Problem Solving: Become a Brainstormer

Brainstorming is a group-creativity technique designed to generate a large number of ideas to solve a problem. Alex Osborn, an advertising executive, popularized the technique in the 1930s. In addition to identifying a large number of ideas, the process enhances teamwork, encourages buy-in, and improves the morale of the group. There are four basic guidelines for brainstorming, intended to stimulate the generation of new ideas.

- **Focus on quantity—the more the better.** The assumption is that the more ideas, the greater the chances of producing an effective solution.
- **No criticism—all ideas are good.** Participants are encouraged to “piggyback” on ideas and are expected to be supportive.
- **Crazy ideas are welcome.** To get a long list of ideas, unusual ideas are expected to be the mainstay. These crazy ideas often lead to a unique, one-of-a-kind idea that may be the solution because old assumptions were set aside.
- **Combine and improve ideas.** Great ideas come from taking one idea and combining it with another. This is one of the benefits of conducting a brainstorming session in a small group.

Review these rules and put them to use. People sit in a semicircle around a whiteboard or flip chart where a facilitator (or you) quickly captures all the ideas so that everyone can see them during the process. Usually 10 to 15 minutes is ample time. It depends on how many people are in your group and how lively the brainstorming session is!