



Getting started can be the hardest part of a brainstorm. Here's a two-step process for jump starting the flow of ideas.

The Rapid-Fire “Light Bulb Man” approach described here is not only a great way to kick off a session, but also can be useful in longer think-tanks to change up the pace of things and refresh the energy in the room. Use it to start any new line of exploration in longer brainstorms, perhaps two or three times throughout the session.

To learn about the three principles and five phases of Think Inside The Box” visit www.thinkinside.biz.



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Rapid-Fire Idea Generation

Getting started fast and effectively

STEP ONE: Short and Solo Ideation

Give your brainstorm participants one or more specific, probing questions designed to get at key aspects of your brainstorm topic. Give them one to two minutes to jot down as many ideas, insights, or associations in response to the question(s) as they can — *individually and silently*. You should prepare your questions in advance and avoid the overly broad, obvious or clichéd. (“How can we get more media attention?” is essentially useless, for example. “What surprised you the first time you tried Product X?” is far more productive.) Don’t underestimate the need to carefully plan the questions you use to start the exercise.

STEP TWO: Toss and Tell Rapid-Fire Sharing

Call time after two minutes. Explain that you’re going to toss out an object at random. (I use a rubber squeeze ball in the form of a faceless light bulb character with arms and legs. Not surprisingly, I call him “Light Bulb Man.”) Whoever catches it quickly tells the group at least one of the things they wrote down. If they like, they can share several or all of them. When the talker is done with his or her turn, he or she then tosses Light Bulb Man to someone else at random, and the process continues until everyone has gone and all ideas have been shared.

IMPORTANT ...

- **No Builds.** Absolutely key — and this is counterintuitive — is that *no one is to comment or build on the ideas as they’re shared*. The only person who gets to talk is the person holding Light Bulb Man. The objective is to get as many thoughts up on the flip chart as quickly as possible. Typically, with six to 10 participants, you should end up with 25 or so ideas in about 10 minutes — as many as 40 on a good day. Only *after* a rapid-fire round of Light Bulb Man should you go into more traditional building, combining and extended brainstorming. Remember, this is about building traction quickly at the start of a session. There will be a sort of pent-up energy of additional ideas that will pour forth as soon as you’re done with the rapid fire round and go into builds, which will drive even more momentum.
- **Anything Throws.** Obviously, you don’t have to use Light Bulb Man. Use anything you prefer or have handy as long as it won’t wound or shatter glass. Most people can’t throw or catch worth a darn around a conference table. That’s part of what makes this fun.
- **Keep it Moving.** Your job is to keep the talker-of-the-moment focused on stating the core idea and then moving on. This isn’t the time for details and depth. Get the idea out then get on with it. You also want to make sure everyone gets a turn. If you have participants on a speaker phone, make sure someone tosses Light Bulb Man to them too.

It’s easy to ignore this idea, but give it a try. People like the simple physical activity of it. They make fun of bad throws and bungled catches, and that laughing and joking relaxes bodies and minds, which creates an environment much more conducive to creativity than a somber discussion of “what can we do?”