

IT'S TIME FOR PLAN "B" BRAINSTORMING

Playing the Brain Game for Gain

by Craig Harrison

Our workgroup was in the middle of a spirited brainstorming session — a free form session where creativity is encouraged, judgment is suspended, and the best ideas often come after ten or more minutes. The ideas were flying fast and furious, as they should, when the group gets momentum. The energy was intoxicating. And, in a fit of inspiration, one employee suggested, "Why don't we reverse the order of the deliverables!?"

While nine other people energetically accepted this offer as worthy of inclusion on their flip chart of ideas, their manager scowled "That will never work!"

Thus ended a productive brainstorming session. Sadly, the manager was unclear on the concept at play. She replaced a brainstorm with a brain fart and stunk up the entire process.

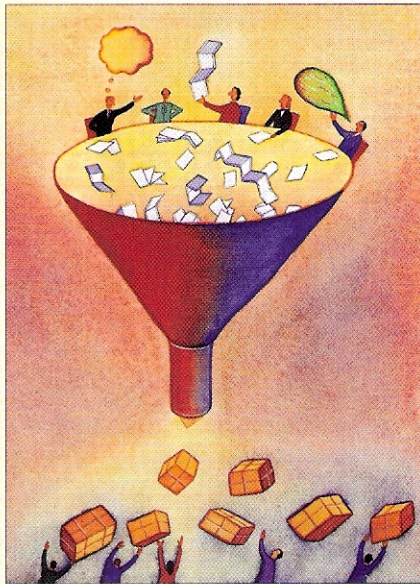
A Different Kind of Collaboration

Brainstorming is a special type of meeting, with its own ground rules, tempo and ethos. It's also an invaluable tool for idea generation, problem solving, innovation, teambuilding and creativity. Whether you are tasked with creating new sales contests, new strategic initiatives or simply trying to break the doldrums of your day-to-day routines, brainstorming carries the day.

Rules That Rock!

By definition, brainstorming is unlike your typical meetings. Its unbounded by traditional rules where pre-determined people speak on pre-determined subjects for prescribed times. Like a jam session of Jazz musicians, all you need to do is begin recording and let the sounds begin. Remember, the key is to record it all. Later you can go back and edit out that which might not be considered beautiful music.

In Brainstorming sessions everyone is equal, all ideas are worthy of consideration, all judgment is suspended and a person's rank or status is irrelevant. The



goal is to fill the air with ideas, depart from conventional thinking, and allow the smorgasbord of strategies, ideas, inspirations and epiphanies to cross-pollinate each other. Think of brainstorming meetings as magnificent melting pots, a veritable giant stew bowl where bouillabaisse bubbles and bursts, unleashing new, exciting and innovative initiatives. Consider a skilled facilitator for best results, though this isn't a requirement.

The B-List: Preparing For Your Meeting

The following recommendations will insure a successful session, whether it's a stand-alone brainstorm or part of a larger meeting or event:

- Adorn your environment with art, toys, games, crayons, colored markers or other stimuli to get the juices flowing and invite fun, free thinking and playfulness.
- Consider special written invitations in advance to set the tone, expectations and goals for the session.

- Create a mental and/or physical ice breaker to loosen everyone up.
- Consider lava lamps, beanbag chairs and even bubble-gum and bubble makers to loosen everyone up.
- Encourage participation by all.
- Language is key. Use sentences such as "What if we...?", "How about...", "Let's try...", or "Suppose we..."
- Check your skepticism, negativity and ego at the door. It's not about who's ideas are embraced. All ideas should be received, for the benefit of the group your mission.
- Employ the "Yes, AND..." approach instead of a "Yes, BUT..." stance in response to others' ideas.
- Remind people to suspend judgement throughout the session.
- Assign a scribe or tape record the meeting.
- Allow enough time for people to loosen up. Often the best ideas occur once the group has gotten over any self-consciousness and gathered momentum.
- Have fun!

Remember, like mastermind groups, brainstorming sessions rely on the reality that when multiple brainpower is applied the results are greater than the sum of their parts. You will generate great results from the blend of talent, experience, ideas and perspectives that naturally result from giving everyone equal footing and freeing them of the usual restrictions of time, structure and rules.

By the way, what if...? ■

San Francisco Bay Area-based Professional speaker Craig Harrison founded Expressions of Excellence™ to provide sales and service solutions through speaking. For information on keynotes, training, coaching, curriculum for licensing and more, call (888) 450-0664 or visit www.ExpressionsOfExcellence.com or E-mail excellence@craigsspeaks.com for inquiries.





How to Design and Deliver GREAT Customer Experiences (CX)



CUSTOMER SERVICE IS DEAD! (RIP)

Delivering customer *service* isn't good enough.

In today's experience economy, your customers, clients and constituents crave memorable **CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES (CX)**!

Are you delivering memorable...or mundane experiences? Your competitors get it, and *give* it! If you aren't, you're just "renting" your customers.

Changing Expectations

Regardless of your industry, your customers' expectations are being raised by leaders in hospitality, travel, healthcare, entertainment and high-tech. They are already delivering great **CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES**. You know them by reputation: Disney, Zappos, IDEO, Harley-Davidson, Nordstrom, Starbucks, Square and Paypal, among others. Now your customers know them too and the great experiences they create for customers.

It's time you analyze your operation from your customers' point of view. What's their user experience? Is it instinctive? Efficient? Pleasing? Fun? Or is it frustrating, inefficient or unnecessarily complicated?

Success By Design

Your goal: to create great customer experiences... using Design Thinking as popularized by IDEO and Stanford's d.school institute of design. Once you understand *touch points*, create *journey maps* of your customers' experiences, employ empathy and walk a mile in your customers' shoes you can conceive of fresher, more powerful ways to create great customer experiences. That builds loyalty, leads to repeat business, referrals and great word of mouth marketing.

Learning Objectives

- ▶ Understand the customer experience revolution and how it applies to your enterprise
- ▶ Create powerful touch points that reinforce your organization's values, bringing smiles to your clients
- ▶ Audit your customer experience through creation of journey maps to identify new ways to WOW and NOW your customers.
- ▶ Listen with empathy to learn valuable insights from your customers to improve your alignment to their needs, creating customers for life.

How The Presentation Is Delivered

Videos, slides, stories and case studies from CX leaders will inspire you. Design thinking concepts help you conceive of new and natural ways to create and enhance CX for your clientele.

About Your Presenter

CRAIG HARRISON is past president of the INTERNATIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE ASSOCIATION of San Francisco-Silicon Valley, and the NATIONAL SPEAKERS ASSOCIATION's northern Calif. chapter.

His clients include UNITED AIRLINES, HILTON HOTELS, US ARMY, PFIZER, HLC HOME LOANS CANADA (CIBC), CITY OF SAN JOSE, THE SALVATION ARMY, NOLO.COM, SF-CVB and HITACHI AMERICA. His articles have appeared in *Support World*, *Selling Power* and *Executive Excellence*, and his book *Stellar Service!* and popular tips booklets help front-line employees, supervisors and leaders serve with distinction.

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