

Brain Storming - The Dynamic New Way To Create Successful Ideas

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Brain Storming-The Dynamic New Way to Create Successful Ideas I can think of no finer way to enrich a person's life than to stimulate him to a greater use of his creative talents. The ability to be creative in which the techniques of "brain-storming" play such an important part is largely a state of mind. It is a state of mind that we all can cultivate. As a business manager, I have been especially interested in stimulating ideas for two reasons: to benefit the business itself and to help the people who work in that business. In our organization we have had quite a bit of experience with this subject. And I can say that these techniques not only work on specific problems. They also help to broaden a person's outlook on life to open his whole personality to the "idea concept" and to encourage a constant, fresh eagerness about all the problems of daily living. Although my comments are being made from a businessman's point of view, I think it is evident that they apply quite generally to all people. Any company or organization that makes and sells products in competition will prosper only as it develops new ideas. This is basic to growth and improvement. To fulfill this objective, the organization must have creative people on all its important areas, such as engineering, manufacturing, sales, and personnel. And it must have good management in seeing that the best results are obtained from those creative people in all those areas. Yet, whether one's business is large or small, there are some dilemmas in which the manager finds himself. For instance, a very small business, desiring to grow, may find the problem of developing new ideas a difficult and expensive one. Therefore, the need to avoid the failure of working on the wrong idea is vital. The manager of a large organization is also in a difficult spot. To him, spending money on a poor idea is not so serious because his resources are larger. However, because of this, there is less appreciation of the cost of development. Consequently the controls that he must employ can create an atmosphere that hampers idea men and their productiveness. Thus there are the dual problems of creativity and good management. Creative ability is most frequently the opposite of good judgment. Creative ability includes the tendency to experiment with novel ideas that might be unsound. It includes a good deal of the gambler's spirit where the individual "sticks his neck out" and tries something new, perhaps even "wild" or

"crazy." Therefore, by its very nature, creative ability is on the opposite end of the scale from good judgment. In other words, if we were to draw a line to represent the various degrees of creative ability and sound judgment, we would put great creativity at one end and sound judgment at the other. The better manager, when rated along this line, would be much closer to the good judgment end than to the creativity end. So we immediately see that a "good manager" may automatically constitute a barrier to an atmosphere that fosters creativity. Consequently, this is a real challenge to business leaders: how to combine a flow of creative new ideas with sound evaluation. Yet I feel that it is absolutely necessary to cultivate the "idea atmosphere" if an organization is to forge ahead day after day. Business, just as art, needs a climate of open-mindedness and should not be wary of non-conformists or men who continually pose ideas that run contrary to our orthodox thinking. When a person is faced with a problem, it seems natural to fall back upon previous experience for answers. In most cases, judgment dictates what is most practical or what has worked in the past. This judgment is the end result of training, which has been instilled in the individual throughout most of his life. From the time the child is old enough to comprehend, he is taught to do what is "best" for himself and for others. He is trained to do the "right" thing. This, then, is the beginning of judgment. This process continues throughout his growth to maturity. What happens during this period when judgment is developing? What was there before judgment developed? Let's look at a young child. One is immediately struck by his power of imagination. Everything is "real" to him. Everything is alive. The stick he picks up and aims is a gun. The tree he climbs is a mountain or a ship's lookout platform. Imagination is tolerated in a child but not always encouraged. As he grows older, he is impressed with the fact that his imagination, while a source of amusement, is often not practical. Thus we see that judgment may take the place of imagination completely or that imagination will be used less and less as judgment is used more and more. Theoretically, this could lead to a person's having all judgment and no imagination and don't we seem to run into those persons? Don't some people seem to rely entirely on precedent and experience and seem afraid to try a new slant? But must judgment be developed at the expense of imagination? I think not. Moreover, I believe we have had experience that proves that ideas can be stimulated and that a climate can be developed, and maintained, in which ideas as well as good judgment flourish. We have drawn freely on all sources of research and information and have reached these conclusions, for example, as to what a creative person is. In the first place, he has a sensitivity to problems. Then he also has a fluency with ideas in that he thinks of a lot of approaches to a problem.

Many of these ideas are characterized by novelty. His ideas are new and perhaps different. The creative man is flexible, able to drop one line of thinking and easily take up another one. Also, he has a quality that has been described as constructive discontent, a certain restlessness of mind, searching for new and better ways of doing things. This characteristic has been forcefully described by Har-low H. Curtice, president of General Motors, as "the inquiring mind." It is this attitude, he points out, that "is never satisfied with things as they are ... is always seeking ways to make things better and do things better." And it is this kind of person who "assumes that everything and anything can be improved." Now let me describe our experience a bit more for it is pertinent to this book. When the author, Charles Clark, asked me to write this, I readily agreed. For "creativity" and "brain-storming" have become a real part of the way we operate our business. For many years, of course, we have had our share of meetings and conferences. In those, we have always tried to develop new and better ways to operate, cut costs, create new products, and improve human relations. But in 1953 we decided to see whether we could do more about creativity in a scientific, systematic manner. We assembled a group of experts in the field, psychologists and educators. Some said we could determine and develop creativity. Others said this was doubtful. But we decided it should be tried and probably could be done. From that start we developed a testing program that has been proved psychologically. It is a test that shows how creative a person is, within fairly close limits. This test has been given to more than one thousand people in our own plants and to probably another two thousand outside our organization folks who borrowed our test to try for themselves. Then we also began to develop a training program to see whether we could stimulate more ideas in our people . . . ideas for new products, new ways of making those products . . . ideas on anything that might help our whole team. More than one thousand of our people have taken this creativity training, and we know it produces good results. Brainstorm-ing is an important part of this course. We started out by trying the course on our top executives. They were convinced it could stimulate people into thinking up ideas that would help the entire division. From them we went on to give the course to our engineering people and then to manufacturing supervision. Everybody seems to like the creativity work. It is, in fact, the most popular of all our educational activities. We have "discovered" that folks like to give their imaginations a workout and, once they know ideas are welcome, they will come up with many good suggestions. I am proud of the fact that for the past several years our division of General Motors has been a leader in the GM Suggestion Plan. This record stems, at least in part, I feel, from the "climate," the

idea-atmosphere, that pervades our organization. That, I believe, is the most important single result to come from our continuing creativity program. Surely we teach people some specific ways to generate ideas. The techniques described by Charles Clark in this book are followed, and I might say I've even learned some new ones from him. But, above all, we have tried to create a definite feeling among our people, especially our management and technical groups, that our division has a "wide-open mind." I don't believe anybody feels he will be criticized for suggesting something new, untried, or different, even if it might seem "screwball." So I am delighted to have the honor of suggesting to you that this book will make life a bit better for you and for all who are affected by your life and occupation. At work, at home, in groups or alone, "brainstorming" is fun and is valuable. Maybe we are highlighting the word "brainstorming" with unusual force. The main idea to get from a book such as this, however, is that the human brain is a wonderful, fantastic, unbelievable instrument and one that we can use constantly for the betterment of mankind!

Charles H. Clark

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statements, on the stock exchange, in the delicatessen which closes, in the headlines. You will see it in your home and other homes, in the family which does things, in your church and lodge, in your political party, in your government. The one quality which turns the ordinary into the extraordinary is ideas. For example, visit the engineering department of a large manufacturing company, say in the field of electronics, and you will see row upon row of drawing boards and row upon row of engineers, all in shirt sleeves, who look remarkably alike. And they have much in common. Each man in the room has an engineering degree, each has been graduated from the company training program. Most of the men are married, have about the same number of children and the same number of bedrooms in their split-level homes, about fourteen payments left on the car, and seventeen years to go on their mortgage. They all get the same pay, give or take a few dollars. If you came back in a year to that vast room full of seemingly identical engineers you would see that a strange process had taken place. One man way back on the left had moved his slide rule and drawing pens up to a drawing board at the front of the room. Another came in one day and sat down at a desk, not a drawing board, in an office down the corridor. Still another, apparently lost in the center of the room full of shirt-sleeved workers, moved out to the front office and started to wear a suit jacket and carry a brown leather dispatch case to work instead of a lunch box. This process might seem strange, mysterious, and completely nonunderstandable viewed from a distance. You might feel like an anthropologist on a South Sea island viewing some native rites that were unaccountable. But if you investigated you would find an enormous difference between the look-alike men in the look-alike shirts in the hangar-sized workroom: the men who moved ahead had ideas. Sure, not all the ideas were good ones, not all of them worked, others were too expensive, still others had been tried before. But they were ideas, that ingenious, creative element which makes all the difference in our lives. Notice I said they had ideas, not an idea, and they expressed those ideas. Actually they had a flood of ideas, and, in effect, the whole engineering department depended on the creative energies of a tiny minority. That fellow on the left was working over a drawing when he had an idea for a new material which would make a better part, at less cost. The next day he worked on another part and realized that one of the manufacturing processes could be eliminated by a redesign. A fortnight later he saw how the company could save money by purchasing stock screws rather than tooling their own connections. All year long he kept seeing the same products and processes as the rest of the men in the room, but in them he saw problems, and then he thought up solutions to those problems. That man in the middle of

the room lost a blueprint one day, and he figured out a coding system so plans couldn't be misplaced so easily. He had a headache and suggested better lights over the drawing boards. Loaded down with work, he devised a new method of drawing designs; trying to arrange his own vacation, he came up with a better vacation schedule. During the year his pet peeves, irritations, frustrations led to new ideas. That fellow way back in the room went shopping with his wife one evening and sent in ideas on new markets for products the next morning. He met an amateur radio bug and realized how a tube his company manufactured could be adapted for ham radio use. He saw his wife make a ready-mix cake and had an idea for plastic packaging. Building a model plane with his son, he saw how one of the company's oldest products could have a new use in guided missiles. Everything he did set off a chain reaction which resulted in ideas. As the ideas from the three men came in to their bosses and filtered up through the company, these men became known for their ideas. They were known as idea men, men who cared about the job, men who were thinking all the time, men you could give tough problems to and expect results. When new jobs opened up, departments expanded, their selection was natural. Ideas set them apart from the hundreds of men who had the same advantages and disadvantages they did; ideas made the difference in their careers. Their ideas also made the difference between the company and its competitors; it swung the balance from loss to profit, from failure to success. Some of the ideas also made the difference in the defense of the free world. For example, the Air Force needed a new radar unit for a supersonic interceptor. One of the engineers had suggested a simple product which could be easily mass-produced. Because of his idea, their bid was by far the lowest. They got the job, made a handsome profit, but most important, the planes got the part in a hurry.

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