

DIY Brainstorming

How to Generate Big Ideas Anytime,
Anyplace in 60 Minutes



Chic Thompson

author "What a Great Idea!" and "Yes, but..."

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Think back to the last time you were stuck and needed to brainstorm solutions to a challenge. Were you sitting in a classroom or a conference room with your colleagues eager to engage?

Probably not... you were staring at your computer alone with your arms crossed and teeth clenched.

So, I have compiled creative strategies to help you conduct your own **one-person brainstorm** with some divergent thinking techniques to overcome your lack of diverse participants.

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DIYB “Cheat Sheet”



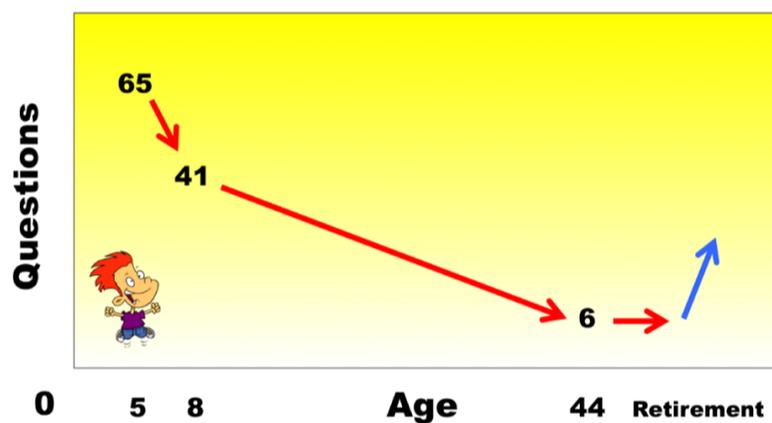
Foreword: The Question is the Answer

"The answer to any problem preexists. We need to ask the right question to reveal the answer."

—Dr. Jonas Salk, inventor of Polio vaccine

Bingo!

We don't find, create, or invent creative solutions—we reveal them by asking questions. Thus, the way to solve problems is to ask more questions. The more questions you ask, the more likely the answers will appear.



The average five-year-old asks 65 questions per day, most of them starting with "why". The average 44-year-old manager only asks six questions per day; most of them starting with "when", "where", or "how much".

The number of questions we ask per day doesn't increase until retirement. Why retirement? Because that's when we start asking, "Where are my keys?" and "Why did I walk into this room?"

Let's face it—in these complex times, our children's iterations of "why" can lead us much more quickly to the root cause of life's challenges than "when," "where," and "how much."



Asking better questions is a process. You start with “what” and then “why” questions before you ever ask “how” questions.

My favorite first questions to ask are:

1. What is the result we want to see, feel and hear?
2. Why do we want to achieve this result?
3. How are we going to achieve this result?

The order of these questions is very important. If you start off asking the how questions before thoroughly defining your challenge with the what and why questions, you’d just come up with solutions in regard to an ill-defined problem.

Hopefully, you are seeing the power of asking great questions, and now it’s time to give you a strategic approach to brainstorming by asking the right questions.

Step I: Define Your Challenge

“If I had an hour to solve a problem, I’d spend 55 minutes defining the problem and 5 minutes thinking about solutions.”

- Dr. Albert Einstein

An effective definition of your challenge addresses only one problem at a time and does not assign a cause or blame for the problem in the definition.

Your definition should identify the “**pain points**” you are trying to solve.



For example:

- Google provided a search engine that allowed people to explore the Internet without knowing the URL of every page.
- Netflix saved people the trouble of going to a video store and worrying about late fees.

Your definition **should not imply a solution.** Definitions are about the “what” and the “why” and not the “how.” Adding an implied solution to your definition can converge your mind too soon and you might miss some divergent inspirations.

To determine the **What**, start with the end in mind. Ask, what is the result that I want to see, feel and hear when my challenge is solved? Be specific with your vision.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



To determine the **Why**, find the urgency to solve your challenge. Ask, why do I want to achieve this result? Be passionate with your vision and describe why you need to overcome the challenge’s “pain points.”

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Additional insights for your definition will come by asking,

what would happen if you do not find a solution to your challenge?

Your definition can be a couple sentences or a few paragraphs. No longer than one page. Then give your definition an “action-driven” title. One short enough to be specific and long enough to force clarity.

Put the title in the form of a motivating question. Here’s a formula that gives me guidance:

How do I (*action*) (*object*) (*qualifier*) (*end result*)?

For example, the problem definition title for the philanthropic side of my business is:

“How do I empower kids to achieve their dreams one idea at a time?”

Step 2. Five Solutions in Five Minutes.

Now it’s time to ask the **How**.

Ask, how am I going to achieve this result? Be bold with your solutions. Take five minutes and brainstorm until you have five possible solutions.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



This rapid-fire brainstorm is a great warm up for your brain and it loosens you up for looking for more possible solutions.

Step 3. Be Curious First... Critical Second

Your creative success will be determined by what you know and by what you can forget. “Unlearning” those grammar school rules we grew up with may be the quickest way to a breakthrough idea.

Here are some “rules of school” that may be holding you back:

1. There is only one right answer.
2. The teacher is always right.
3. The right answer is in the back of the Teacher’s Edition.
4. Don’t pass notes.
5. The answer is not on the ceiling.

In third grade, many of us dreamed of magically finding a copy of the Teacher’s Edition so that we would have all the right answers.



These rules worked well in the industrial age when companies mined the land for their assets. Today, successful organizations mine our minds to extract the precious gems called ideas.

To create an environment for idea harvesting, the rules definitely have changed. They are the exact “opposite” of those from school:

1. Look for second and third right answers.
2. Challenge management and look for answers from all levels.

3. Constantly revise policy manuals.
4. Pass notes, collaborate, and appreciate diversity.
5. The answers still aren't on the ceiling, but if you look with creative eyes, the questions might be.

Einstein was once asked what the difference was between him and the average person. He said that if you asked the average person to find a needle in a haystack, they would stop when they found a needle.



He, on the other hand, would tear through the entire haystack looking for all possible needles. In other words, he was looking for second and third "right" answers.

Einstein handed out his final exam to a second-year physics class and one student raised his hand and said, "This is the same exam you gave us last year." Einstein replied, "You are very observant, but the answers are different this year."

When we are confronted with a problem, we feel strong internal pressure to find a solution. When we are encouraged to find a second solution, the second answer is invariably more creative than the first one.

Leonardo da Vinci believed that the first way he looked at a problem was too biased toward his usual way of seeing things. To break out of your bias, ask "what do I need to be more **open-minded** about to see new possibilities?."

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Be honest with yourself. Are you open to new ideas to solve your challenge or will your first response to a new idea be “It’ll never work,” or “We tried that before,” or “I don’t have the resources.”

When children think up or hear a new idea, their initial thoughts are all about the possibilities... the fun that they could have. But mature, educated minds usually see first what is wrong with a new idea. “Yes, **but** it’s too costly...” goes the voice in their head.

“Yes-butters” are geniuses at devising excuses for inaction. Several studies have shown that up to 83 percent of your self-talk is negative and it drowns out any other conversation.



When you have a negative conversation with yourself, it can cut your functional, or task-related, IQ in half.

Therefore, if you allow yourself to be critical first about new ideas, you are only operating at half your potential . . . **Yikes!**

Here is a list of Killer Phrases I’ve collected from my creativity workshops. The last five are unspoken phrases—many times these are the most deadly.

“Yes, but . . .”

“We tried that before.”

“That’s irrelevant.”

“We haven’t got the manpower.”

“Obviously, you misread my request.”
“Don’t rock the boat!”
“The boss [or the competition] will eat you alive.”
“Don’t waste time thinking.”
“I’m the one who gets paid to think.”
“Great idea, but not for us.”
“It’ll never fly.”
“Don’t be ridiculous.”
“People don’t want change.”
“It’s not in the budget.”
“Put it in writing.”
“It will be more trouble than it’s worth.”
“It isn’t your responsibility.”
“That’s not in your job description.”
“You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.”
“Let’s stick with what works.”
“We’ve done all right so far.”
“The boss will never go for it.”
“It’s too far ahead of the times.”
“What will people say?”
“Get a committee to look into that.”
“If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”
“You’ve got to be kidding.”
“No!”
“We’ve always done it this way.”
“It’s all right in theory, but . . .”



“Be practical!”

“Do you realize the paperwork it will create?”

“Because I said so.”

“I’ll get back to you.”

... silence ...

... laughter ...

... suppressed laughter ...

... condescending grins ...

... dirty looks ...

To function at 100%, identify the negative **“killer phrases”** that can stifle your creativity and your ideas.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.



Now, overcome your killer phrases by creating **“enabling phrases”**. These phrases will turn your creative tension into a jolt of energy to sustain your perseverance in solving your challenge.

Here are some examples of enabling phrases:

Let’s do a prototype that won’t cost much money.

Then I’ll have a competitive advantage.

I’ve got to break it to remove the “pain points”.

Improv genius Drew Carey gives us great advice on how to be curious first rather than critical first. According to Drew, “In improv, it doesn’t matter what the question is, the answer is always “Yes, and . . .”

So, upon hearing a new idea, be “curious first” and let the vision of possibilities dance in your head before you pass judgment.

1. Rather than “Yes, but . . .” say, “Yes, and . . .”
2. Rather than cast blame with “Why did we . . . ?” ask, “How can we . . . ?”
3. Rather than respond with “We tried that before,” focus on what’s different about the idea or the environment this time.



Being curious first allows you to find out what is right with an idea before dissecting its faults or hurdles to overcome.

Step 4. Reframe Your Challenge to Break Old Thought Patterns

“To achieve ‘management innovation’ you need to find analogies from an atypical organization that redefine what’s possible.”

—Gary Hamel

Ask, what is **unique** about your challenge that you have not seen in another situation?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



Identifying the unique features of your challenge can help you see the root cause of the problem and the seed of the solution that you need to grow.

Then ask, what is **similar** to your challenge? What analogy can give you insight and strategies to benchmark?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Finally ask, how would another industry or another country respond to your challenge?

What would Starbucks do?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



What would Apple do?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



What would a NASCAR pit crew do?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



Now apply these insights to your problem definition and list of solution possibilities.

NASCAR meets the ER

Several years ago, I was giving a Grand Rounds talk at St. Barnabas Medical Center in Livingston, New Jersey. The hospital wanted to brainstorm streamlining the operation of their emergency department.

So I posed this reframe: “NASCAR just partnered with your hospital, and the pit crew offered to help run the Emergency Room. How is the pit crew going to change the experience of the emergency room?” The resulting ideas on medical triage were enlightening as hospital staff began to talk about the operating values of the pit crew—safety, speed, simplicity, self-confidence, and shared vision.



Neurobics

I’m also looking for pattern-breaking exercises to keep my brain alive. You could call my workout routine “neurobics”—aerobics for the mind.

Here are seven “neurobic” exercises to keep your brain from getting stuck during your brainstorm.

1. Move your watch to your opposite wrist, one day a week.
2. Listen to a new radio station on the way to work.

3. Watch a different newscast on TV.
4. Sit in a different seat at meetings or at the dining table.
5. Mix and match your clothing combinations.
6. Drive to and from work via a different route.
7. Use your opposite hand to control your mouse.

These exercises will at first make your brain feel distinctly uncomfortable—and that’s not a bad thing. You will force the non-dominant side of your brain to do things it normally doesn’t do and prompt your entire mind to look at things in different, creative ways. Now apply pattern-breaking to the way you look at your challenge.

Step 5. See Your Blind Spots by Visualizing the Opposite

“The sun rises, the sun sets. Everything goes to its opposite. Look at your problem backwards, forwards and upside down.”

—Tao Te Ching

Big. Little. Up. Down. The world is full of opposites. Without opposites, any attribute, concept, or idea is meaningless. We need to understand what something isn’t to truly understand what it is. Remember the HBO commercial, “it’s not TV, it’s HBO.”

We need to find out how something doesn’t work to help us grasp how it does work. It’s like how you learned to use your new



computer. Did you read the instruction manual? Not likely. You probably just turned it on and learned by trial and error.

When primitive man discovered he could raise a heavy object by pushing down on the other end of a long piece of wood, he was using opposite thinking.

When Aboriginal tribesmen invented the boomerang—a thrown weapon that, if it missed its prey, would come back to the thrower's hand—they were using opposite thinking.



When Watson and Crick discovered that DNA consists of two identical strands of molecules connected together in opposing spirals, they were using opposite thinking.

Great thinkers and achievers have always been aware of the interplay of opposites. They realize that new ideas don't travel in straight lines.

According to physicist Niels Bohr, geniuses mentally reverse their thinking by asking the simple but powerful question, "What would we **never** do?" Then they look at the "nevers" to see if they can turn them into possibilities.

Robin Chase used this opposite strategy when he created Zipcar to compete against Hertz. Rather than rent cars at airport terminals, Zipcar rented on the streets of major cities. Rather than rent by the day, Zipcar rented by the hour. Thinking in opposites, Zipcar transformed the stagnant rental car business.

Jim Collins points out in *Good to Great* that, great companies did not just focus on what to do to become great; they focused equally on what not to do and what to stop doing."

Now it's time to be crazy and have some fun brainstorming solutions you would never suggest as possibilities.

Ask, what would I **never** do?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



Then ask, what if I actually did this "**never**" solution? What's right about this crazy solution?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Finally ask, what's the exact **opposite** of the way others are solving your challenge today?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What if you actually did this **opposite** solution? Could there be a breakthrough idea here? If so, flip an opposite into an opportunity.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



For me, the magic of opposite thinking is that, at first, an opposite idea might sound absurd, contradictory, or illogical.

Yet upon review, the idea can turn out to be brilliant, true, and logical. It can open up possibilities, break through mental blocks, and pull the rug out from under false assumptions.

Step 6. Evaluate Your Ideas

"Ideas are the currency of your future."

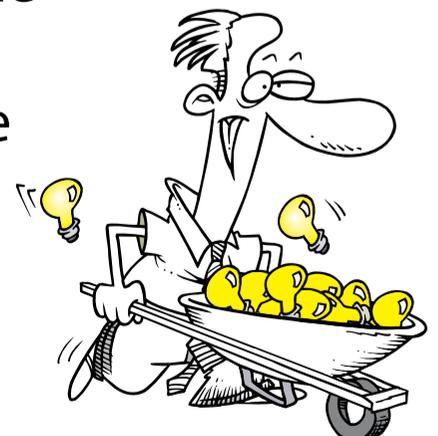
—Kevin Roberts, CEO Saatchi & Saatchi

Because ideas are cumulative in nature—one leading naturally to another—they encourage us to think in terms of abundance rather than scarcity.

For example, if you exchange an idea with an associate at lunch, you both walk away with two ideas. If instead you just exchanged \$1 bills at lunch, you'd both walk away with \$1.

Now that you know new ways to develop ideas, ideas will begin to come more easily and more spontaneously. Wonderful. Now what will you do with them? And what ideas will you have to leave behind? No one has enough time to chase every single idea out there. If ideas are truly currency, then they have a denomination associated with them.

Your new challenge is to learn how to evaluate the quality of the many ideas you have. We need to think like venture capitalists, who don't throw the same amount of money and time at each idea. Instead, they want to understand the true value of what they're investing in and what yields they can expect in return.



What a Great Idea!

Everybody knows what a great idea is. A great idea is the one that worked!

Everybody can look at this great idea and say, "What a great idea!" Or they'll say, "Look at how simple that is!" Or, more likely, they'll say, "Why didn't I think of that?" Of course, they are correct in their assessment of greatness.



They have the advantage of looking at an idea after someone evaluated it and determined that it was indeed a great idea, after someone nurtured it, after someone decided to run with it, after some people stuck their necks out, after the marketplace or organization or bosses or public opinion indeed got together, waved their hands in unison, and wildly agreed: "This is a great idea. We'll buy it!"

You, the DIY brainstormer, however, don't have this advantage of 20/20 hindsight. You've just come up with an idea. It sounds good. You like its approach, uniqueness and immediately-apparent benefits.

But is the idea really good? You need to avoid the "Focus Group of One" trap: it's a great idea, simply because I'd buy it.

I want to give you some quick approaches to evaluation so that you can obtain an initial "feel" concerning an idea's relative merits.

Your Gut Check

Einstein, for example, sensed that he was on the right track when he felt a tingling at the tips of his fingers.

A survey of top executives revealed other physical manifestations of the gut reaction:

1. A growing excitement in the pit of the stomach.
2. A feeling of total harmony.
3. A total sense of commitment.
4. A burst of enthusiasm and energy.

Sigmund Freud came up with a unique way to test out his gut feeling on a problem. He would flip a coin. First he would assign heads and tails to a yes/no decision.

Then he'd flip. If the coin said yes and his gut said, "Let's go two out of three. I'm not comfortable with that decision!" then his intuitive reaction had just revealed itself.



The Blink Response

In the best-seller *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking*, author Malcolm Gladwell explores decisions we make in the blink of an eye. Gladwell believes that great decision makers aren't those who just collect the most information or spend the most time deliberating, but those who have developed the ability to instantly filter relevant from irrelevant information.

The term "blink response" is now heard in meeting rooms around the world to describe our gut reaction based on the brain's instant separation of the few facts that matter from the overwhelming piles of possibilities.

To improve and trust my blink response, I took a class in

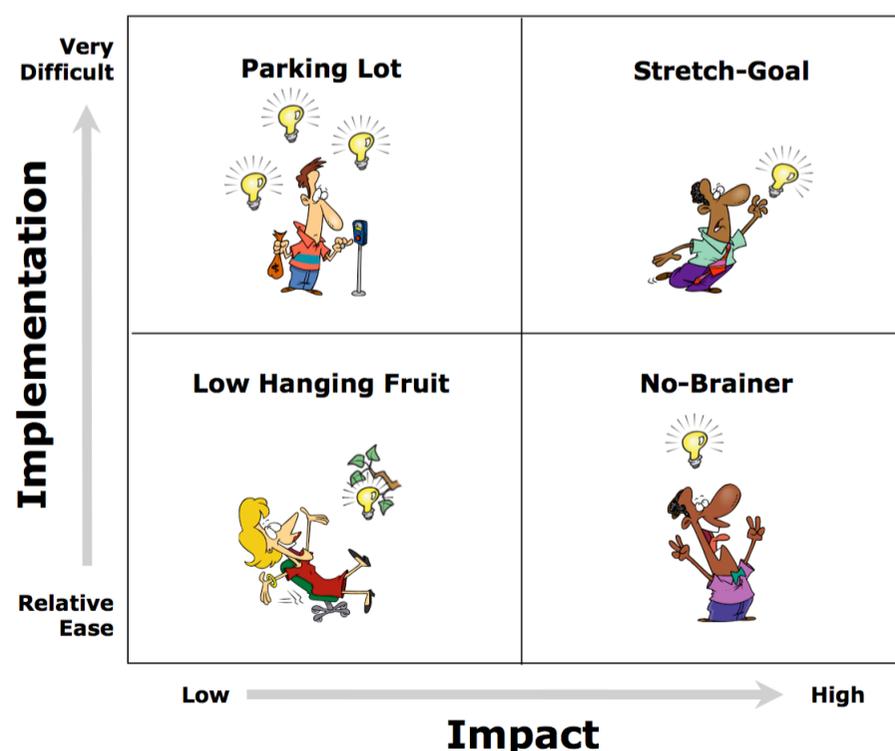
improvisational theater at the world-renowned Banff Centre in Canada. Improv requires making very sophisticated decisions on the spur of the moment, without any script. What is so terrifying about improv is that it appears to be utterly random. You just get up onstage and make everything up.

But improv isn't as haphazard as it looks; in fact, it's a much rehearsed art form governed by a series of rules. My favorite rule is that to continue the dialogue, the response to any question is "Yes, and . . ."

When you need to stop the scene, your response is "Yes, but . . .," followed by an excuse for abruptly ending the dialogue. This relates to the strategies we discussed earlier for defusing Killer Phrases.

The Idea Bucket

The first thing I do with my ideas is put them in an Idea Bucket. The bucket relates the impact the idea will have to the difficulty of implementation. I love all four quadrants for different reasons.



The “low hanging fruit” bucket gives me some easy wins and some execution confidence. The “no-brainer” bucket requires more effort but it’s so worth it.

The “parking lot” is my idea file cabinet. I put the ideas away and look at them periodically to see if they will give me inspiration in solving another challenge.

The “stretch-goal” bucket is the most challenging and the most rewarding to accomplish because successful implementation takes your skillset to the next level.

The Evaluation Form

Most evaluation forms ask for positives and negatives and force you to “weigh” these factors. Then you make some final tally and come up with a score, perhaps on a scale of one to ten, so that you can look at your idea and call it an “eight.”

Some standard evaluation forms, with their emphasis on negatives, might force you to fling a host of Killer Phrases at yourself, killing off your idea before it has any chance of proving its worth.

Also, the traditional forms tend to look at ideas from only two perspectives: goodness and badness, positives and negatives. The proverbial thumb points only up or down.

Any “in-betweenness” shows up only in flat, or average, scores—say, a five on a scale of one to ten.

But in-betweenness might be the attractiveness or strength of an idea. This in-betweenness I like to call the “interest factor.”

For example, perhaps you think an idea is a bad one or a so-so one when evaluating it by your articulated standards.



But maybe it has an “interesting” attribute. Maybe there’s something about it that is fresh or “edgy,” or that grabs you even if it doesn’t seem quite feasible in its current incarnation.

This attribute, this “interest factor,” might prompt you to sit on the idea for a few days, to let it simmer, rather than dismiss it outright. This in-betweenness might be the distinguishing characteristic of a truly great idea. Yet many evaluation forms are blind to this potential.

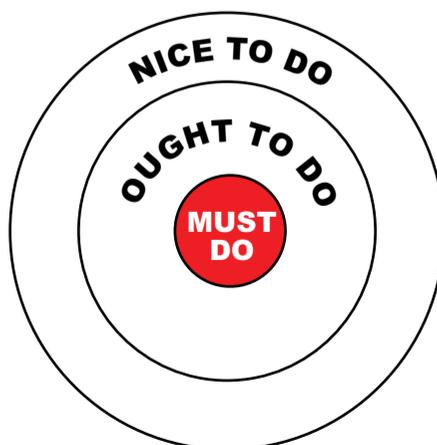
To cure what I perceive to be a defect in traditional evaluation, just add an interesting column to your typical evaluation chart.

| Positive | Interesting | Negative |
|----------|-------------|----------|
| 1. | 1. | 1. |
| 2. | 2. | 2. |
| 3. | 3. | 3. |

The Bull’s Eye

Take your solutions and put them on the wall or lay them out on a table. Rearrange them, combine them and add to them. Be careful not to group ideas that, when combined, hide the unique value of the individual solutions.

Now create a bull’s-eye diagram with “Must Do” at the center,



“Ought to Do” on the next ring and “Nice to Do” as the outer ring.

Then, sort your solutions into the three rings. The “Nice to do” ring describes things that are important, yet, that have a lower impact on the outcomes you want to achieve. The “Ought to do” ring is for items of higher impact and might involve pressure from peers and society.

The all-important “Must do” bull’s-eye is the place that deserves your attention even when your plate is overflowing with activities and responsibilities.

The Vital/Fatal Ratio

This quick ratio will give you an excellent snapshot of the risks associated with your idea. I usually assign numbers 1-5 to the boxes with 5 being the highest.

As a rule of thumb, I like to see a 2:1 Vital/Fatal ratio before taking an idea to the next phase of development. However, this is creativity and rules are meant to be broken—especially if I see a very high vital score.

| | | Vital/Fatal Ratio | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|----|
|  | Available Resources | 4 | 20 |
| | Achievability | 4 | |
| | Mission Consistency | 5 | |
| | Organization Commitment | 3 | |
| | Return on Investment | 4 | |
|  | Legal Liability | 4 | 12 |
| | Negative Media Response | 3 | |
| | Too Costly | 2 | |
| | Technical Complexity | 1 | |
| | Bad Timing | 2 | |

Step 7. Renovate While You Innovate

As you are creating your solutions to implement, it is vital that you identify unsuccessful or inhibiting resources and policies to abandon that will allow your ideas to be successful.

Two questions to ask are:

What should I **start** doing to allow my ideas to be successful?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What should I **stop** doing to allow my ideas to be successful?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

The energy released from abandoning unsuccessful policies will give you the time to implement your solutions.



Step 8. Sell Your Ideas with Passion

“All things are created twice. There’s a mental or first creation, and a physical or second creation of all things.”

—Stephen Covey

So you’ve got great ideas. Now it’s time to figure out how to convince others that the ideas are indeed great and worthy of

their investment of time, money, and/or other resources.

To do that, to sell your ideas to others, you must first analyze their receptiveness to new ideas. Are they eager for the new and the different? Or do they tend to cling to the old ways of doing things?

I believe that you can think about the openness to new ideas by considering the following formula:

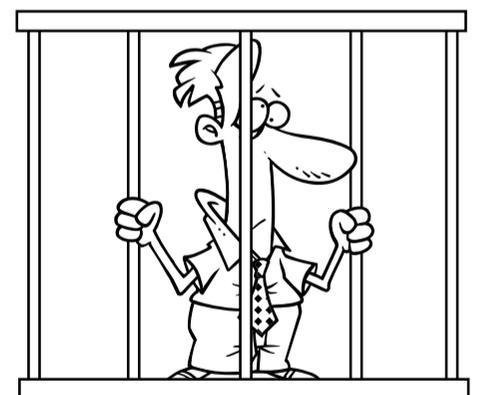
$$\text{Openness} = \frac{\# \text{ Ideas} \times (\# \text{ Implemented} + \text{Fast Failures}) \times \text{Shared Vision}}{\text{Penalty for Failure}}$$

Penalty for Failure

If you remember your high school algebra, you will see from the equation above that you can increase the degree of openness by increasing the fraction's numerator or by decreasing the denominator.

Thus, to increase openness, you should seek to increase the quantity of ideas generated, increase the fast failures, and create a common and agreed on vision. Simultaneously, to decrease the denominator (thereby increasing openness) you should seek to reduce the penalty for failure.

The cardinal rule of thumb for fostering openness to new: make sure that the penalty for failure is not greater than the penalty for doing nothing.



When Bill Gore, inventor of Gore-Tex[®], explained to me that he wanted a new use for Gore-Tex[®] every week, he also set the guidelines for risk taking. He would say, "You can try anything, as long as it's above the waterline. If you want to drill holes below the waterline, you need to check with me."

Selling “In”

Before you can possibly convince anyone else of the merits of your great idea, you must first sell yourself. You must live your idea, follow it, use it, show it off to others—well before you begin to hype it inside and outside the organization.

You must also be prepared to fall out of love with it. Perhaps your idea has already been tried and improved on by someone else. If so, you should be ready to learn from the results of that venture and adapt.

Overall, you should be aware that idea generators are notoriously optimistic. They are often blinded by their love for their own ideas and must learn to wake up to reality.

Selling “Up”

In all organizations, there is a need to sell up. But how far up must you go? As a rule, you should try to sell two levels above yourself, that is, to your boss' boss. If you're the director of purchasing, then your boss might be the vice president for manufacturing. Your boss' boss? The chief executive officer. If you own your own business, then your boss is your customer. Two levels up is the bank.



I am not suggesting that you do an end run around your boss. Instead, I'm talking about perspective—the perspective of your boss's boss. Try to imagine how your boss's boss will react to your proposal. Thinking in this way will help you create a proposal that will “fly” up your organization.

Selling “Down”

Selling down requires selling two levels below your position.

For once you've given your idea wings, it must be supported from below. Ideas foisted on workers from management up above often provoke cynicism because people below can't quite see your vision (or nobody has bothered to make that vision clear to them).

Selling “Out”

Some ideas are strictly internal ones that will never see the light of day outside the organization. Indeed, when it comes to inventions, trade secrets, or patents, the objective is not to sell outward but to keep such matters strictly confidential until the organization is ready to market them.

Other ideas, of course, must be sold outside the organization. To make your selling efforts truly creative, be different. And being different requires you to . . . do what everybody else doesn't.

For example, to launch an upscale shopping mall along the river in New York City, you would hold a party, of course. And who does everybody else invite to the party? Why, all the bigwigs, all the politicians, all the VIPs.

And what did a truly creative development company do when it launched a new, upscale shopping mall along the river in New York City?

The company threw a party and invited thousands of New York cabbies and their spouses. Can you imagine the ensuing free publicity to thousands of tourists asking the cabbies about new and different places to visit in the Big Apple?



Your Selling Pre-Work

Here are your action steps necessary before you start selling your great idea.

What actions must you take to sell **yourself** on this idea?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What actions must you take to sell this idea to those two levels **above you**?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What actions must you take to sell this idea to those two levels **below you**?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What actions must you take to sell this idea to those **outside** your organization?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Creating Your Sales Pitch

Many people only think of one way to present their solution. A PowerPoint presentation with too many slides, too many words and unreadable charts.

To overcome this tendency, create at least two different presentations for your favorite idea and see what you can learn from the different approaches.

Here are some suggested divergent presentation formats that will generate new insight. Combine the insight from both presentations and you'll have a winning formula.

The **1-Minute Elevator Speech** to a hurried potential customer.

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The **15-Minute Stadium Speech** to 10,000 cheering fans.



The elevator speech needs to come across as a spontaneous conversation when, in reality, it's a well-rehearsed sales pitch to get the listener to want more information.

Here are a few guidelines:

1. Personalize the listener's problem as a question, and your idea as the answer.
2. Practice in front of a mirror until it becomes a natural conversation.
3. When you part, hand him or her your contact information.

The stadium pitch is the elevator pitch on steroids and you have 10 minutes to tell your story. You can use the “Jumbotron,” cheerleaders and even fireworks.

The message, though, is the same. You are answering every attendee’s question of “What can your idea do for me?”

Here’s another set of divergent presentation formats.

The **Napkin Pitch**: it’s just what you can fit on the napkin and the story you tell.

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The **Billboard Pitch**: sell your idea on a highway billboard.



When creating your napkin and billboard, ask:

What’s your headline?

What’s your visual?

What’s your call to action?

Remember, people are driving 65 mph past your billboard, so get your message across in the blink of an eye.

Step 9. Smile and Change Your World

We're all different in so many ways: language, education, culture and customs. But the one thing we do the same the world over is smile. Smiling does more for us than just push our cheeks out and show our teeth.

A smile lifts our spirits.

A smile introduces us to the love of our life.

A smile builds our careers.

A smile raises happy, secure children.

A smile strips anger of its power.

A smile integrates both hemispheres of our brain, which, in turn, increases our receptivity to new ideas.



Now that you know the power of the smile, are you:

Smiling while talking about your idea to others?

Smiling when talking on a phone call and the other person can't see you and during video-conference calls?

Smiling in your social network headshots?

The next time you are stuck for an idea, try unfolding your arms and turning your serious face into a smiling face.

Hold your smile for 10 seconds and then relax. Smile again... hold... relax.

You'll be amazed at how much more receptive conscious smiling makes you to the ideas of others and to your own musings.

Step 10. Achieve Immortality

Plato said that, as humans, we all strive for immortality. He showed us three ways.

First, by having children.

Second, by planting trees.

And third, by creating an idea and making it happen.

Purposeful creativity and big ideas seem to come when we are faced with a challenge that causes us to question deeply, act deeply, and most of all, love deeply.

The spark that sustains our creativity could simply be called love. Creative people fall in love with and are transported by the medium in which they live.



I believe that the great thinkers, inventors, and artists of this world are really those who love what they're doing, know what they're doing, and do it faithfully. Then a confidence emerges that stretches their limits and with their true passion comes the self-discipline to achieve greatness.

"Someday, after we have mastered the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love. Then for the second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire."

— Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Then go forth, implement and become immortal. And, along the way, pass notes, write on walls and stare at ceilings.

Afterword: How Not to Kill Your Idea!



Since you know by now how much I like to think in opposites. This technique can also be just as effective in selling your idea!

Here's my list of the top ten ways to kill your idea:

1. Expect to receive all the credit.
2. Never look for a second right answer.
3. Drag your feet; lack a sense of commitment.
4. Run it through a committee.
5. Wait for market surveys and full market analysis.
6. Hold lengthy meetings to explore its merit.
7. Boost cost estimates, just to be safe.
8. Set unrealistic deadlines.
9. Don't get views from other stakeholders.
10. Make sure it's the only idea you ever have.

To be successful, just do the **opposite!**

Your DIYB “Cheat Sheet”

Here are the questions that we explored throughout the **DIY Brainstorm**. Please let me know about additional questions that helped you define and brainstorm your ideas.



What is the result you want to see, feel and hear?

Why do you want to achieve this result?

What's are the “pain points” you are overcoming?

How are you going to achieve this result?

What do you have to be more open-minded about to see possibilities?

What are the killer phrases that could kill your idea?

What are the enabling phrases that will help you persevere?

What's unique about your idea?

What is it similar to?

What would Apple, NASCAR or Starbucks do?

What would you never do?

What's right about the never?

What's an opposite strategy to solve your challenge?

What's (+) (-) and "interesting" about your idea?

What actions must you take to sell yourself
on this idea?

What actions must you take to sell this idea to those
two levels above you?

What actions must you take to sell this idea to those
two levels below you?

What actions must you take to sell this idea to those
outside your organization?

What do you need to start/stop doing to allow your
idea to be successful?

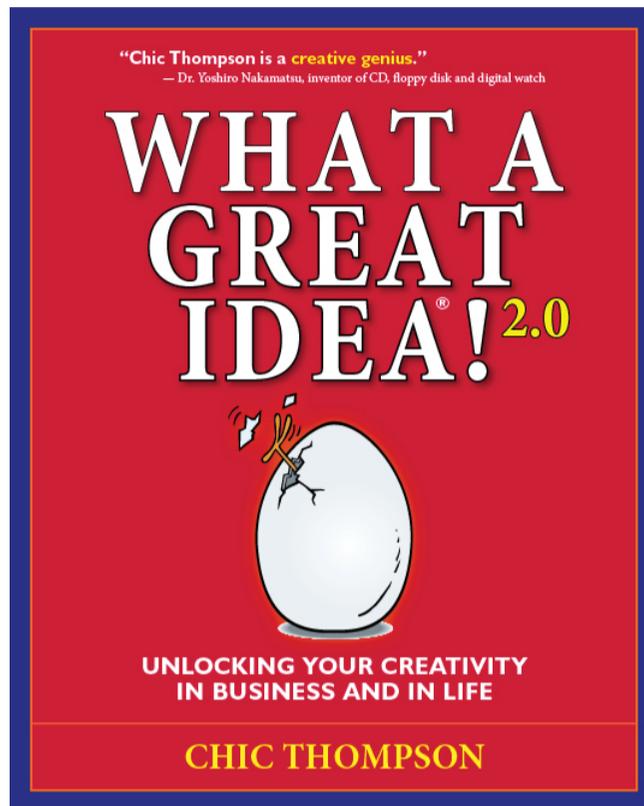
What are your elevator and stadium speeches?

What are your napkin and billboard pitches?

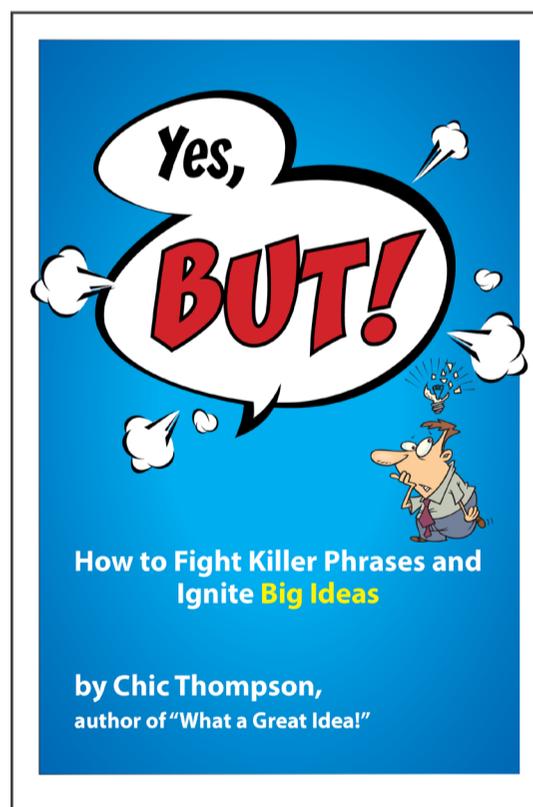
Are you smiling?



Other Books by Chic Thompson



What a Great Idea! 2.0



Yes, BUT!



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