



The Power of Brainstorming & Individual Problem Solving

By Jim Stewart

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How company owners and managers execute the fundamental principles of management, make decisions by consensus, hold effective meetings, and listen “engagingly” can have a significant effect on organizational effectiveness. **Brainstorming, Giving and Receiving Feedback, and Group Problem Solving** are other fundamental actions that occur in all businesses—and how the dynamics of these actions are handled can have a very significant impact on anticipated outcomes. Following are some simple guidelines for each of these actions:

BRAINSTORMING

- **Hold the Criticism**
When ideas are criticized, a tendency develops to hesitate and evaluate an idea internally before stating it out loud. As a result, few ideas are generated, and many good ideas are lost.
- **The More Ideas, the Better**
There is a direct relationship between the number of ideas generated and the number of ideas later judged as usable or good. *Quantity* leads to *quality* in the same sense that practice improves a skill.
- **The Wilder, the Better**
Wild ideas indicate creative thinking. They are the result of approaching the problem or topic from a fresh perspective. This kind of uninhibited thinking leads to unique solutions.
- **Hitch-Hike**
In addition to contributing ideas on their own, people should suggest how the ideas of others can be turned into better ideas, or how the two or more ideas can be joined to create a new idea.

GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK

- **Focus Feedback on Behavior rather Than the Person**
It is critical to refer to what a person does, rather than to comment on what we imagine is being done. When we talk in subjective terms implying inherited, constant qualities, it is difficult (if not impossible) to understand how to change behavior.
- **Focus Feedback on Description rather than Judgment**
The effort to *describe* represents a process for reporting what occurred. Judgment refers to an evaluation in terms of good or bad, right or wrong, nice or not nice and makes assumptions about motives.
- **Focus Feedback on the Sharing of Information rather than on Giving Advice**
By sharing information, the other person is left free to decide how to use the information provided.
- **Focus Feedback on the Exploration of Alternatives rather than on Imposing Your Own Solutions**
When a variety of options or means are generated towards the attainment of a particular goal, premature acceptance of a particular answer or solution is less likely.

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GROUP PROBLEM SOLVING

1. **State the problem clearly.**
Be sure enough information is available, so that the real problem is stated rather than merely a symptom of the problem.
2. **Define the essential criteria a solution must meet to be satisfactory.**
List any other conditions to be fulfilled which would be desirable, if feasible.
3. **Use creative ideas to search for solutions.**
List Them. Try to use different frames of reference and perspectives to develop creative solutions.
4. **Evaluate the solutions to determine the extent to which they meet the essential criteria.**
Be certain there is enough information to know the solution will not produce unacceptable side effects.
5. **Select the solution which best meets the essential criteria**
6. **Check the solution finally selected against the problem as stated.**
Be sure the solution really solves the problem.
7. **Specify the action plan for implementing the solution.**
Who? What? How? When? Where?
8. **Specify an action plan for assessing how well the solution is being implemented.**
What information is required to make this assessment? Who will collect it? How? Who will make the assessment and report success achieved to the group?
9. **Implement the solution**
10. **Follow through on the assessment steps**

The bottom line: In effective organizations, people feel they are on a winning team and they believe they're doing something important. They are proud of the organization they work for and they feel they're making a contribution to something that's important to them. Effective brainstorming, problem solving and employee feedback can help to make these desired outcomes become more of a reality.