



"Yes, And" Your Way to a Brilliant Brainstorm

Exploring new ideas is essential to our work. New ideas help us overcome obstacles, navigate the unexpected, and envision what is possible. That's why so many meetings contain brainstorming. But not all brainstorms are created equal.

It can be challenging to cultivate an environment where your team is inspired, motivated, and safe enough to contribute their most creative, off-center, imaginative, and outside-the-box ideas. Yet, these are the kind of ideas that most help us change for the better.

This is where the central tenet of improvisation, "yes, and," comes in handy. The premise of "yes, and" is that we build brilliant things together. We make the most out of our creativity when we let a person's idea land on us (that's the "yes"), then we build upon it (that's the "and").

Sounds simple enough, but saying "yes, and" takes some practice. All too often, saying "no" is our default. We worry that we will get sidetracked by an idea that feels off-the-mark, so we nip it in the bud:

Colleague: We could have our volunteers do guest blogging.

*You: **No.** That's too much to coordinate.*

End of brainstorm.



When we do this, we are forgetting that time is just one of our many valuable resources. So, while we might be saving 3 minutes in *this* meeting, we aren't capitalizing on the creativity and possibility in the room.

Even if you are pretty sure you don't want to land on your colleague's idea, if you squash it during the brainstorm, it will have a chilling effect on the room. No one wants to share their ideas (especially the ones they care about) in an environment of squashing. *(Please scroll down to continue reading.)*

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"Yes, And" Your Way to a Brilliant Brainstorm (cont.)

Often the first step past "no" is trickier than we think. We end up saying something along the lines of "yes, but." You desperately want to say yes, *but part of your brain can't resist kiboshing an idea you don't love:*

Colleague: What if we have our volunteers do guest blogging?

*You: **Yes,** that could be cool for the blog, **but** it's too much to coordinate right now. Maybe we should focus on the newsletter?*

Colleague: umm... ok.

(Sound of air going out of a balloon)

“Yes, but” is just a friendlier-sounding “no.” Nobody is going to be fooled by a “yes, but”. Your team won’t offer their ingenuity if they don’t feel heard and supported.

Here’s what a yes, and really looks like:

Colleague: My idea is to have our volunteers do guest blogging.

*You: **Yes, and** we could offer a few story-based prompts to inspire them.*

*Colleague: **Yes, and** we can re-purpose this content in the newsletter!*

*Another colleague: **Yes, and** we could email Kirsten at the Goodman Center to ask for tips!*

Wow! See what amazing ideas happen when we Yes, And? Ok, seriously, the power of “yes, and” happens when you muster up all the enthusiasm you can find and build joyfully off of your colleagues’ suggestions. Let go of critical voices - you can make time for assessing the viability of the ideas later - because you will miss out on unexpected, outside-the-box brilliance if you stifle contributions too soon.

So, is “Yes, and” a powerful meetings tool to unlock the potential in each of us, while fostering a work environment where each person feels heard and valued? Yes, and I hope you start using it today.



About Us

This edition of *free-range thinking* was written and edited by Kirsten Farrell and Madi Goff. To read back issues, download free publications, and to learn more about our work, please visit www.thegoodmancenter.com.

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