

**BRAINSTORMING IS DANGEROUS!**

7 Reasons Brainstorming Is  
Dangerous To The Health Of Your  
Company And 3 Ways To Get  
Breakthrough Ideas

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**McNellis**™

# **Brainstorming is Dangerous!**

## **7 Reasons Brainstorming Is Dangerous To The Health Of Your Company And 3 Ways To Get Breakthrough Ideas**

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# Reason 1:

**Most problems you brainstorm aren't problems. They are predicaments — bear traps set to snare your participants if not handled properly.**

**So what is the difference between a Problem and a Predicament?**

Problems can be solved. There is an answer if you dig deep enough.

Predicaments, however, can't be solved.

The issues people sweat the most are actually predicaments.

You don't have problems. You have predicaments.

You need to develop coping mechanisms, as there is no clear cut right answer. Your solutions will work for a while before people begin to shortcut them and you have to revisit them.

Let's look at a simple example.

**Problem:**

The temperature in the room your group is working in is 65 degrees.

**Solution:**

Turn up the thermostat to 72 degrees.

**Predicament:**

Get twenty people to agree on a single temperature where everyone is comfortable.

**Here is a more complex example.**

**Problem:**

When human organ transplants were first pioneered, surgeons and patients were faced with the problem of rejection of the donated organ. Science was able to isolate factors that related to rejection. There was a technical solution to guide surgeons when transplanting organs.

**Predicament:**

Two people need a kidney and there is only one kidney available.



The approach you take to resolve this kind of predicament is drastically different than the approach you take in a typical brainstorming session.

In over 3½ decades of leading idea and planning sessions, as well as teaching and coaching thousands of leaders to do the same, we have found greater than 95% of the challenges organizations face are predicaments and not problems.

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You are looking for coping mechanisms. There are no "right answers" to solve predicaments.

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One key way to crack a predicament is to carefully look at **who** you invite to the table to help think through your issue. Recruiting a thinking team is different than how groups are traditionally put together. You aren't looking for wild and crazy ideas, which is frequently the image of many traditional brainstorming sessions.

Your search requires the wisdom of Solomon. Such wisdom is frequently buried in the crevices of the minds and personalities of the shiest most reticent members of your groups. Often they won't compete for air-time over your aggressively loud members.

**Protect them and don't let your extroverts "plow over them".**

**This is why "brainstorming" sessions are dangerous to the health of your organization.**



# Reason 2:

## Poorly led brainstorming sessions demoralize your participants.

Just because someone is a manager, or an executive, there is no reason to think they have been blessed with the God-given ability to lead an idea or planning session.

That's like saying someone who is six feet tall should instinctively know how to dunk a basketball.

It is absurd.

It's a skill few leaders have been trained in but most feel they should be able to do.

Some of the most destructive, humiliating and outrageous behavior happens in idea sessions.

All too often, leaders are frequently incompetent and way over their heads when it comes to leading a group tackling a complex issue. They feel crippled and desperate at the thought of having to get fresh "out-of-the-box," state-of-the-art ideas from their colleagues.

### Participants often feel:

- intimidated,
- put on the spot,
- embarrassed, and
- overwhelmed.

**Shy people feel like "deer caught in the headlights" in high-energy sessions with bouncing off the wall leaders guiding participation.**

**Organizations are filled with people whose single role is to kill ideas outwardly or subtly.**

**The rolling of the eyes or raising an eyebrow can kill million dollar ideas.**



When setting up **TYPICAL** brainstorm groups people get labeled as any or many of the following:

- Creative
- Analytical
- Visionaries
- Blue sky thinker
- Strategists
- Implementer
- Bean counter
- Airhead
- Introvert
- Extrovert
- Micro-manager
- Thinker
- Doer

The list goes on and on.

Frequently people are divided into brainstorming groups according to such labels. Many labels are quite derogatory.

"She's stuck in the 1800s", or

"He hasn't had an original idea since he was in puberty."

People are cruelly excluded or included for amateur psychological and prejudicial reasons. We're not naïve in this area.

**Just be cautious about how groups get put together for idea generation. Too much amateur psychology gets in the way.**

## Reason 2: *(continued)*

### Watching two Dr. Phil shows doesn't make one an expert in selecting idea groups.

There is a school of thought that recruits participants based on their personal and professional experience.

“She was a truck driver before going to law school and plays trumpet in a jazz band.”

“He played semipro baseball, sold insurance, worked in our claims department, teaches Bible school and runs iron man triathlons.”

#### You're So Creative

There have to be ways other than branding people with a label like

**creative**

that stands out on their forehead like Double D ranch.

When these people are invited to brainstorming sessions because “they're so creative”, they are expected to be “so creative.”

In our society, “creative” may mean any of the following:

- Outlandish
- Off-the-wall
- Colorful
- Non-traditional

Thinking “outside of the box” has become a trite phrase. Does that mean everyone else thinks “inside the box?” What box are we talking about?

Breakthrough ideas often hide in the most unusual of participants.

Breakthrough ideas often come from people who were branded and initially written off as useless. In the right setting they brought rich insights and experiences under the hands of a skilled leader.

For example, if a company needs a new safety system to help people with hearing issues and calls for a creative, off-the-wall brainstorming session, perhaps the “bean counter” is sensitive to hearing issues because his mother is hearing impaired. It's an insult to invite or engage him to be outlandish and creative even though he may have an idea that will be wildly successful in the market they will never hear from him.

“ Good thinkers with rich backgrounds who will share what they are thinking should be the standard for participation.

Find them and your quest for Solomon's wisdom will be achieved.”

*wisdom*  
wis·dom  
noun [wiz-duhm]

1. the quality or state of being wise; knowledge of what is true or right coupled with just judgment as to action; sagacity, discernment, or insight.
2. scholarly knowledge or learning: the wisdom of the schools.
3. wise sayings or teachings; precepts.
4. a wise act or saying.
5. Wisdom of Solomon.

# Reason 3:

## Never do traditional brainstorming because many forces in your organization will destroy it.

When Alex Osborn (the “Father of Brainstorming”) began developing his methods for creative problem solving in 1939, it was for the purposes of creating ideas as part of idea development.

It was a valuable tool, which has unfortunately become diffused over the decades.

Osborn had 4 basic rules for brainstorming. They have been blindly followed for decades by thousands of leaders with residue in current brainstorming methods.

### We believe these rules are out of date.

#### Osborn Rule #1:

#### *Withhold criticism*

#### Observation:

This seldom happens. The bolder the idea shared, the faster the judgment by participants in the group.

Delaying judgment can be seen when the person sharing the idea holds a higher “power position” than other members of the group. The key word being **delay**. Judgment is unfortunately the norm in most groups. Observing this rule for any length of time over 10 minutes is rare in most groups.



### We live judgmental lives.

Show someone a new product, a new type of car, and ask for their reaction and 80% will point out the flaws. It’s too big. It’s too small. It’s hard to get into. It’s hard to get out of. The doors look funny.

You do not have to do anything other than ask what they think and the brain goes negative. Count on it. Don’t believe it? Try proposing a “new diet” to your spouse and see what their reaction is.

Your participants aren’t stupid. They aren’t going to put their bold ideas out in front of a group to be ridiculed and hacked apart more than once, especially when the rules say “NO JUDGEMENT”. People don’t observe the rules 90-95% of the time.



### IDEA SKEET

In your brainstorming sessions you will experience “idea skeet.”

One of your participants screws up their courage and launches a “fresh idea” in front of your group.

#### What happens?

People sit around and shoot holes in the idea.

# Reason 3: *(continued)*

## Osborn Rule #2:

*Welcome unusual ideas*

### Observation:

Sounds good but doesn't exist in common business.

Business is serious.

Wildness isn't.

Beanbag chairs and shooting sponge balls looks good on TV. In isolated situations, they make the media. Not true of the other 99.99 % of organizations.

Besides how do bean bag chairs and sponge balls help a group of lawyers get more high-end clients to do pension work with their firm? This is the type of issues real people face every day and they are looking for fresh approaches.

These props are silly and won't work in 99% of organizations. They make people really uncomfortable. Examples where such gimmicks are used always seem to be with 24-year-olds in Silicon Valley. The .01% makes for good YouTube viral stories though.

People have too much work to do to fool around with the "unusual."

## Osborn Rule #3:

*Focus on quantity*

### Observation:

People don't actually know how to formulate an idea so what you end up with is a pile of any of the following:

- Raw thoughts
- Reactions
- Vague material
- Inferences
- Hints
- Thought starters

Lots and lots of "stuff." Frequently mountains of junk that requires immense time to wade through to find any "nuggets" of value.

There is an alternative.

Ideas sessions can be done differently.

Develop a lot less material of significantly higher value versus masses of junk "hoping you'll find a gem."

## PROTOTYPE THINKING™

It's possible to find the jewel in 30-70% or less time.

We've developed an approach called "Prototype Thinking™" and more than 95% of situations require it.

You simply do not have time to do endless mining or endless meetings.

## Osborn Rule #4:

*Combine & improve ideas*

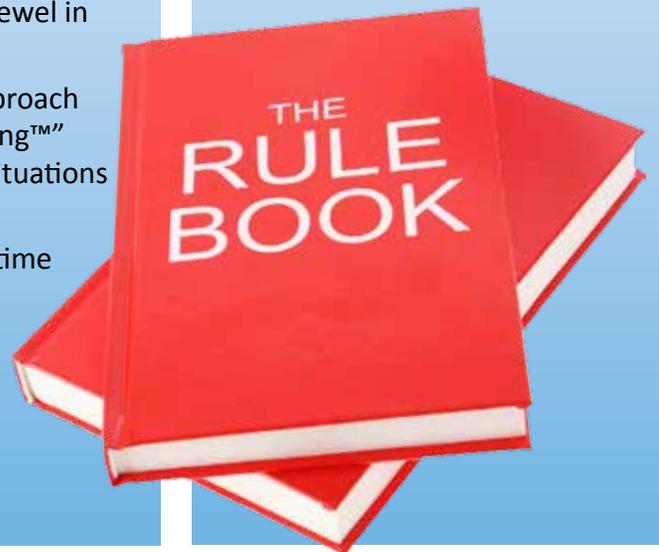
### Observation:

If groups follow the quantity guideline, it's hard to combine and improve "junk" in any reasonable amount of time.

When you are short on time you need to quickly prototype ideas you can work with.

You need to find the kernel quickly and not do endless mining.

Osborn's rules served for decades and still do in limited applications. However they are limited in broader planning applications, especially strategic ones



# Reason 4:

**Too much nonsense is tied to traditional brainstorming.**

**People are cynical. If not cynical, they are at least skeptical. They've heard it all before – "New BOSS, same old BS."**



**Does it even make sense to get people's ideas?**

**Yes, sort of.**

People are cynical. If not cynical, they are at least skeptical. They've heard it all before – "New BOSS, same old BS."

## Your Inner Aladdin Lamp

Osborn said "Each of us has an Aladdin's lamp, and if we rub it hard enough, it can light our way to better living – just as that same lamp lit up the march of civilization."

That type of language today makes business people gag.

Imagine a group of workers in a bakery looking for ideas to speed up their manufacturing line for producing "whiskey cupcakes" and how well they'll respond to "looking for their inner Aladdin Lamps."

Keep your idea efforts low-key. Just do the work. That doesn't mean don't communicate it.

Expect to spend vast amounts of time communicating and updating people on what's happening.

Just don't overplay it. Mute your voice and do real work.

Show true results and people will begin to buy into legitimate outcomes and not the shenanigans of "show and tell."

There's been too much nonsense and hype, and you have a chance to change that.

Start from the point of view that to have true brainstorming, people need to have trust and expect that their ideas won't come back and bite them in the tail. That's an exception in most companies.

Better you take these factors into consideration before doing brainstorming or you'll be dead in the water before anyone offers their first thought.

**Fear is the central nervous system of many companies.**

**"If I suggest this idea, will it cost me my job or hurt my career?"**

# Reason 5:

## Traditional brainstorming gets you mired in the cesspools of organizational leadership issues.

### You better have an 800-pound gorilla involved to help you with the implementation of your ideas.

Count on this—flaws with leadership and systems issues will surface. Someone will have to deal with them or whatever genius idea you come up with won't have a chance to breathe, much less lurch forward.

A leader with jaws of steel is needed to nurture and protect it long, long, long after it was the spark of a thought in an idea session.

Too many times the real issues revolve around who will implement the ideas. Do you have a LEADER who has the ability to get the money, time, talent to get the idea moving forward fast enough?

If you have wimps masquerading as managers and leaders for you, quit before starting, as nothing will happen.

Typical brainstorming teams without such a leader guarantees they'll go over Niagara Falls in a Volkswagen.

#### And the reason isn't because they aren't good or great ideas.

We're addressing ideas the market wants and will pay for. The ideas will be profitable. You can design, manufacture, sell, deliver and service them.

They have all the makings of being successful.

Why they will FAIL is because of competition. Not from other companies but your own company. Inertia.

Lack of focus. Lack of resources. Too many other things competing for time. Too many initiatives going on. Leadership bouncing other new ideas around.

#### People forget how hard it is to launch a new idea.

That's why you need a fanatical leader who gets his or her teeth into an idea like a pit bull and simply won't give up. They break rules and destroy norms to get good ideas implemented. It's their tenacity to fight your people down the hallway or 'in the next department' that makes them successful.

Your internal competition is your number #1 enemy.

Enough said. Just be prepared for it and don't get discouraged.

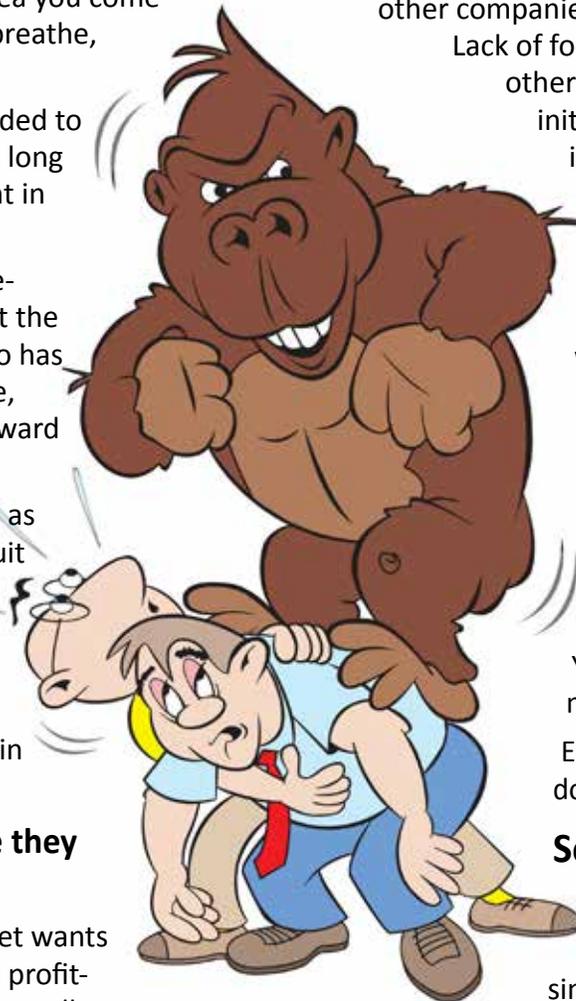
#### So, who is your 800-pound gorilla?

If you don't have one, get one. Or simply QUIT your brainstorming efforts.

#### Why?

There are too many forces in EVERY organization working against any idea you develop. Market forces. Legal forces. Competitive forces. Time and budget forces. Petty people forces.

And just to remind you of some of the people forces, here are a few you can be guaranteed you'll consistently run into in your idea sessions.



**NOW LET'S GET REAL!**  
 Most TOP ideas from your brainstorming sessions will FAIL.

# Reason 5: *(continued)*

## People Guaranteed to Kill Your Ideas

### Person 1:

*suffers from “The Arrogance of Righteousness Disorder” (AORD)*

In our experience, the most difficult type of person to work with in an idea session is the one who is convinced their ideas are 100% correct in any circumstance.

They believe they speak for God.

You know the type. Their opinion is the only one that counts.

You only include them in an idea session when the cost of excluding them is greater than excluding them.

### Triage Solution #1:

If you have to include someone with **AORD**, stage your session so you guarantee all ideas are considered first before you evaluate them.

The proper attitude we believe is to move from **PRE-JUDICIAL THINKING** (the one in most groups) to **POST-JUDICIAL THINKING** (the ideal which is possible).

Only after all ideas are presented, heard, thought through and considered are they open for evaluation. **POST-JUDICIAL THINKING** becomes your norm.

### Triage Solution #2:

Spend a lot of your idea time in small groups (two or three members at a time). This ensures your person with AORD can only contaminate the work of a few people instead of the entire team.

Sometimes their behavior changes radically in a team of two as you have taken away their “audience.”

### Person 2:

*is unaware of their constant “Wandering Rabbit Syndrome” (WRS)*

This participant frequents bunny trails with their thinking which makes it impossible for others to have even a hint of where they are going. It’s impossible for others to know how to work with them.

They can’t stay on point and are incapable of staying anywhere near the subject.

Bunny trails can be “interesting” but they chew up vast amounts of time in your brainstorming sessions.

They frustrate members to the point where you’ll have a hard time getting future participants.

### Triage Solution #1:

Get a soft toy rabbit. Put it in the middle of your table where all participants can reach it and flip it when they sense WRS is happening to one or more of the group.

### Triage Solution #2:

As a last resort, make your participant with acute Wandering Rabbit Syndrome (WRS) in charge of the rabbit.

Then you can deal with the wasted time and get your participants refocused.

- **It works.**
- **It saves time.**
- **It will get you better ideas faster.**

### Person 3:

*has “Intolerable Blabbermouth Disorder” (IBD)*

You know who I’m talking about, the person who just can’t stop talking.

This person seems to surface in every brainstorming session and is the one who will use 200 words to say something when 14 would have done the trick.

They grind your session to a halt.

IBD members talk whether they have something to say or not.

They will bleed the energy from your idea session.

IBD doesn’t have to be that way.

### Triage Solution # 1:

To deal with the blabbermouth, post a guideline of “No Speeches.” When you sense a speech is in the making, review your posted guideline and ask that person to share the essence of their idea.

To make this work, the person leading your idea session has to be strong and keep people on track with the guidelines.

### Triage Solution #2:

Appoint someone to be a “speech cop” and use an artifact (like a flag) if there is a speech.

# Reason 5: *(continued)*

## People with:

**“Digital Device Addiction” (DDA), which is at tsunami epidemic levels.**

**iPads. iPhones. Laptops.**

**You name the “device”...they are TECHNO-LUSTERS!!!**

We’re not referring to those who intelligently, appropriately and politely use technology to support what they are doing. You know who we’re talking about.

If you’re clueless to what we’re discussing, go to Starbucks, sit in a corner and observe how many people are attached to an electronic umbilical cord and ask yourself if any of them are accomplishing anything meaningful.

We’d guess 60 % of them are the people we’re discussing here.

Members of brainstorming sessions may be doing 4 to 5 functions simultaneously when you’re trying to extract fresh ideas from them on the most complex of issues!

In the 1940s and 50s - Alex Osborn’s days - you could get people’s attention to focus and do brainstorming. Today you need to beat people over the head to tear them away from their electronic “toys.”



### Triage # 1:

Have the most senior person start the session by addressing **DDA**. Make clear statements of how **DDA** will be handled during your session.

### Triage # 2:

We suggest taking frequent breaks. **Don’t go more than 90 minutes in your session** then take a **14 minute break** so members can deal with their business and personal needs.

You’ll run into all these people who suffer one or more of the following afflictions and need triage when you run idea sessions.

- Arrogance of Righteousness Disorder (AORD)
- Wandering Rabbit Syndrome (WRS)
- Person with Intolerable Blabbermouth Disorder (IBD)
- People with Digital Device Addiction (DDA)

I know you identify with several of these frustrating people. They are a big part of the reason brainstorming frustrates you and you don’t see breakthrough ideas.

It takes incredible intestinal fortitude to screw up ones courage and present an idea—especially a fresh one to a group of peers or superiors—particularly if the idea is anywhere outside of the norm.

**NOTE:** The higher in an organization your members are the less DDA seems to appear.

# Reason 6:

## Traditional brainstorming is done when what is truly needed is strategic planning.

Strategic planning requires the right participants focused 100% on a well-designed topic, in the right place, at the right time where your members are properly prepared to participate.

It's not "let's get everyone involved for the sake of buy-in". In our experience, it's an extremely small group of people who truly think strategically.

Getting large numbers of people involved at the tactical level – how to make the strategy work – makes sense in some situations.

It's not unusual for less than 5% of top leadership of most companies to be true strategic thinkers. Most are too caught up in the weeds and don't know how to get out to focus on the long-term direction of their company.

Thinking tactically is easy compared to thinking strategically. Expecting the 95% of leaders who are basically "non-strategic thinkers" to do strategic work in a brainstorming mode is setting them up for failure.

*brainstorming*  
 brain·storm·ing  
*noun* [breyn-stawr-ming]

1. a conference technique of solving specific problems, amassing information, stimulating creative thinking, developing new ideas, etc., by unrestrained and spontaneous participation in discussion.

### American Business Disease

Often the best strategies aren't "blue-sky-out-there ideas" but are frequently obvious in retrospect. Many are so counter to their industry. Others are doing the basics better than anyone else. Others are supported by better systems.

Great strategy is normally doing just a few things extremely well. Fewer rather than many should be the norm. Taking on too many initiatives with too few people is an American business disease, which is destroying lives and killing organizations.

Combining ideas to get "more done" can be damaging. It takes great strength of leadership to develop just a few that are done exceptionally well versus many done poorly.

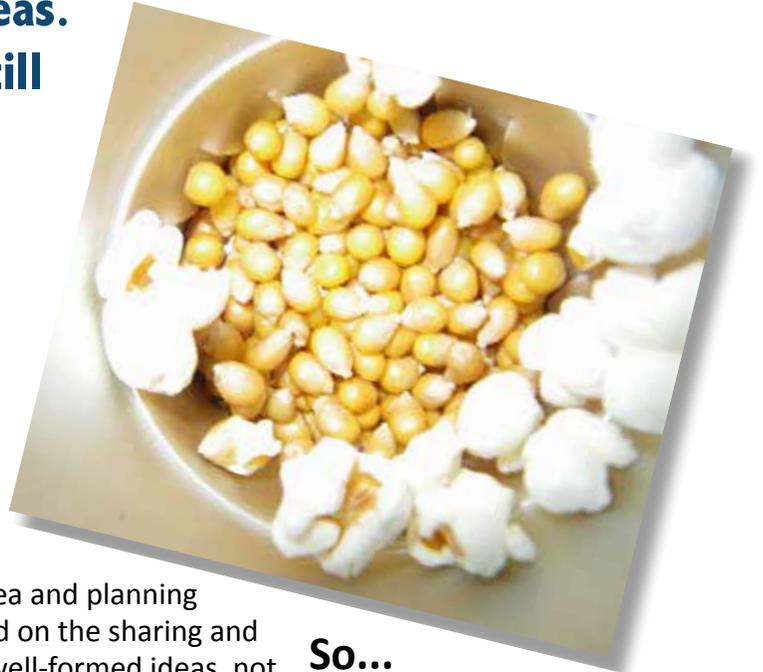
Traditional brainstorming often tends to go in the other direction.

**Great strategy often resides in simplicity.**

# Reason 7:

**Most brainstorming ideas aren't ideas. They are "kernels" of ideas that still need to be popped.**

i · de · a *idea*  
*noun* [ī - dē - ə]



First, let's look at the definition of an "idea."

1. Something, such as a thought or conception, that potentially or actually exists in the mind as a product of mental activity
2. A plan, scheme, or method
3. The gist of a specific situation
4. A notion, a fancy
5. The mental representation of something
6. The list goes on.

A successful idea and planning session is based on the sharing and generation of well-formed ideas, not vague thoughts.

***So, how do you get you beyond the useless output of typical brainstorming sessions?***

***The same old tame ideas?***

### **Churned Ideas™**

"Churning" was TOTALLY given life from our work with a group of GE engineering consultants who used traditional brainstorming with their manufacturing plant clients. We received immense resistance from them about "Churning".

### **So...**

We proposed a test and put them into two groups. Each group tackled the same issue. One group Churned Ideas™ and the other using their typical brainstorming approach.

After an hour, both groups got back together. The "Churning" group presented their output first and the other group just shook their heads. A key 'resistor' said, "Now I get it. We'll be able to do in three hours what we now do in three days, we'll get better ideas and we won't fry our clients."

Many brainstorming sessions work at the "kernel" level. They chew up bucket loads of time and can be excruciating for the participants as no real forward progress is made.

What do we mean when we say ideas aren't "ideas" – they are "kernels"? Time needs to be spent developing the ideas into something meaningful – i.e. getting them to pop. That's where "Churning" comes in.

“ Many brainstorming sessions work at the “kernel” level. They chew up bucket loads of time and can be **excruciating** for the participants as no real forward progress is made. ”

# Reason 7: *(continued)*

**You'll know you have a Churned Idea™ when it has been enhanced to meet the following three criteria:**

## **Criteria #1:**

### *Assign-able*

You can assign it to someone (and they know what it means enough to go to work on the development of the idea).

## **Criteria #2:**

### *Cost-able*

You can put a preliminary cost to it. You can intuitively tell if it is a \$1,000 idea or a \$10,000, \$100,000 idea,

## **Criteria #3:**

### *Prototype-able*

You can develop a rough prototype of the idea...a quick test to learn from it – a rough model, a drawing, a rough draft, a two-page executive summary.

**Creating ideas typically starts with something along the lines of:**

***“Make it fast.”***

***“Make it easy for our customers.”***

***“Engage our customers up front.”***

While on the surface that seems to some like an idea, step back and ask yourself if it meets the above criteria.

Can you **assign** them to someone so they know exactly what they are supposed to do?

Can you put a **cost** to any of them?

How about sketching out a **prototype** of what they might look like?

No, you can't.

**Now, think about the difference if you work the previous “kernel ideas” into the following Churned Ideas™.**

**Guarantee that a customer does not have to wait on the phone for a representative for more than 60 seconds.**

- Assign it?
- Cost it?
- Prototype it?

**You bet!**

**Provide three billing choices for attendees of our training seminars.**

- Assign it?
- Cost it?
- Prototype it?

**Absolutely!**

**Provide an opt-in form on our website's homepage that offers participants a free White Paper on Leading Off-Site Retreats.”**

- Again, assign it?
- Cost it?
- Prototype it?

**Yes to all three!**

Now you have **ACTION IDEAS** or the results of Prototype Thinking™, which you can make decisions on and act on if you decide to. And you'll save immense time and headaches getting to this point.

You'll experience what so many others have before you – they reached better decisions, faster.

You'll see fresh ideas in 30-70% less time simply by “Churning”, which is explained in greater detail in the next section of this report.

# 3 Ways To Get Breakthrough Ideas

## Approach 1:

# STOP BRAINSTORMING. DO PROTOTYPE THINKING™



## First, what is Prototype Thinking™?

Prototype Thinking™ is the refinement of a raw thought where:

- it can be **assigned** to someone else for development
- you can apply **preliminary costs**, and
- you can make a **prototype** or model out of the idea.

Prototype Thinking™ takes a thought to the point where you don't detail it, but it is solid enough so that you can make a good decision about whether or not to move it further ahead or not.

### How is it different from brainstorming?

Brainstorming tends to produce one-two-three-word raw thoughts without actions. It's vague and sounds good.

It's like nailing applesauce on a wall.

After you hear an idea in a typical brainstorming session, you intuitively go "what the heck does that mean"?

It doesn't meet the three criteria we mentioned of **Assign-able, Cost-able, Prototype-able**.

Don't judge if the ideas are good or bad. Ask yourself if they are formed to the point you can make judgments about them? Can you test them?

We'll demonstrate the difference on a fictitious subject.

## Revitalizing a Drive-Though Car Wash

Brainstormed idea:	Churned idea:
Dry the car	Use hand held dryer above the windshields where water runs down the sides of the windows.
Fast wash	Set up a system where people can make an appointment to ensure there is no wait time.
Vacuum the inside	Remove baby seats, sanitize them and reinstall them according to federal guidelines.
Check the car	Check tire pressure, fluids, windshield wipers, tire treads, inspection dates and give driver a written evaluation with offer to fix any problems for a fee.
Have a waiting area	Provide a lounge for customers with wi-fi, espresso, local and national newspapers, and the top 10 aromatherapy scents for people to buy for their car.
Clean the car	Have a bug, tar, skunk and other "disaster" specialist for the outside and inside problems like spilled milk, kids getting sick and dogs getting messy.
Make it easy to do business with us	Offer a pick up and delivery service for local businesses within 5 miles of the Car-Wash.

### You get the point.

The brainstormed ideas are vague, raw thoughts to which you can't apply the three criteria of Assign-able, Cost-able and Prototype-able. All the above Churned Ideas™ you can hand to someone and you have an idea of how much they would cost to do (low, medium, high) and you can prototype them easily.

# 3 Ways To Get Breakthrough Ideas

## Approach 1: (continued)

### Step 1:

#### TO DO PROTOTYPE THINKING™

- Slow your idea sessions down at the beginning.
- Don't let your group take off like traditional brainstorming where people rapid-fire their thoughts with high energy, generating large lists of vague, raw one-two or three-word vague, raw thoughts off the top of their heads.
- Again, slow it down.
- Really slow down your session. At first.

### Step 2:

#### TO DO PROTOTYPE THINKING™

- Be prepared to document the thoughts on flip charts, smart boards, storyboards.
- Whatever means you use to document your session make sure you document all thoughts. Why capture all ideas?
  - Some ideas are great.
  - Some ideas could be combined with something later on in your session and be good.
  - Some ideas may stimulate worthwhile ideas.
  - You **HONOR** people by capturing their ideas (if you don't document their ideas you may lose them).
- The first word to document is a **VERB. ACTION.** Get a verb.
- People don't think in terms of action and need your guidance.
- Push for **ACTION.**
- Listen for **ACTION.**
- Define the **ACTION** for the group if they don't or can't.
- Without the verb (**ACTION**) you can't get to Prototype Thinking™.
- With **ACTION** ideas the quality of what you generate will be quantum-leap greater than the raw thoughts of brainstorming sessions.

### Step 3:

#### TO DO PROTOTYPE THINKING™

- A simple trick is to make sure each documented idea has at least 8-10 words following a verb. What follows is a refined set of thoughts that will make the criteria of:
  - You can assign it to someone
  - You can assign a preliminary cost, be it low cost, medium cost, high cost
  - You can make a prototype, a drawing to demonstrate your idea, or you can make an inexpensive model of your idea.

Leaders of idea sessions who do Steps 1-3 find they change the nature of typical brainstorming to breakthrough work with groups they guide.

They do it in a fraction of the normal time - 30-70% time savings minimum, with much greater results quality wise.

People who lead lots of brainstorming sessions find they don't want to go back to their previous methods because of the efficiency of Churned Ideas™.

# 3 Ways To Get Breakthrough Ideas

## Approach 2:

### Carefully design you idea sessions. Don't throw them together.

There must be structure to guide the creativity and development of your ideas.

This goes against some of the current thought processes out there that "structure squashes creativity."

#### Hogwash.

Structure the time for the group and give them the reasons they are there. Let them know the following:

1. What they are there to work on. This is your **TOPIC**.
2. Why they are working on it – clearly defined goals and metrics. These are your **OVERALL PURPOSES**.
3. What specifically is being asked of them at that point in time. These are the **PURPOSES OF YOUR SESSION**.
4. What is off the table for discussion. These are your **NON-PURPOSES**.
5. Critical background they need to know at that point in time to accomplish what is being asked of them. These facts and data comprise your **BACKGROUND**.
6. Key questions that will guide the discussion that are tied directly to what is being asked of them. These pivotal questions are called **HEADERS**.

Your members' time is too pricey for your challenges to be dealt with in haphazard approaches.

You need to spend time designing your idea and planning sessions. The time spent designing may be more than conducting them.

#### Here are Guidelines to follow:

- It is not unusual to spend 1-2 hours planning to every hour you plan to meet with a group.
- Your topic needs to be stated in 10 words or less. Don't be surprised if it takes you 6-10 times to state it cleanly. Clarity doesn't always come easily.
- Specify what you want to increase or decrease, by how much, by when.
- Identify 3 specific purposes you want to walk away from the session with like "7-10 methods we can implement and test in the next 60 days" versus a bunch of ideas.
- Identify 2-4 things you don't want to happen or be worked on during the session.
- Identify 1-3 overall reasons you are working on the topic.
- Identify 10-12 **KEY FACTS** participants need to know in order to participate.
- Identify 3-6 **KEY QUESTIONS (HEADERS)** you want to ask during your session.

#### And ... that's just for the first part of an idea/planning session.

The foundation has been laid. You may now begin your idea development session.

Without having the above present, any energy spent on the generation of ideas is wasted.

**We get immense feedback on how helpful Non-Purposes are to idea and planning sessions, especially strategic sessions.**

Leaders who go through the steps outlined above find the quality of their idea and planning sessions are greatly enhanced. To find a list of the questions we use in creating high impact designs, go to <http://bit.ly/W3IKpb>.  **click here**

You may not use all questions but select the ones from **EACH** section you find helpful.

## 3 Ways To Get Breakthrough Ideas

### Approach 3:

**Plunge your idea creators into your topic. Don't tip toe into it. Validate it.**

**One big challenge with typical brainstorming is how prepared people are to participate.**

One big challenge with typical brainstorming is how prepared people are to participate.

Something to seriously consider when you need breakthrough ideas is the arena of "Validation."

First, what it isn't. It's not testing an idea to see if it is valid or will sell or resolve a problem. It's at the other end of the process. It's getting a real understanding of the question you are addressing.

It's getting "street smart" – getting the flavor and texture of what it is you are working on.

#### Direct Validation

Now, an example of what validation is:

#### The Topic:

#### Drastically Improving Our Admissions System

We had each member of the idea team go through being admitted to their own hospital as well as neighboring hospitals.

They sat for hours in the waiting areas at all hours, 24/7. They sat across the desk from the person interviewing them and asking for their insurance information. They went through triage on "fake injuries or illnesses."

The idea is that you 100% experience what you are working on. It seems like such a simple idea but it is amazing how many people don't understand what they are going to be working on.

How often do people on the other side of a procedure experience what their customers do? That is called a direct validation.

It is remarkable how many people who work in a hotel are brought into an idea session to "improve the way we serve guests who stay with us in our facility." The problem is many of the idea developers have never stayed in their own hotel nor in a hotel of their major competitors.

They've never spent a night in their own hotel and ordered room service.

## 3 Ways To Get Breakthrough Ideas

### Approach 3: (continued)

#### An Indirect Validation

An *indirect* validation involves looking at and experiencing the principles behind the issue you are working with.

Following the example from above:

While looking at the same admissions procedure to a hospital, have your team members be admitted into hotels, restaurants, car rentals, even a local Navy recruiting office. Study other admissions processes. The ideas will just come pouring out. They will be “close to your customer” kinds of ideas.

One physician who ran an emergency room went through being admitted to her own ER. She was dumbfounded at some of the things her “customers” were subjected to.

Suddenly it wasn’t just another process – it was a blood and guts “Let’s get this thing straightened out and stop doing this to the people coming to us for our services!”

#### Develop ideas for a few hours, then validate

The most successful fish restaurant in the country has his staff meet on Saturday to test all dishes the chef was considering for the menu. The staff sampled them and voted. If the majority didn’t like the new dishes, they didn’t make it to the menu. How’s that for having your front line validate your product?

How many times have you asked a waiter or waitress about an item on the menu and they say, “I don’t eat the restaurant food”? A lost opportunity for direct validation.

## 3 Ways To Get Breakthrough Ideas

### Approach 3: (continued)

**RULE: If you are trying to improve something you need to experience it.**

**Not just intellectually.**

**Jump in and actually experience it.**

**Get the texture of your challenge.**

You drive a car before buying it. You climb in and out of it. You gun the engine. You peel rubber. Drive your project the same way to understand it.

Don't begin a major project immediately with a validation. Work your subject for a while so when your team does validate they have more "mental hooks" to hang ideas and insights on. They will be more mentally sensitive to things that might happen in the validation than they would have been without that preliminary work.

In preparing people for validation, have them take pictures and make sure they have cards and markers, so they can capture ideas as they surface.

Tell your participants to look for what goes right and glean from that. Then tell them to study what is wrong so they can formulate ideas from that as well.

### Use all of your senses

Get your participants to "five-sense" the experiences so they don't just observe visually. You can even have them switch perspectives. Have people go through it as a person new to your situation, someone who doesn't speak English, someone who is visually impaired, etc. Be creative in how you set up your validations.

A woman we know wanted to open a store for full-figured woman. She was about 115 pounds and bulked up her body with padding so she could wear a dress of a woman about 240 pounds. Then she went to New York on a shopping trip. She took reams of notes from her observations as she validated her experiences being a full-figured woman.

The end result was an elegant boutique full of customers who drove long distances because of how sensitive she was to their particular needs due to their sizes.

Your validations don't have to take a long time. They can take 20 minutes to an hour or two. On a major project, you may want to take 3-8 hours or 3-4 days.

Validation is also a tremendous team building experience.

**Once again,** validation is not to see how well the answers or action ideas work. It is to get the participants in touch with the real issues and the nuances behind them. It simultaneously drives the importance of that issue up. You don't have to worry about "motivating" people. Validating does more of that than a thousand "Win one for the Gipper" speeches.

Validation differs from traditional benchmarking because it is 100% experiential.

## 3 Ways To Get Breakthrough Ideas

Do you validate everything?

**No.**

Does it add richness and insights into your work?

**Absolutely.**

Use it whenever and wherever you need breakthrough ideas.

You can do it with great, good, so-so and poor examples as well as direct examples and indirect examples of your challenge.

## WHAT CAN WE DO FOR YOU?

**? Have you ever heard of Death by Planning Session?**  
That's when committees take 6 weeks to come up with a solution and 18 months later they're still at it.

**? Do you ever feel like you're drowning in quicksand due to all the useless, boring, unnecessary meetings you get trapped in?"**

### For over 3 decades

The McNellis Company has been leading and teaching our **7-Step Visual Planning System™** known as **Compression Planning®** to leaders who are frustrated with the snail-like pace of:

- Idea development
- Decision making
- Action in their organizations



To see a six-minute sample Compression Planning® video, visit [www.compressionplanning.com](http://www.compressionplanning.com) and click on the video in the bottom right hand corner.

click here  <http://bit.ly/V60LrZ>

## 3 Ways To Get Breakthrough Ideas

### Testimonial:

**Donny Beaver from HomeWaters Retreats says:**

*“For the last 17 years my team at HomeWaters has been setting the stage for hundreds of other organizations to have a great place to escape the rat race, refocus their efforts and recharge their souls to face the world again.*



*On one hand, it has been very rewarding. On the other, I've always wanted to develop a methodology to help our clients facilitate their meetings & planning sessions. Unfortunately, I am not an expert in planning or meeting facilitation, so I simply focused on creating a great retreat experience and allowed my guests to worry about their own facilitation.*

*Then I met Jerry McNellis, the Father of Compression Planning®. Wow, was I amazed. In less than a day and a half, we condensed three decades of my fuzzy thinking about meeting facilitation into a solid plan to launch the prototype of the 'Spruce Creek Institute' within the next 30 days.”*

Donny Beaver

donnyb@homewaters-club.com

HomeWaters

814.571.9779

www.HomeWatersRetreats.com

Building Better Relationships in God's Great Outdoors

## 3 Ways To Get Breakthrough Ideas

To all CEOs and Senior Executives,

If you want to gain a clearer picture of where you stand with your business at present and which steps you could take to set up a more efficient idea development and planning system, we offer you a 90-minute strategy session free of charge.

**Make your appointment now.**

We hope this article has started to provoke some thoughts in your mind. Please do not hesitate to call if you wish to explore solutions together with us.

Until then we wish you excellent reduction in time and frustration with your idea development and planning efforts.

### Contact Us:

724-484-7700

launa@compressionplanning.com



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jerry".

**Jerry McNellis**

Founder / Director

The Compression Planning Institute

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pat".

**Patrick McNellis**

Director Idea Development and Implementation

The Compression Planning Institute

“A DARN  
good plan  
with a broad  
base of support  
**NOW**  
is much better than a  
**PERFECT** plan  
9 months  
from now.”

