

In my line of work, travelling around the world to various meetings and conferences, I'm lucky enough to meet the senior management teams of a huge variety of successful companies in many different sectors. At one of these meetings recently, it occurred to me that some of these leaders may be striving a little too hard for perfection. Although I'm a firm believer in maintaining the highest standards in order to develop outstanding products, in some cases this constant quest for the ideal may be holding back their creative spirit.

One of the problems is that perfectionists tend to be 'left brain' people – it is this side of the mind that is logical, analytical and in some cases inflexible. There is undoubtedly a place for this type of thinking, but the question is, at what point does it begin to shut out creativity?

The original brainstorming model, invented by Sid Parnes and Alex Osborne back in the early 1990s while they were working at NASA, allows room for a perfectionist model of thinking. However, after becoming very clear and focused on the topic or question to be answered in the brainstorm, the next step in the process is to throw away any constraints, rules and barriers and be completely creative. At this stage literally anything goes, or as a young attendee at one of my speeches observed recently, it's an opportunity to 'freestyle'.

When many individuals go into a creative session they are already thinking with their left brain and being guided by their inner perfectionist. This means that they are creatively handicapped from the very outset.

Many of us are taught that there is only one right answer and that only right answers get rewarded. However, history is littered with outstanding contributions in many different areas and it's no surprise that the people responsible for these great ideas were also willing to make mistakes.

In order to be creative you have to be able to 'let go' in your own mind.

In a truly creative session, once you are clear on the aims you must be able to let go completely of any logic, fear, time constraints and the need to find a correct answer. Anything goes and there are no barriers, rules or right and wrong – there's just thinking.

For most people the creative process will involve continually judging each idea as it is proposed. But what we really need to do is relish illogical thinking and encourage and reward the 'anarchists' whose thought processes clash with mainstream ideas.

Brainstorming, as invented by Parnes and Osborne, is about building big lists and the only way you can build big lists is to let go of logic and in particular, judgment. One of the biggest enemies to our imagination and the ability to think differently is judgment. Every day we are judged by people and it moulds the way we think, often making it hard to accept new ideas for fear of ridicule or censure. Suspending judgment is the only way to see through the obvious and clichéd and come up with some genuinely innovative ideas.

### TREASURE THE TRIPE

Of course, while letting go of logic, judgment and the feeling of being comfortable, we also have to accept a massive amount of junk. But this is all part of the process and it is important to remember that one person's junk is another person's treasure. Although an idea may seem illogical or silly, it could well be a wonderful stepping stone for someone else's thought process. It is also vital not to judge your ideas before getting them out – they at least deserve to be written down. If you don't write ideas down, you're pretty much saying to yourself, 'My ideas aren't worth the time it takes to record them'. Because our brains don't differentiate easily between what's real and what's imaginary, if you tell yourself that you don't have good ideas, pretty soon you will start to believe it.

So once the ideas are out there, how do you start to judge them, bearing in mind that not all of them will be suitable for the particular



IN A TRULY CREATIVE SESSION YOU MUST BE ABLE TO LET GO OF ANY LOGIC, FEAR AND THE NEED TO FIND A CORRECT ANSWER. THERE IS NO RIGHT AND WRONG



**GARY BERTWISTLE** is Australia's new pioneer in creative thinking and has developed Australia's first creative thinking venue called The Vault. For more information go to [www.bluemooncreative.com.au](http://www.bluemooncreative.com.au)

Hear Gary speak at the talkleadership08 seminar on 7 May in London - for more information see [www.talkseminars.co.uk](http://www.talkseminars.co.uk)

project you are working on? How do you scrutinise them in order to find some that will really work? Naturally, it is important to judge all of your random thoughts and ideas subjectively, but this should not be done until you have really explored all of the many possibilities. Your best ideas will probably be among the last third you come up with, but how many you get from your creative session is very much up to the person facilitating the meeting. All I can say to guide you is that it's imperative that judgment takes place only once you are comfortable with the sheer number of ideas you have created.

When Osborne and Parnes invented the brainstorming model in their book *Applied Imagination*, they included Success Criteria and Evaluation as the second-to-last section. The model follows a set number of steps: first, be clear on the problem you are brainstorming; second, generate as many ideas as possible using different creative tools and stimulants; third, once you believe you have a sufficient number of ideas, narrow them down and come up with a top three or five, but at no time apply any success criteria. Finally, once you have your top ideas, judge them against the criteria required for them to best suit your outcome.

The problem in most organisations is that the management think it is their job to judge each idea as it is raised. But by doing this the best ideas are never really isolated and a lot of the potential of the participants can be missed. Judgment should be left until the very end of the creative session. Remember, it is easy to sink ideas, but a true creative spirit is one who is prepared to relinquish preconceived judgments in order to find new and exciting breakthrough ideas.

I firmly believe there is a place for perfection but it must come after you have found your great ideas – in fact great ideas come from letting go of perfection. By all means use your left brain to judge your ideas, but never forget it's your right brain that will discover them in the first place. This is the art of whole brain thinking. ■