

# 9 Tips For Productive Brainstorming Meetings

**with Ben Stapley**

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Today, I wanted to give you **nine ways to ensure your brainstorming meetings pour down ideas.**

I don't know what your ideal workday looks like, but mine would be brainstorming meeting after brainstorming meeting. I feel most alive with marker in my hand a dry erase board behind my back and a room full of creatives in front of me ready to dream. But even though I'm wired for this type of work, sometimes it can feel just like that, work. Sometimes it can feel like a lot of effort and little effect. Over the years I've learned and unlocked a number of principles to maximize brainstorming meetings. Here are some of those principles.

Number one, **communicate the scope beforehand**. A lot of creatives are quick on their feet and love to spitball ideas. But not every creative person is wired this way. Not everyone develops their best ideas in the midst of a brainstorming meeting. Some thrive with time and thought, so make sure everyone is set up for success by communicating the scope beforehand. Let everybody know what the topic or topics will be discussed before you discuss them. This type of clear communication before the meeting aids folks who like plenty of time to mull over ideas.

Two, **think aspirationally before practically.** I once worked with a guy who would start brainstorming meetings with “Let’s start to dream.” He liked to run free before being penned in. Over the years I found myself applying this mindset. I usually like to start the meeting by asking my team what they want to do, not what they can do. If you start the discussion with what can be done, then you miss out on a number of ideas that probably could be done. This mindset also helps you and your team aim for the moon before your budget pulls them back to earth. Then when you do come up with that cosmic idea, it will have so much energy and enthusiasm around it that your team will probably find a way to pull it off.

Step three, **acknowledge the 9:1 ratio**. The 9:1 ratio is this, if 10 ideas suggested that nine will suck and only one will be good. Acknowledging this ratio up front empowers people to voice their many bad ideas to help them find their limited good ideas.



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**Brainstorm meetings are a vital part of any healthy team. But they can either be productive or tortorous! Think ahead, and use these 9 tips to plan and prepare better!**

## action**steps**

Notes don't change anything, actions do.  
So don't take notes, take actions!

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 20 evenly spaced horizontal grey lines across its entire width, providing a template for handwriting practice or general note-taking. The margins are consistent on all sides.

I often start a brainstorming meeting with of a couple of terrible ideas myself to model a safe environment for the rest of the team, and their terrible ideas.

Another way to explain and demonstrate this ratio is with the umbrella of grace. All ideas in this meeting, regardless of how outlandish or even stupid, are covered by the umbrella of grace. I've even pulled out an actual umbrella as a prop while explaining the concept. Then in the meeting, when an idea starts to get overly critiqued, I pull out the umbrella back and hold it over the team until reminded of the concept.

Four, **write down ideas**. The simple suggestion has a lot of benefits. First of all, it ensures no idea is missed throughout the meeting. I hate forgetting good ideas as I'm sure you do as well. Secondly, it allows the visual learners to keep track of what's been said. You want to make sure you engage all learning styles. Thirdly, writing down your ideas on a dry erase board enables you to cluster concepts and start developing themes.

This really helps when you need to start compiling action steps towards the end of the meeting. And lastly, it honors participation. People need to know you honor and value their ideas. A great and simple way to demonstrate this honor and value is by writing it down.

Five, **get a transcriber**. Ideas in a brainstorming meeting are similar to popcorn in the microwave. At first, they pop slowly, but as the creative temperature rises, the ideas start to explode at a quicker pace. A transcriber can record this frenzy of ideas.

This person ensures that all ideas are captured and none are missed during a burst of creativity. A transcriber plays another vital role. They release you from taking notes. Once you are freed from taking notes, you then have the fullest ability to lead the meeting. And then, you have the chance to keep those creative conversations at a heated level and start popping some corn.

Six, **generate ideas with rewards**. Capitalize on the desire to be rewarded in your brainstorming meetings. When you reward an idea it generates new ones. And the easiest way to do this is by rewarding idea by praise, but make sure to personalize this praise each time or it will feel forced. Another easy ways to reward ideas is by tossing out candy bars. I often times spend 10 bucks on a bag of fun size candy bars before every brainstorming meeting. Then every idea, no matter how good or bad, gets rewarded with a candy bar. The payoff in valuable ideas and a fun time.

You can also reward ideas with a high five. Now hear me out, it may feel juvenile running around a conference table high fiving folks, but once you start doing this people will crave the validation and start generating awesome ideas. Here is the last way to reward ideas. Keep a five dollar gift card of Starbucks in your back pocket. If there's an awesome idea, and I'm talking, not a home run, but a grand slam, then pull out the gift card and reward it right then and there. Next time you hold a brainstorming meeting, I guarantee you everyone will be swinging for the fences.

Seven, **meet earlier than needed.** In a brainstorming meeting you want everyone to be thinking about ideas not action steps. You want people thinking about the present not the future. The best way to keep people mentally engaged in the current conversation is to meet earlier than needed. The creative process is simple, you come up with an idea, and then you execute it. The longer you wait to begin coming up with ideas, the less ideas you will generate. Because, instead of thinking about ideas, your team will be thinking about execution.

So schedule your brainstorming meeting with plenty of time for execution. When your team knows they have time to deliver, the concepts that are generated, the burden of a deadline is lifted, and their minds are free to roam. If you think meeting in October is fine, then meet in September.

Eight, **crockpot, not a microwave.** This is one of my favorite concepts mainly because it involves food, and I like food. So here's the idea, the creative process is similar to serving up a delicious dish. Have you ever forgotten to defrost your turkey? If so, did you try to warm it up in the microwave on Thanksgiving morning? If you have, you know it wasn't a good idea. The same applies to the creative process. Slow cooking your ideas brings out the fullest flavors. Yes, you could microwave your concepts, but that just gets them warm and rubbery and tasting terrible. So instead, crockpot your concepts. Build your concepts slowly, giving them time, will allow them to fully develop.

Nine, **don't turn off the tap.** Don't turn off the idea tap once the meeting ends. At the end of the meeting, you may feel like you've squeezed the lemon dry, you haven't. You may feel like your creatives have nothing left to give, that is false. Creativity is a renewable resource. Ideas are infinite. So don't turn off the tap. Instead, send an email to the team in a couple of days asking for additional ideas that have surfaced. You and your creatives will be pleasantly surprised by the amount of ideas that come up post meeting. So don't turn off the tap.

## actionsteps