

A person wearing a yellow shirt is seated at a desk, working on a computer. The computer monitor displays a video conference with several participants. On the desk, there is a black keyboard and a mouse. A small potted plant in a blue pot is visible on the left side of the desk. The background is slightly blurred, showing a home office environment.

# ExperiencePoint®

# Brainstorm Toolkit

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# Brainstorm

Colorful post-its. Wacky visuals. Funky rooms. What technique of innovation is better known than brainstorming? What word solicits more eyerolls in the real world?

Brainstorms are frequently unproductive. There are two main reasons why, and they're related:

- People evaluate others' ideas ("Neat, so how much would that cost?").
- People evaluate their own ideas before they've even shared them. They censor out the most unusual ones for fear of being judged as silly or dumb.

Analysis and evaluation are critical skills. We're rewarded for quickly evaluating situations, diagnosing errors, and finding practical solutions in nearly every aspect of our lives. Rightly so.

*Brainstorming is harder than it looks because it requires us to temporarily suspend these instincts.*

The purpose of a brainstorm is to come up with as *many different options* as possible to delight our users. The greater the number and variety of options, the higher the odds of a valuable idea.

A properly run group brainstorm is your most useful tool to generate game changing ideas. It requires skill and preparation to be effective. Here's what we think are the most impactful steps you can take to make your next brainstorm as productive as it can be.



## WHEN

*When you need unique ideas.*

*Most effective when focused on a meaningful HMW and followed by prototyping and experimentation with the most promising ideas.*

## HOW

*Post-its & Sharpies.*

*30 min (including quick prototyping).*

*A flipchart or whiteboard to storyboard promising ideas.*

# Brainstorm

## **Assemble 6-8 people.**

Assemble a handful of people with diverse but relevant backgrounds and expertise. Book 30 minutes. *(Eg: if you're trying to improve financial reporting, bring an analyst who provides numbers, an executive who makes decisions based on the report, a graphic designer, and a couple of people who've just been productive in past brainstorming sessions)*

## **Share a well crafted HMW challenge.**

Share a well crafted HMW challenge with the group in advance (see our previous tools).

## **Model the behavior you want to see.**

The easiest way to do this is to kick things off with a video of a great brainstorm. Then discuss, "what were some of the behaviors you observed that made this session so effective?" [This video](#) is our favorite.

Set ground rules. There are many, enough to overwhelm. Here's what we think needs most emphasis:

- Withhold judgement - this includes evaluating questions like "how much would that cost?" and helps us...
- Encourage wild ideas - even if we don't end up using them, they stretch the group's imagination

## **Facilitate!**

Skilled facilitator, effective brainstorm. Here's what a facilitator does:

Warmup - Check out our ExperienceInnovation Live episode, "There's a storm comin'" for our 2 favorite drills!

Silence - Let everyone take 2 minutes at the start to think and capture their ideas in silence, then share with the group.

Stimulate - Your job is to keep energy high and ideas flowing! Ensure everyone's standing up. If there's a stall, or the group fixates on a similar type of idea, introduce some stimuli: "What if time travel were an option?" "What would get you fired?" "What's an idea that costs at least \$100M?"

Direct- If someone's evaluating, asking too many clarifying questions, or openly criticizing an idea, remind them to withhold judgement until later.

## **Make promising ideas tangible.**

There's no better way to help everyone understand and build on an idea than by making it tangible.

End your brainstorm by having the group vote on the ideas they think have the highest potential to have awesome impact for users (note that practicality is not the criterion here). Then, quickly prototype the top 2 or 3 ideas. Check out the prototyping episodes and tool for more. Two great methods are to storyboard or roleplay the idea. Once your brainstorm results in a few prototypes you're happy with, it's time to take your ideas to your users to test and evolve.