo Strategic Solutions, SLACK Incorporated, and Vindico Medical Education. The shared mission of our companies is to deliver the highest quality information, education and communications to health care professionals to improve patient health. Click here for more information on the history of the Wyanoke Group. Our Companies Heallo provides news, information and education for health care professionals. Built on its web platform, Heallo.com, we offer daily clinical news, peer-review journals and CME in more than 30 medical specialties. Fundamental to the organization, Heallo has been committed to delivering health care specialists with the information they need to stay informed and improve patient health. Heallo LIVE organizes live continuing education meetings for health care specialists, delivering unique experiences through quality information, perspective on new data and face-to-face interaction with leading experts and peers. Heallo Strategic Solutions is a full-service medical communications company providing tailored information and education to health care professionals worldwide. SLACK Incorporated provides information and education to physicians, nurses and other health care professionals. Through the publication of its 14 peer-reviewed journals and 350 medical and allied health textbooks, SLACK provides health care specialists with timely access to trustworthy information in a variety of print and electronic formats. Vindico Medical Education is dedicated to improving patient health by providing the highest quality continuing medical education activities through live, print and electronic formats. Over dinner a couple months ago, one of my friends said he needed some help coming up with a name for a new website. He told me a bit about the site and asked if I could help think of something over dinner. He also asked my other friends to join in so we could get a whole bunch of ideas on the table and choose the best one. From my experience working at an agency, as a designer, and at [my company] oomf, coming up with ideas from a single brainstorming session like this one is usually not the most effective way. Many people I’ve come across, including the most creative ones, need individual time to let ideas marinate before the best concept reveals itself (even if it’s something that seems as simple as naming a website). I encouraged my friend to take some time to do the same—to play with his concept a bit more before bringing it to anyone for more input. After this experience, I wondered why the group brainstorming session is often the default choice when we’re pressed to find that perfect idea. The Origins of the Brainstorming Session In the 1940s, advertising executive, Alex Osborn, was frustrated with his employees’ creative output and began experimenting with ways to improve it. In 1953, Osborn published a book titled Applied Imagination, where he discussed how group brainstorming is a more efficient way to improve ideation compared to individual thought. To have an effective brainstorming session, Osborn outlined that the group must: G/O Media may get a commission Defer judgment (don’t get upset when people say bad ideas) Reach for quantity (come up with as many ideas as possible) This sounds like simple criteria to follow but the challenge is actually orchestrating brainstorming sessions where these two principles are consistently put into practice. What Goes On in Your Brain During a Group Brainstorming Session Unfortunately, the typical brainstorming meetings that many of us experience today do not follow Osborn’s criteria. Even if the intentions of the meetings are good, most break one or both of Osborn’s principles because there are multiple psychological factors at play that are hard to control. Here’s the most common social factors that make group brainstorming sessions difficult to get right: 1. Fear of Judgment from People in Positions of Power Studies indicate that it’s difficult for people to remove fear of judgement when presenting ideas in meetings where a boss or someone with a higher status in the company is present. Since most meetings include a manager, boss, or someone in a position of power, there’s a chance that presenting a bad idea, may make you look like you’re not smart and perhaps unworthy of your job. This makes you less likely to share quirky ideas for fear that they may come off as bad ones. 2. Extroverts Take Center Stage When faced with creating ideas during a group setting, extroverts find it more natural to share their ideas; whereas introverts, are more likely to process information internally and make meaning before contributing to the group discussion. Brain imaging studies have shown that in the presence of external stimulation, introverts show more activity in the regions of the brain that process information, make meaning, and problem solve compared to extroverts. Ever since Carl Jung first started giving people their personality types, there’s been a divide... Read more In fact, the pathway where external stimuli travels in an introvert is much longer than that of a person who is more extroverted, navigating through complex areas of the brain associated with information processing and problem solving. Here’s a graphic showing the difference: The Introvert Advantage: Making the Most of Your Inner Strengths G/O Media may get a commission This difference in neural processing can hurt the effectiveness of a typical group brainstorming session because people in the group who are more extroverted will naturally get their ideas out faster than introverts, whether they have the most innovative ideas or not. 3. Groups Hate Scary Ideas No matter how much we say we love creative ideas as a society, our brains are hardwired to fear novelty. Researchers at Cornell, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of North Carolina noted that we generally value practical ideas because they are proven and familiar compared to novel concepts which are riskier to endorse. This thought process is difficult to control because it’s driven by a built-in motivation to reduce uncertainty in our lives. Making a wrong decision is literally painful for our brains to cope with so we tend to seek out ideas that are safer. This tweet by Box founder Aaron Levie sums up how people tend to react to ideas: The Incubation Period: The Forgotten Step to Great Ideas Many brainstorming sessions are thought of as an end goal—that an answer needs to be drawn at its conclusion for it to have “worked.” If the perfect idea doesn’t show itself by the end of the meeting, the brainstorming session is usually deemed a failure. This is in spite of research that show the optimal process for creativity is not within a single group setting with time as the official. Creative theorist Graham Wallas presented one of the first models of the creative process in 1926. Wallas noted that our creative process stems from an evolutionary process that allows us to adapt quickly to rapidly changing environments. Wallas concluded that the creative process can be broken down into five stages: Preparation (individual study to focus your mind on the problem and explore its dimensions) Incubation (the problem enters your unconscious mind and nothing appears to be happening externally) Intimation (you get a “feeling” that a solution is on the way) Illumination (your creative idea moves from preconscious processing to conscious awareness) Verification (your idea is consciously verified, expanded upon, and then executed) The problem is, we typically cannot move through this creative process within a single group meeting. Sometimes the incubation stage itself can take days or weeks before you get a feeling that a good idea is on the way. Many of the most creative people in the world validate this, reporting they only arrive at the best solutions after a constant zig zag through alternatives. When it comes to creativity, one of our biggest concerns is usually how we can be more creative, or Read more The incubation period can be stressful because there is no clear time as to when inspiration may strike and to make matters worse, it looks like no progress is being made. Sally Hogshead, an author and creative director who helps develop ideas for both Fortune 500 companies and start-ups, even compared the incubation period as a time of doubt leading into agony. But coming to terms with how the creative process works is important for it to work. As Albert Einstein noted, “Creativity is the residue of time wasted.” Being too rigid in the creative process can kill the seeds of exceptional ideas. Joshua Slayton, an engineer at Angellist, shared this slide in a recent presentation, making the case for the importance of removing rules when it comes to creativity: Slide from Joshua Slayton, Engineer at Angellist Keynote Re-Thinking the Brainstorm The point of brainstorming is to set aside uninterrupted time to think about how to solve a problem. This doesn’t mean a brainstorming session has to always be done in a group setting to be effective. Start with Alone Time When you give yourself alone time to ponder an idea, you don’t have to worry about other people’s perceptions, which opens up more creative avenues for you to explore. Scott Berkun, author of The Year Without Pants: WordPress.com and the Future of Work, notes the importance of individual thought to spark creativity in people: “Great programmers, designers, and even managers come up with many of their best ideas in the solitary space of their own minds, or when working alone at desks and computers. It’s important to remember that you don’t need a big meeting or some fancy process to generate ideas: a brain, some desire, and some time are all you need.” Removing the fear of judgement from others by giving yourself alone time with a concept can help improve your creative output. Follow with a Group Session Input from someone else or a small group is most valuable once you’ve had some initial time to think about an idea individually. In 2008, research from the University of Toronto showed that group brainstorming can be more effective if people come to a group session after some initial ideas are already cooking. In other words, showing up with a blank slate to a meeting is not as effective as coming in with a few boundaries in place. A Better Way When I or one of my co-founders setup a group meeting with some initial thought already done, we’ve seen dramatic improvement in the quality of ideas and steps to execution. Most of our blog posts and tools like Unsplash and How Much To Make An App came from initial time spent alone where there was a spark of inspiration before we explored the concepts as a team. I’ve since observed a loose format that our most effective group meetings tend to follow. Everything from this list might not work for you but you’re free to take from it what you wish: Allow for tangents. Sometimes going off in different directions during a conversation opens up opportunities for a wide range of connections to be made. Keep the topic in mind but research shows that a few injections of humor and wit along the way can spark novel ideas. No time limit. Why end a meeting early if it’s producing tons of ideas? And why force a meeting if nothing’s coming from it? We’ve had meetings go for a couple hours and others last only a few minutes. However long your meeting is, let it go until you notice the creative output stalling. Then, shut it down. Don’t force immediate conclusions. Ending some meetings without a clear answer is tough but sometimes it’s necessary. When you’re faced with a challenging problem, sometimes it’s best to remove from the problem rather than stare directly at it. The ideas you generate at first may not be the best but letting them sit for a while can provoke new connections, leading you to where the good stuff lies. Beer is welcome. Studies shows that one to two beers can help you be more creative. We try to keep a couple cold ones around just in case we need to fuel some inspiration. Having a group brainstorming session isn’t wrong but it shouldn’t be thought of as a single event. Instead, group brainstorming should be considered part of a process that includes sufficient time for individual thought. The myth of the brainstorming session | Oomf Mikael Cho is the co-founder of oomf, a creative marketplace connecting mobile & web projects with vetted, first class developers and designers from around the world. Mikael writes more posts on psychology, startups, and product marketing over on the oomf blog. Find him on Twitter @mikaelcho. Want to see your work on Lifehacker? Email Tessa.



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