

Brainstorm Your Company to Success

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Many successful managers have figured out that to increase levels of productivity, sales and service you have to involve the people who know the jobs best – frontline employees. Don't have employees? Not a problem, network and benchmark with peers in similar companies or industries. To make this happen in your organization, set up brainstorming meetings with small groups of employees using the following tips.

Keep the groups manageable. Typically groups of 5-8 people will allow for interaction and the stimulation of ideas without becoming bogged down. Such groups allow for a quick pace of ideas and a lot of energy.

Meet early. In order to capitalize on high energy levels, hold your meetings in the morning. Mid-morning seems to work best since it captures the energy of people who have both a morning and evening Circadian Rhythm (natural 24-hour internal clock possessed by humans). Mid-week also seems to work best for people.

Provide an agenda in advance. Once attendees for the meetings have been identified, send out a summary of what will be discussed and ask people to give some thoughts to what currently works, what does not work and what can be changed related to the topic. Providing this list can result in a more productive meeting.

Provide refreshments. People usually work best when their brains are stimulated by nourishment. Offer water and drinks and a combination of sweet and healthy items. Fruit and juices with natural sugars are a good choice.

Set some ground rules for the meeting. Successful brainstorming follows the following basic guidelines:

- Freewheeling of ideas encouraged (anything goes);
- No criticism of ideas is allowed;
- Quantity of ideas, not quality, is encouraged;
- Piggy-backing of ideas is fine (building on someone else's idea);
- No discussion of issues (do this later);
- Everyone participates; no observers;
- One person speaks at a time;
- Use inclusive language (consider diversity); and
- ALL ideas are captured on a flip chart page.

Follow-up. Once the meeting has concluded, compile the ideas generated and provide a list to attendees and any other appropriate person. Form action committees of supervisors and managers to decide which items are practical and meet the mission/vision of the organization. Formulate action plans and keep attendees informed of progress so that they see the end result and feel intangibly rewarded for their ideas. You can go further with the idea of rewards by sending a personal thank you to attendees and making mention of their valuable participation in any organizational newsletter.

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