

Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events (T.I.M.E.)

Topic: Creativity

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WELCOME

Despite the fact that I am not an artist, not a poet, and can't even carry a tune, I do consider myself to be creative.

Themes, décor, food and entertainment are naturally associated with creativity. The challenge (and need today) is to make the MEETING part of the meeting more creative and to allow the participants themselves to be more creative. Creativity is one of the most valuable and powerful resources in business today. This issue offers you ways to hold more creative product launches, meetings, brainstorming sessions, training events and management retreats.

I hope it gets your creative juices flowing.

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1. WAS CREATIVITY INVITED TO ATTEND

Creativity is one of the most valuable and powerful resources in business today. Fostering creativity is important in meetings where people are involved in:

- Brainstorming
- Product Development
- Innovation
- Problem Solving
- Cost Cutting

Cost cutting?? Yes. Alan Robinson, the co-author of [Corporate Creativity: How Innovation and Improvement Actual Happens](#), states that the employees on the front line tend to be the most creative, not because of who they are but because they are dealing with customers, suppliers and generally getting their hands dirty.

Consider that on average people have 5 new ideas a day. Organizations need their people to be more creative (seeking the competitive advantage). The fast pace of change and adoption means that we all need to build the “next new thing”.

2. MENTAL LOCKS

Roger von Oech in his book, [A Whack on the Side of the Head: How You Can Be More Creative](#), takes a look at the 10 mental locks that keep us from being creative:

1. The Right Answer
2. That's Not Logical
3. Follow the Rules
4. Be Practical
5. Avoid Ambiguity
6. To Err is Wrong
7. Play is Frivolous
8. That's Not My Area
9. Don't Be Foolish
10. I'm Not Creative

These 10 probably don't need too much explanation!

3. UNLOCKING

What can you do to foster creativity? Here are some basic ideas to eliminate locks from participants' minds:

Create an attitude of creativity. For example, start the meeting at 9:03 am instead of 9:00 am. Not only will people be more likely to be on time but also you are setting a new trend, announcing that this meeting will be different and creating a sense of newness. Simple but effective.

Liven up the physical space (color, cartoons, music, posters)

Have frequent breaks

Do things differently. Breaking habits is a way to spur creativity

Invite a cross section of people. Form teams or tables with a cross section of people.

Make presentations creative. Bullets and PowerPoint (with all due respect) are not the only way to go.

Use props and toys

Ban Killer Phrases (Killer Phrases include - Its too much work. It hasn't been done before. Not that idea again.) [Five Star Mind: Games and Exercises to Stimulate your Creativity & Imagination](#) author Tom Wujec includes 30 phrases that kill creativity. He suggests creating the Killer Phrase Police who give out citations or warrants to anyone using a killer phrase during a meeting. In [Games That Teach Teams](#), the authors suggest using an exercise, Snow Ball, where participants throw wadded pieces of paper at anyone who makes a negative or unacceptable statement. This type of immediate feedback will create a new group norm for the meeting!

Schedule a Daydream break. Daydreams tap into our unconscious, which is a rich source of ideas, experiences and images that can lead to new connections and fresh thinking. Successful Meetings Down to the Wire e-newsletter (5/30/02 issue) states that daydreaming is a way to incubate the components of a problem and uncover solutions. They offered the following questions that can be used to make a daydream break effective: How can you apply the images and thoughts of your daydream to the project you are working on? How could the image be a metaphor? Does your daydream show you a new perspective? [The Brain Workout Book](#) also contains exercises for making daydreaming useful.

4. UNLEASHING CREATIVITY

Ready to do more? I have categorized 25+ ideas into the following 6 groupings:

Get People in the Mood
Questions
Change your Perspective
Picture It
Form New Connections
Brainstorming

Here are some ideas for unleashing people's creativity:

Get People in the Mood

IDEA #1: At a rock concert or standup comedy show, there are bands or lesser-known comedians who warm up the crowd before the main attraction performs. This should also be done for meetings where people are expected to be creative.

Take one minute to come up with as many uses for a common object as possible. That object can be a paper clip, a pencil, anything. A group of Hewlett Packard dealer sales people came up with 83 uses for baking soda in three minutes. Warming up your crowd will help the rest of the meeting.

IDEA #1.5: Ask What If questions for a minute. Pose the question to your participants: What if animals became more intelligent than people? What if men also had babies?

What if people did not need to sleep? (From [A Whack on the Side of the Head: How You Can Be More Creative](#))

IDEA #2: Use an exercise from [Creativity Games for Trainers: A Handbook of Group Activities for Jumpstarting Workplace Creativity](#) which contains 30 innovative, entertaining games to enhance creativity in any organizational setting. Each ready-to-use activity comes complete with lists of required and optional materials, time recommendations, reproducible handouts, follow-up discussion questions, and other essential information.

Questions

There are a variety of ways to use questions effectively to be more creative

IDEA #3: Frame the right question - Don't say "We don't have the money" rather phrase it as "How do we raise the money?"

IDEA # 4: Ask Dumb questions – Why have we always done it that way? Does anyone actually look at that form?

IDEA #5: Ask why questions – Like a three-year old child, keep asking WHY? Ask WHY at least 5 times.

IDEA # 6: Ask the Six Universal Questions. What? When? Where? How? Why? Who?

The last three ideas are from [What a Great Idea!: The Key Steps](#) Creative People Take.

IDEA # 7: Find new ways to mix and match using these questions (from [Five Star Mind: Games and Exercises to Stimulate your Creativity & Imagination](#))

What can you modify?
What can you substitute?
What can you combine?
What can you adapt?
What can you magnify?
What can you eliminate or minimize?
What use can you change? (New uses)
What can you rearrange?

Change your Perspective

IDEA # 8: Use the Change Your Shoes Approach ([What a Great Idea!: The Key Steps](#) Creative People Take)

You can do this exercise figuratively or literally.

Take off your shoes

Identify as many people as possible who are in some way connected with the problem you are trying to solve

Put on their shoes (Take their shoes)

Imagine what the problem looks like to them

Jot down ideas that come from your changed perspective

IDEA # 8 ½: Imagine How Others Would Do It. How would Winston Churchill, the Three Stooges, a seven-year-old girl, Martin Luther King, your mother, or Spiderman solve the problem?

IDEA # 9: Thinking in opposites using the Yin/Yang approach. One approach is to restate the problem to be a negative statement. For example, if the issue is:

All hassled customers complain loudly

Try this restatement:

All hassled customers do not complain loudly. Implication – Do they want to compliment us or thank us? How can we get hassled customers to thank us??

Then try this restatement:

Not all hassled customers complain loudly. Implication - Hassled customers may just leave without complaining.

Then try this restatement:

All hassled customers complain not loudly. Implication – They complain softly – they don't complain to us but they complain to all their friends, relatives and associates.

This technique starts us thinking about many different avenues for a problem

IDEA # 10: Parents will relate to this technique for we often hear from our children “But everybody is doing it...” Try approaching it as “Doing what everyone else doesn't do..”

Formulate your discussion around what everybody else doesn't do. This may help you identify niches that no one else has discovered

IDEA #10.5: Cross-Fertilize. Ask your meeting participants to buy a magazine that they have never read before (or tell them to buy the magazine on the top shelf, left hand corner from their local newsstand – you can't use the newsstand in your office building) and bring an idea or perspective from that magazine to the upcoming meeting that relates to your problem/challenge or issue.

IDEA # 11: What If Compass (from [What a Great Idea!: The Key Steps](#) Creative People Take)

Use opposite actions to facilitate thinking in new directions

What if I:

Stretch it	Shrink it
Combine it	Separate it
Freeze it	Melt it
Raise the price	Give it away

IDEA # 12: Flip Flop Results. State the exact opposite of the results you are experiencing. Note how you could produce these opposite results. ([What a Great Idea!: The Key Steps](#) Creative People Take.)

IDEA # 12.5: Work backwards

Picture a finished project and then work backward through every step needed to make it a reality.

Picture It

IDEA # 13: Idea Mapping

Idea mapping is visual brainstorming. Write down the word or phrase that expresses the idea you want to think about. Then write down associations as quickly as they come to you. Focus on the big issues that come out of the idea map and explore relationships and associations with the map.

IDEA # 14: Here to There Map. Draw a map with two locations: here and there. Identify your Here and where you want to go - There. Map out each step to get from here to there.

IDEA # 15: Force Field Map. Place your idea in the center of your map. On one side list the factors that support your idea. On the other side, list the facts that resist your idea. Then look at the map and figure out what can be done to maximize the supporting factors and minimize the resisting factors.

IDEA # 16: The Context Map. A context map allows you to consider several points of view. On the map show the idea, and include you, your client, and 2 levels of management above you and below you. Then write down a few sentences to illustrate each person's perspective. The map should help you find new relationships, connections, and common factors. It can also aid you in selling your ideas to the people who matter inside and outside the company.

IDEA # 17: Use an idea matrix. (Picture a road map mileage chart that shows the distance between various locations. Now list attributes along the top of a matrix (you are

brainstorming for a new child's toy and you list attributes of toys – bounce, fall, spin, stack and then on the other matrix list other attributes of toys – round, square soft, furry) See what new relationships develop and what captures your imagination.

(These visual strategies are from [Five Star Mind: Games and Exercises to Stimulate your Creativity & Imagination](#))

New Connections

IDEA # 18: Random Words. Go to the dictionary and randomly point to a word. Think up 6 ideas/associations/connections/ relationships about your problem and that word.

IDEA # 19: Find the link. What do (name several concepts) have in common? For example, what do the following have in common: A financial watchdog, the food chain, and a leap of faith, frame of reference?

Brainstorming Ideas

IDEA #20: Reverse Brainstorm. Suppose you have a new product that you are about to launch. Hold a brainstorming session but from the perspective of your competitors. How would they respond to your product?

IDEA # 21: Build a toy box. When you are stuck on a problem, pick an item out of the box at random and consider how it might relate to your problem.

IDEA # 22: Combo Brainstorming. Take two ideas from two different people from their brainstorming list. Ask the group to discuss how to combine both ideas. Have a third person read an idea. The group must then work that idea into the first combination. (Presentations, November 2001)

TIP: If you are holding a brainstorming meeting, the lead manager should not run this part of the meeting. Rotate responsibility among the participants. The Boss may squelch the views of others.

5. PUSHING THE CREATIVITY ENVELOPE

For the right meeting, the right objective and the right audience, you may even push the creativity envelope a little further. Please, sit down. Suspend Judgment. Read.

Assign Roles for More Productive and Creative Meetings

Edward DeBono in his book [Six Thinking Hats](#) promotes a method to make meetings more effective, shorter in duration, and more creative.

In the Six Thinking Hat method, people are asked to think in a specific direction for an appointed amount of time during a meeting. Everyone is asked to “wear a hat” of specific color.

White Hat. White is neutral and objective. The white hat is concerned with objective facts and figures.

Red Hat. Red suggests anger (seeing red). Red is the emotional hat and when people wear the red hat they give the emotional view.

Black Hat. Black is somber and serious. The Black hat is cautious and careful. It points out the weaknesses in an idea.

Yellow Hat. Yellow is sunny and positive. The yellow hat is optimistic and contains hope. Yellow Hat thinking is positive thinking

Green Hat. Green is vegetation and represents abundant, fertile growth. The green hat indicates creativity and new idea.

Blue Hat. Blue is the color of the sky, which is above everything else. The blue hat is concerned with control, the organization of the thinking process and the use of the other hats.

DeBono’s book goes through the details on Six Thinking Hats. The six hats can be used sequentially or singly. The two main purposes to the Six Thinking Hats concepts are:

1. It simplifies thinking by allowing each participant to deal with one thing at a time.
2. It allows a switch in thinking. The request to switch hats is direct and not personal

The benefits of using the hats include the following:

1. As symbols to request a particular type of thinking, use of the hats de-personalizes comments

I think we need some green hat thinking

instead of

We need some creativity here

There can be a call for Black hat thinking (and a recognition of its value)

instead of

saying

Don't be so negative.

2. The experience and intelligence of everyone is directed in a specific way. This makes fullest use of everyone in a meeting.
3. If a topic is emotional, people will have an outlet (the red hat) to express their emotion and if it's time for Red Hat thinking then they are more likely to feel comfortable describing their feelings.
4. Yellow Hat thinking provides an opportunity for people to look for value. It's usually easier to find disadvantages and dangers than benefits. (Think about meetings where people use those killer phrases.) Yellow hat thinking can produce some new and powerful insights.

Finally,

5. The method helps people stay on track.

Another book that promotes roles for meeting participants is [**A Kick in the Seat of the Pants: Using Your Explorer, Artist, Judge and Warrior to Be More Creative**](#) Von Oech advances 4 roles: Explorer, Artist, Judge and Warrior.

When you're searching for new information, be an Explorer

When your turning your resources into new ideas, be an Artist

When you're evaluating the merits of an idea, be a Judge

When you're carrying your idea into action, be a Warrior

6. CREATIVE AND STILL EMPLOYED

For success (and job security)

The creativity effort should support the objective. Always start with the objective and what are the forces working against meeting the objective (like in the Force Field Map, Idea # 15). Work the creativity to counteract the negative forces and always support the goal of the meeting or event.

Tie the need for creativity into your strategy. I am willing to bet that more than 80% of organizations have used the words Innovation, Leading Edge, Out of the Box to

describe their mission, their strategy or a need for the organization. Align your meeting tactics with this strategy.

Tailor your efforts to the audience.

Some audiences will be uncomfortable with being creative. Warn them ahead of time to expect some feelings of “uncomfortableness.” Stretching is part of being creative.

Briefly explain the links between creativity, fun, and good business. (See my Freebie for additional support.)

7. YOU CAN RECAPTURE IT

Creativity can be recaptured. You had it when you were a child and you can get it back. Here is a list of additional resources for you:

[Brain Boosters for Business Advantage:](#) Ticklers, Grab Bags, Blue Skies and other Bionic Ideas by Arthur VanGundy

[Coloring Outside the Lines:](#) Business Thoughts on Creativity, Marketing and Sales by Jeff Tobe

If you liked reading about DeBono’s **[Six Thinking Hats](#)** his other book is **[Lateral Thinking: Creativity Step-By-Step.](#)**

[Aha!: 10 Ways to Free Your Creative... Spirit and Find Your Great Ideas](#)
Aha! is a fast read that uses 10 clear ways to unlock your creative mind. It is fun and usable

[Jump Start Your Brain](#)

[Breakthrough! Everything you Need to... Start a Solution Revolution \(Book, CD-Rom, Problem Identification Card Pack\)](#)

[Weird Ideas That Work: 11 1 2 Practices](#) for promoting, Managing and Sustaining Innovation. Also available in two e-book versions: Adobe **[Weird Ideas That Work: 11 1/2 Practices...](#)** and Microsoft Reader **[Weird Ideas That Work: 11 1/2 Practices](#)**

[Thinkertoys \(A Handbook of Business Creativity\)](#) by Michael Michalko

[Collaborative Creativity: Unleashing the Power of Shared Thinking](#) by Jack Ricchiuto

[How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci: Seven Steps to Genius Every Day](#) by Michael

J. Gelb

[99% Inspiration: Tips, Tales &... Techniques for Liberating Your Business Creativity](#)

[Creative Whack Pack](#) created by Roger Von Oech - This is not a book but rather an illustrated deck of 64 creative thinking strategies to enhance every person's creativity. Or his newest is [Expect the Unexpected \(Or You Won't Find It: A Creativity Tool Based on the Ancient Wisdom of Heraclitus](#) is another set of cards. Von Oech uses 30 epigrams from Heraclitus, the ancient Greek philosopher. Von Oech uses the epigrams as creativity exercises--accompanied by mental puzzles, anecdotes, questions, and punchy footnotes--to demonstrate that Heraclitus' 2,500-year-old creative insights have aged well. He explains his premise: "Creative thinking involves imagining familiar things in a new light, digging below the surface to find previously undetected patterns, and finding connections among unrelated phenomena." The cards feature thirty sayings that will make you think about the world and your problems in a whole new way.

Roger Von Oech's other books referenced in this newsletter include [A Kick in the Seat of the Pants: Using Your Explorer, Artist, Judge and Warrior to Be More Creative](#) and [A Whack on the Side of the Head: How You Can Be More Creative](#)

8. TIDBITS & FREEBIES

I'm not sure if creativity is behind this effort but the honor bars in the rooms of Kimpton Group hotels, now offer candy necklaces, a ball of Silly Putty, a yo-yo, or a pair of wax lips along with the usual pretzels and vodka.

If mother is the necessity of invention, then play is the father of invention. Creativity and fun is good business sense. If you need help building the business case for some creative measures in your meeting, email me for this month's Freebie. Just send an email with BUILDING THE BUSINESS CASE in the subject line.

9. MY CLAIM TO CREATIVITY

I said I was creative and one way that I express my creativity is through my interactive, engaging and highly creative seminars. I am pleased to announce that several of my seminars are now available through the Meeting Professional International's (MPI) Platinum Program:

Communicating Effectively Across the Globe

180 Ways to Transform your Meetings

Lights, Color, Sound & Action: Reaching a Jaded Audience

What's Your EQ? - Exploring the Role of Emotional Intelligence

If you are a Meeting Professionals International member, bring me to your local MPI Chapter for 1-3hour customized program on these topics.

I will also be presenting at the ITME Motivation Show (September 24 –26, 2002, Chicago) on the following topics:
Beyond Logistics: Becoming the Valued Knowledge Worker (in collaboration with Mike Hamilton of [Synchronicity](#))
Exploring the Role of Emotional Intelligence
Communicating Effectively Across the Globe

I love speaking and will happily create a seminar, presentation or speech for you and your organization. My areas of specialization: Creating Effective Meetings, Reaching the Adult Audience, Teams and Teambuilding, Humor in the Business World, Communication Strategies and more.

10. T.I.M.E. GONE BY

Past issues of T.I.M.E. can be downloaded as a MS Word document. Here is an index of topics and “freebies” offered in the past:

May 2000:	Teambuilding And (Freebie) New York Times Reprint On Teambuilding
June 2000:	Green Meetings And (Freebie) Resource List Of Exercises
July 2000:	American (Values) And (Freebie) Meeting Analysis
August 2000:	Minimum/Minimal Meetings And (Freebie) Web Winners
October 2000:	Evaluations And (Freebie) Sample Evaluation Questions
November 2000:	Politics
December 2000:	Toys And (Freebie) Brainstorming Ideas
January 2001:	Sales, Award Presentations And (Freebie) Sales Tips
February 2001:	Change And Communicating Change And (Freebie) Change Bombs
March 2001:	Open Space Technology
April 2001:	Adult Learning Styles And (Freebie) Learning Style Questionnaire
May 2001:	Trade Shows And (Freebie) Trade Show Timeline
June 2001:	Emotional Intelligence And (Freebie) EI Quiz
July 2001:	Presentation Skills And (Freebie) Speaker Introductions
August 2001:	Ice Breakers And (Freebie) Resource List
September 2001:	Facilitation And (Freebie) Problem Personalities In A Meeting
October 2001:	Humor And (Freebie) The Benefits Of Laughter
November 2001:	Customer Care And (Freebie) Complaints
December 2001:	Slack And (Freebie) Quiet Time
January 2002:	The Many Faces Of Teambuilding And (Freebie)
February 2002:	Promotional Products And (Freebie) Case Study
March 2002:	Multicultural Communication And (Freebie) Multicultural Meeting Tips
April 2002:	Outdoor Learning And (Freebie) Justification Checklist

May 2002:

[Budgets, ROI, ROO, And ROK And \(Freebie\) Budgeting – Beyond Excel](#)

11. FUTURE T.I.M.E.

How can I help you in the future? Will we meet face-to-face? Here are ways that I can help you out in the future:

Provide Facilitators

Customize a Teambuilding Program

Reprint past newsletters for further distribution (Past clients have used my issues for Internal Speakers, Trade Shows, etc.)

Provide Links/Articles for your web site

Preparation for Internal Speakers

Training and Seminars (Development and Delivery)

Meeting Management Consulting

I am an Interaction-ary. We specialize in providing interaction and boosting the effectiveness of meetings. Networking and education are top priorities of employees and association members. Interaction enhances both networking and education. Call us to talk about what SEAL Inc can do for you in Teambuilding, Icebreakers, Training, Speaker Preparation and other meeting content related areas.

In the meantime, I would really appreciate it if you would forward T.I.M.E. onto your colleagues, associates, and clients. Just press the forward button.

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