

Great Groups! - Getting a Group to Think Like a Genius

Wouldn't it be great to have an Edison or Einstein, or Mozart at your next meeting? If you had a genius at your meeting, do you think you might come up with better results? Let me be the first to tell you that those people won't be at your next meeting. But there are some things you can do as a facilitator - some techniques and tactics that you can use with the group that will help them work better. In this article you will learn some of the strategies of geniuses (adapted from *Thinking Like a Genius*, by Michael Michalko in the May 1998 issue of *The Futurist*), and how to apply them within any group you are working with.

Geniuses look at problems in many different ways

The key to this strategy is helping a group find new perspectives. Often a group gets "locked in" on one specific solution or cause. The goal should be to slow the group down and help them look at their situation from a variety of perspectives. Once a group has an initial approach, encourage them to stop and force a new perspective - force them to re-conceptualize the problem.

How To Do It

Once a group has settled in on an approach, encourage them to step out of the room. When they return, explain the concept of looking at the problem from another perspective. Ask the group to list three or more other perspectives that this situation could be viewed from. From that list, pick one for the group to reconsider the situation from. (If the group is large enough have sub groups work different perspectives.) The time spent in reviewing the situation from the new perspectives should be as rigorous as the first analysis. Once the group has completed their reanalysis, have them look at all of their results. At this point encourage them to make the best decision, given all the data they have at their disposal.

Geniuses make novel combinations

Sometimes geniuses don't come up with new ideas, but combine existing ones to make great advances.

How To Do It

Once a group has a variety of possible solutions (possibly by using some of the steps above), have them try to combine them, rather than just pick one. Spur them on with questions like:

- How could you do both A and B?

- How could you gain the benefits of both A and D, while minimizing the risks?

Geniuses force relationships

This may be the genius' biggest strategy of all, and one you can employ easily with groups.

How To Do It

Always have a few (or a lot) of disparate items on a list. At any time that a group is stuck, ask them to force a relationship between their problem to one of the items on your list. (You could also have pictures of the items, which might spur their creativity even further.) These relationships may be forced, and this may be where the breakthrough comes.

Note: Some groups or individuals will scoff at this idea as silly. Acknowledge this, but encourage them to try anyway. They may be very pleasantly surprised. Remember too, that the quality comes with quantity rule applies here. You may need to try more than one or two forced relationships before real progress is made.

Geniuses make their thought visible

This strategy is often put to use in group meetings, but only at the lowest level. Recording a group's work on a flipchart, or whiteboard, is a small step in this direction, but to take this to the next level (to the genius level!), you need to get more visual.

How To Do It

Have members of a group draw their solutions to a problem, or draw the results of implementing their solution. If you want to look at a variety of solutions at once, have sub groups do this for different scenarios. Focus the group(s) on making it visual and inclusive of their whole idea. The goal is to communicate, not wow the group with artistic abilities. Once the groups have completed their drawings, review all of them to see if new ideas, or combinations of ideas are found.

Geniuses think in opposites

Often it is very revealing to examine the opposite of your situation, or ask the opposite question.

How To Do It

Rather than having the group ask the direct question on their task, have them ask the opposite. For example, if the question

is, "How do we attract new Customers?", more new ideas and insights might come from asking, "How could we drive all of our Customers away?" With the answers to the opposite question, tactics and plans for avoiding this outcome can be developed.

Geniuses think metaphorically

Aristotle believed that metaphors were a sign of genius. If they were good enough for Aristotle, they should be good enough for us!

How To Do It

Have the group compare their situation to anything else (another place for your list mentioned above). The more metaphors (or analogies) the group can draw between their situation and these random items the better. The insights will flow from the discussion of these connections. You can also ask the group to tell you what they might compare the situation to, which is another method of initiating the metaphors.

Geniuses prepare themselves for chance

In a group situation, this most likely fits after a solution has been implemented. This "preparation for chance" will be enhanced by the willingness to do two things: admit mistakes, and spend time reviewing the results of the decision or solution.

How To Do It

After a decision is made, encourage the group to schedule time to review the results of the decision. Time might also be scheduled to discuss the process the group used for coming to the decision. By reflecting on the work and the results, often new ideas and improvements can be found. The decision to take this time is seldom the natural inclination of a group. Group dynamics are such that when the result or decision is made, the group is ready to "cross that item off the list", and move on. As a facilitator you can provide significant value by encouraging this review process.

Geniuses produce

One hallmark of geniuses is that they produced large quantities of work. The key in groups is this phrase: "The more ideas (or possible solutions) we produce, the more likely we are to produce a great idea." Geniuses not only produced large quantities of ideas from which their breakthroughs came, but

they also acted on those ideas. So Geniuses not only produce ideas, they produce action.

How to Do It

When the groups seems to have hit a lull in a brainstorming session, push them on to think of more ideas (perhaps combining this thought with other strategies on this list). Remind them that there is value in quantity and that often the best ideas come after the easy ones are already out. Challenge them to add more to the list.

Another way to use this strategy is to force the group to come up with a challenging goal of a number of ideas before beginning the brainstorming session. As the facilitator you need to make sure that the number is sufficiently large, to make sure it will be a challenge.

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