

Thunder-thinking...when lightning strikes

"The lightning spark of thought generation in the solitary mind awakens its likeness in another mind," according to Thomas Carlyle

by Bob 'Idea Man' Hooey

Is there a way to increase my productivity and leverage my creativity? Is it true that two minds are better than one? Are there advantages to working with others to brainstorm my ideas, problems, and dreams?

Thunder-thinking occurs when you unleash your mind's creative power and is fully experienced when the lightning of a new idea strikes. But can this creative power be controlled or directed?

From my personal and business experience, I've found that unleashing the creative power of several minds on a single issue can work miracles. There are many benefits to teaming up for creative problem solving. It can be a lot of fun and bring people closer together, providing a sense of belonging or bonding that enhances relationships and creativity. Morale can be enhanced when people are solicited for their input and ideas. A larger amount of good ideas, better ideas, will result if the thunder thinking process is properly utilized. Communication is often improved.

Whenever you have more than two individuals involved, team creativity or joint idea-creation can successfully be used in solving problems for most situations in family, small business, church groups or community associations.

Webster's defines 'brainstorming' as a group problem-solving technique that involves the spontaneous contribution of ideas from all members of the group." Alex Osborn, respected author of "Applied Imagination", popularized the technique in the late 1930s. Actually, the idea is older than that I've been told that Hindu teachers in India practiced it over 400 years ago. It works as a part of the creative problem-solving process, occurring during the idea generation or illumination phase. Thunder Thinking more accurately focuses this power for productive tapping into your creative genius.

The creative problem-solving guide is a tri-phase process involving fact finding, i.e. gathering information, doing research and defining the problem. This is followed by the idea generation phase, as mentioned already. The final stage or phase, is the solution selection, i.e. refining, verification of ideas and selection of the best possible alternative idea or combination of ideas.

Keep in mind that ideas generated during a thunder thinking session need to be evaluated and processed to be productive in their application. **Thunder-thinking**, as a creative process, provides its greatest benefit in the generation of good ideas, in contrast to our experience in a typical meeting, and in less time too!

The typical committee is not a breeding ground for creativity, with participants continually getting bogged down in minutia or in defending their own agenda or viewpoints. I remember a quote that sums it up, "God so loved the world that he didn't send a committee." This is not to down play the valid contribution of committees, but to emphasize their limitations and difference in roles.

Are there any rules I should be aware of, you ask? Yes! Several, that will assist in effective thunder thinking.

1. **Criticism and judgment are suspended** ... virtually forbidden. Only by suspending judgment do we unleash the power of our individual minds and tap into the real underlying power of SYNERGY. Evaluate later.

2. **Free thinking or wheeling is essential.** No idea is too wild, too crazy, too farfetched when it comes to attacking the matter at hand. Evaluate later.

3. **Shoot for quantity!** Make it your goal to throw out as many ideas as possible. The greater number generated the greater chance of discovering a useful idea.

4. **Work to combine and build on ideas, to improve on them, to add to them,** as they are mentioned. Encourage participants to value add or layer on the ideas of others as they seek to add new ones of their own. Work each idea and adaptation until it reaches a natural pause and then move on to the next one.

In addition, these following guidelines will help.

1. **Make the problem to be brainstormed as specific as possible,** by breaking it down into its essential components. Focus each participant's energies on a single topic. Accurate problem definition will assist in its solution being generated.

2. **Use thunder-thinking for idea finding decisions.** Judgment style decisions work better with a balance sheet or pro vs. con approach.

3. Once you've defined the problem to be brainstormed, **share the relevant background and parameters with all participants.**

4. Start each session with a **review and a commitment by all parties to follow the basic rules and guidelines.**

5. **Work to side step a "perfectionistic" atmosphere** ... keep it informal and fun. A spirit of friendly competition could be helpful. Encourage ideas that are stimulated by previous ideas...get a chain reaction happening ...feed or bounce off each other's creativity and ingenuity.

I find it helpful to appoint one non-participant to act as a recorder, to ensure ideas are captured for future evaluation. This will also ensure participants are not bogged down in the recording process. Focus your energies instead on the creative process.

Avoid these common thunder-thinking blockers, i.e. phrases that kill the creative process and limit open discussion and idea generation. Be wary if you start hearing them from people on your team, family or work associates!

1. That is ridiculous.
2. You should have passed on that one.
3. We don't have the time.
4. Pull the other one, it laughs.
5. We did all right without it before.

6. That's not included in our responsibility.
7. Let's form a committee. (My favorite!)
8. What will the union (or...) say?
9. Why change it when it's still working?
10. It's not in the budget,
11. You can't teach an old dog new tricks
12. That's not practical.
13. That's their problem, not ours.
14. Let's get back to reality.
15. Has anyone else tried it before?
16. We've tried that before.
17. Senior management (-) won't agree to it.
18. This will cost too much!
19. We've never done that before.
20. We're not ready for that.

Add your own. Make sure you don't fall into these traps. Too often, we slip into negative thinking during a positive - creative period.

Why does it work? I would think it's essential success is with the chain reaction process. Idea stimulation in the host brain as well as the participant's brains. The associative power of ideas generates a two-way current. When you offer up a new idea, your own imagination - along with everyone else's - is stimulated.

People tend to generate more ideas with other people, in social settings, than they do individually. Associative idea generation tests have indicated an production increase of over 65% in social sessions, than in solo efforts.

Competition can work wonders, with mental output increases by up to 50%.

The major difference in the concept of **thunder-thinking** is its acceptance of ALL ideas. This rules out the possibility of any premature criticism or judgment stifling the creative problem-solving process. Thunder -thinking remains effective when all participants follow the basic rules and guidelines.

Can I hold thunder-thinking or creative problem-solving sessions with only two people? Yes, although the more the merrier. Ideally 5-10 people can become an idea generation machine. It can, however, be done with as few as two people.

"The lightning spark of thought generation in the solitary mind awakens its likeness in another mind," according to Thomas Carlyle. A good partner can stimulate effort in addition to increased associative powers.

There are a few guidelines to keep in mind, which apply to two person creative teams as well as larger thunder thinking groups.

1. Ensure there is an incentive for each party. Work to see that values and paybacks are equitable or compatible for each of you.

2. Select a specific place and scheduled time to think. Allow time for each of you to rethink the problem. Allow the information to incubate in your subconscious brain prior to each meeting.

3. Get together, as planned, to thunder-think the problem. Try to keep it fun and informal... bounce ideas off each other. Keep the atmosphere informal and accepting to ensure the idea flow continues. Consider each idea generated. Go for quantity and record them for future evaluation and decision. I've used a tape recorder to make sure I didn't miss any good ones.

4. Take a break ... think alone. Review all your joint ideas to date. Do additional research and formulate your ideas.

5. Get back together, review ideas and generate new ones. Start choosing alternatives found satisfactory to both parties.

This is where your judgment, preferences and personal tastes come into play. This will often result in at least one workable idea.

Remember not to argue! This is the deathblow to the power of creative problem solving. Too many potentially good ideas die on the drawing boards or in the embryonic phase if argumentative atmospheres emerge. It's not about right and wrong ... it is about better solutions.

Intelligent discussion is great! Argument is a dream killer and should be avoided at all costs. As phrased by Robert Quillen, "Discussion is an exchange of knowledge, argument is an exchange of ignorance." We want to work with each other to achieve feats not grasped alone. This goal should allow us to supersede our individual egos, to reach better results in our lives.

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