



# EPICENTRAL

A Newsletter from Epicenter Development Group  
highlighting ideas that improve organizations

Welcome to Epicenter Development Group's newsletter, EPICentral. The purpose of this newsletter is to highlight fundamental ideas that have helped organizations develop and maintain great manufacturing and service operations. We hope that you find our EPICentral newsletter helpful, and we would welcome your comments on its content.

## Supercharged Brainstorming

The technique referred to as "brainstorming" has been around for many years. Brainstorming involves gathering a group of people together into a conference room, setting some "ground rules" and very quickly creating an exhaustive list of ideas (freeform). Some typical "ground rules" include not judging people's ideas, setting a time limit for the event, asking for 100% participation and having someone record ALL ideas. The brainstorming technique is supposed to lead to more and better ideas for creating new products, solving problems and designing new systems. It often does - but could it be better?

**Not all brainstorming is created equal.** I have found that some groups of people can amass a huge pile of good ideas in a short time while other groups have a hard time filling up one page. What makes the difference? In my experience, I have found some general conditions that can make the difference between an "OK" brainstorming session and a "supercharged" brainstorming session.

**Condition #1: Plan Diversity** - The freshest and best ideas usually come from a diverse group of people. Forget organizational boundaries and seek group diversity by inviting accountants, operators, technicians, sales people, the maintenance staff and, yes, even some suppliers and customers to your brainstorming sessions. Sometimes the people that know the least about your process can provide the most insight into opportunities.

**Condition #2: Use Different Formats** - Make the format fit the participants not the participants fit the format. The typical brainstorming session is a "fish market" of people throwing out ideas that are tabulated onto a master list. This unstructured and public format works well under some circumstances, but it can lead to a lack of participation by all people (like introverts). For this reason, I strategically plan different formats for generating ideas such as mind-mapping, fish-bone diagramming, individually filled post-it notes, or "world-café" writing-on-the-tablecloth techniques.

**Condition #3: Create a New Perspective** - Sometimes the best ideas materialize when people are "jarred" from their usual way of thinking into a new perspective. This forces them to reexamine how they look at the world and potential solutions. Create a new perspective for people by asking thought-provoking questions like, "What is the one thing that we could do that would make our competitors go nuts?" or "Could a person that does not speak or read English do this operation?"

**Condition #4: Stimulate the Creative Juices** - It has been said that there are no truly original ideas - only old ideas that are recycled into different combinations. Whatever you believe, the fact is that people generate new ideas based upon their exposure to stimulus. Therefore, if you want to generate more ideas, consider how you can bring some stimulus into your brainstorming efforts. This can include a visit to a customer, trade show or retail store prior to a brainstorming session, use of props (like competitor's products), trade magazines that cover your industry, different types of food or Internet "clippings" from other companies.

More stimulus = More ideas.

**Condition #5: Have Fun** - Brainstorming is serious business, but having fun while brainstorming will lead to better results. "Fun" breaks down organizational barriers and makes people more comfortable working together as a group. In addition, "fun" as opposed to "boring," creates a sense of energy in a group setting. How do you create fun? Smile. Have fun yourself. Invite fun people to the session. Serve fun food. Pick a fun place to brainstorm. Brainstorm with your group on what would be fun . . .

**Final Thoughts:** However you use it, the brainstorming technique is a great tool for quickly generating ideas. The quality and quantity of those ideas, however, can be greatly affected by how brainstorming is implemented within your company. The use of general brainstorming guidelines, in combination with the conditions that I have mentioned in this article, can help you to become a brainstorming "master" and maximize the benefit of brainstorming for you and your firm.

## Next Steps

If you would like more information on this topic or other similar types of tools, please contact Bill Proctor with your request at [wproctor@epicentergroup.com](mailto:wproctor@epicentergroup.com) or 216-702-0952. You can also find previous issues of EPICentral at [Newsletters](#).

Mr. Proctor also speaks on a variety of problem-solving and system design topics that can help companies significantly increase the success and profitability of their businesses. If you are interested in having Bill speak at one of your upcoming meetings/events or would like more information on any of the speaking topics, please visit [Speaker Services](#) or you can email [sales@epicentergroup.com](mailto:sales@epicentergroup.com).

Epicenter Development Group is a unique consulting firm that seamlessly integrates the disciplines of Systems Engineering and Organizational Analysis & Development to create practical design solutions to your toughest challenges. It is on the cutting edge of problem-solving solutions and the creator of a unique process called GreenRoom Engineering. This process adds greater value and cost savings for clients as compared to traditional engineering methods.

William Proctor, Epicenter's founder and president, has provided services around the country to more than 100 companies consisting of a variety of organizations; and Epicenter continues to grow as a resource for firms of all sizes.

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