

## Brainstorm

by: Dr. Alvin Chan Ever lost for ideas while working in a group? One of the most often-used technique for generating many ideas is Brainstorming. Alex Osborn, a partner in an advertising agency, developed brainstorming techniques years ago in 1941 to help his employees to come up with many, many ideas for their advertising business. To enable Brainstorming to be effective, there are certain rules to follow. One of the most important is that no one should make any judgment about anyone's ideas. There should be a FREE-FLOW of ideas (that's why Brainstorm is put under the WATER Element category!) and everyone's ideas are to be respected and taken into account. Let's go through the steps of setting up an effective Brainstorming session: 1. Get into small groups of less than six (it was found to be more effective) and select a leader and a recorder (they may be the same person). 2. The leader must explain the focus topic and goals of the Brainstorming session. In short, he/she must make sure that everyone is clear on the topic being explored. 3. The leader should spell out the rules of an effective Brainstorming session. These will include: There are no WRONG ideas! Everyone plays a part to contribute. No laughing and poking fun at people's ideas. No CRITICISM! Do not discuss or argue about the ideas given. The person in charge must record all ideas without any biasness. 4. It is also important to set a realistic time limit. This is to prevent wastage of precious time and the group members tend to be more motivated to give their best, without delays. 5. Start the brainstorming. 6. Usually, anyone can contribute their ideas at any time, without any restrictions. But, there are groups that use a small game to enhance the effectiveness of their Brainstorming sessions. This includes getting the leader to start the Brainstorming session by throwing a tennis ball to another member for his turn to give an idea. And in turn, he/she will pass the ball to another member for his turn to give another idea. Whatever it is, there are no real hard and fast rules about this. As long as ideas are continuously flowing from each member, the objective is met. 7. The recorder should write down all responses and enable the other members to see them. This help a lot in the brainstorming as sometimes, ideas of others can help spark more original ideas form the rest of the group. 8. Usually after the Brainstorming session, the group will need to go through the results and begin to evaluate the ideas given. Certain questions to ponder upon include: Are there ideas that are similar? Can some of the ideas and concepts be grouped together for clarity? Are there ideas that are really impossible to use at this point of time (maybe due to lack of resources or other reasons)?

Putting Your Elements to Work: Here are some Brainstorming exercises for you and your group to practice: 1. Ideas to start a business with less than \$100 in the bank. 2. Generate ideas to make an effective advertisement for a business. 3. To improve sales of a new product. 4. Generate ideas to get people to buy what I am selling (for example, Health Products) instead of flowers for Valentine's Day. 5. To find ways to get rid of excess products (for example, food, flowers and others) that will be rotting in a week's time. Just a note for Solo Warriors: Brainstorming is usually done in a group for obvious reasons. In any case, if you are ever caught alone with an IDEA FLOW blockage, you can still brainstorm alone by jotting down ideas on paper or laptop. The same rules apply and that is to jot ideas as they flow without considering whether they are good or bad. The evaluation of your responses can be done later after you feel that the flow of ideas is subsiding.

The Stone Soup Legend There exists a tale, handed down from times long ago, of two travelers on a pilgrimage. Hungry and tired from a long day's journey, they come to a small, impoverished, medieval village, where they decide to rest by the side of the road. One of the travelers builds a small fire, upon which he places a large pot, while the other, having drawn water from the town well, fills the pot and places into the vessel a simple stone. As the two men sit by the fire, bringing their "stone soup" to a boil, the local villagers become inquisitive of the curious antics of these strangers. Eventually, several townsfolk decide to investigate the matter and approach the two travelers to engage them in conversation. Shortly thereafter, there is heard the sound of merriment, as the visitors, who turn out to be quite friendly, share their tales of the lands and people they have met throughout their journey and pilgrimage with the local villagers. Finally, a young boy asks the travelers "But why, pray thee, are you boiling a stone?" One of the pilgrims replies, "So we may eat stone soup." "It must be terribly bland!" says an old woman. "But I have a cabbage, which will add some flavor!" "And I, some carrots, which will add color!" says another villager. "Some potatoes!", offers another, until, shortly, by the contribution of a little by many, a hearty stew was made, upon which the entire village and the weary pilgrims dined... and while doing so, shared their tales, talents, and camaraderie throughout the night. The very next day, the travelers (who by now could be called "strangers" no more), continued their journey, leaving the little town, and its people, behind. But the villagers never forgot them, and the lesson they had learned. In fact, during the hardest of times, in such a time as this tale, that little village thrived, because the townsfolk never forgot how to make "stone soup".

## About the Author

Dr. Alvin Chan is a Senior Research Consultant at First Quatermain. Please contact him at [bizguru88@hotmail.com](mailto:bizguru88@hotmail.com) if you are reprinting his article online or in print.

[heartware2002@yahoo.com](mailto:heartware2002@yahoo.com)

Source: <http://www.serverforever.com>