

10 Deadly Brainstorming Ruts That Kill Innovation



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Are you stuck in a “brainstorming” rut?

Most people think they know how to brainstorm. Yet, few realize there is more to brainstorming than the one traditional method that Alex Osborn created in the 1950’s (yes, LAST century). A multitude of new methods, tools, and techniques have been developed in recent years. Here are 10 of the most deadly brainstorming ruts that kill innovation.

1. **“KIA’s”** – KIA is the military acronym for those “Killed In Action”. Yet, **Know It Alls** (KIA’s) are the surest way to “kill” innovation. These are people who act like there’s no room to grow or learn. Arrogance in all forms (a lack of openness to new ideas, current reality, or outside input) is a “killer”. Being a lifelong learner is essential to staying innovative. Don’t get KIA by being a *Know It All*.

2. **“Been There, Done That”** - Almost everyone puts brainstorming in a “box”. They don’t realize there are over 25 different brainstorming tools and techniques. Some work better with certain groups, projects or topics. Often the best tools are the ones YOU create for your specific needs. S-T-R-E-T-C-H!

3. **“MIA”** - Most people have participated in brainstorming sessions where a TON of ideas were generated. Then, everybody got up, walked out and... NOTHING HAPPENED! This is what’s called “Missing In Action”. It’s critical to quickly move to key Evaluation and Implementation techniques that capitalize on team ownership, yet assign individual action steps. Don’t forget the Action!

4. **“Failure Freeze”** – Much of the traditional management and educational environment is geared toward the ‘one right answer’ philosophy. People are scared to make a mistake, yet the ability to

“engage” risk that includes the possibility of failure is a vital component to being innovative. Failure is an essential element of success! If you want more success, increase your failure rate!

5. **“Blabbermouths Rule!”** - Without a trained facilitator, brainstorming sessions tend to be dominated by the loudest or most outgoing participants. Quieter team members can get run over, thus stifling some really great ideas. Due to social inhibitions, it’s usually not the best idea to let the boss facilitate. This is just one reason why new methods of brainstorming can be more effective.

6. **“We Got Lost!”** - A clear direction, purpose, or goal for the session is CRITICAL! Tangents are the norm. It takes wise pre-session planning and a skilled facilitator to guide the discussion back to the goal without squelching genuinely useful ideas. Knowing what’s a rabbit trail and when to chase it is an important skill you’ll need to stay on course.

7. **“Rear-View Living”** – Spending too much time focusing on the past in “Woulda, Coulda, Shoulda-Thinking” is dangerous. Hindsight can offer great insight into problems, failure, crisis, and even success. Yet, “rear view living”, especially if it turns into a blame game, is unproductive. Focus on the Future!

8. **“Meeting Nausea”** – ‘We’re SICK of meetings’ is often the unspoken attitude... and justifiably so. A GREAT brainstorming session is totally different than a normal ‘meeting’. Make it an “experience” with amazing results by thorough preparation including: a clear purpose, strategic pre-planning, a spirit of experimentation in a ‘grace-filled’ environment, and even a good bit of fun and laughter.

9. **“Bad Experience”** – If you’ve ever had food poisoning, you usually avoid the culprit food for quite some time. Yet, you don’t give up on food altogether! If you’ve experienced a toxic brainstorming session in the past (perhaps led by

an untrained facilitator or inhibiting boss), take some mental Pepto, get over it and try a new approach.

10. **“The Fear Factor”** – “I’m scared... What if we can’t solve the problem? What if someone else comes up with a better idea than mine? What if someone suggests an idea that means I might have to change?” Fear is still a driving force in stifling innovation, whether it means personal or organizational growth. Acknowledge your fear and then face it with renewed confidence.

Brainstorming, in its multiple forms, is one of the quickest ways to help you create an *Environment of Innovation*[™] in your organization. Differently Think!

John Storm is known as The Idea Expert[™]. His mission is to bring Your ideas to LIFE! His expertise focuses on helping people discover, evaluate and implement their ideas. For additional articles and innovation resources, go to: www.brainstormnetwork.org