

Capture your Genius

**(OR WHY YOU DON'T GET
YOUR BEST IDEAS
IN A BRAINSTORM)**

When did you last have a really good idea? Don't say you've never had one – of course you have!

It might have been something related to work, or perhaps to a home project or an organisation you support.

Perhaps you had a terrific idea about how you could work better with other people, or an idea for developing the business. Perhaps you thought of a new way of pitching to clients, or presenting a report to your colleagues or other departments.

Now, I want you to close your eyes, and think back to where you were when you had that "flash of inspiration". What were you doing when the idea struck you? Where exactly were you?

I'd bet that you didn't say "in a brainstorm" or "concentrating on the problem". In fact, it's unlikely you were thinking about the problem at all.

You're much more likely to have had that flash of inspiration when you were lying in bed, or in the car or out running, or talking to a colleague about something completely unrelated to the 'problem' your idea solved.

Over the last couple of years, I have asked that question to hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people attending my Headsurfing™ Workshops, or at conferences at which I've been a speaker. Of all the people I've asked, only a few (fewer than ten!) have said "I was in a brainstorm meeting".

Here's the "Top Ten" – the most common answers from top to bottom.

- In bed
- In the bath or shower
- Driving my car
- On a train
- Out walking or playing golf
- Meeting/talking about another issue
- Reading a book or magazine
- While exercising or out running
- In the pub
- In a brainstorm about the issue

From my research, it would seem that actually concentrating on the problem or the issue doesn't help us come up with ideas.

Incidentally, it also explains that annoying experience we've all had when we ask a colleague to help solve a problem. You know what I'm talking about – they suddenly exclaim "I've got it!"

You say "Brilliant - an idea to help me?", only for them to mumble apologetically "No – but I HAVE had a great idea about another problem I've been trying to solve for the last three days!"

Why does that happen?

We all know our brains are the most incredible resource – far more complex, 'intelligent' and capable than any computer. However, research into the way the brain works – how we think, how we generate ideas – has discovered that when we're concentrating, we only use a tiny percentage of our brain's thinking power. When we're working hard trying to come up with ideas, we only engage the Conscious brain. And incredibly, it is thought that the Conscious brain represents less than 8% of the brain's total 'power'. No wonder we get stuck for ideas!

Of the remainder of the brain, approximately another 10% is what some people call the "Reptilian" brain. This is the function of the brain which keeps us alive. It runs the body's "operating system" – keeps us breathing, blinking, salivating, and ensuring the muscles in our blood vessels and heart help pump the blood round our veins and such like. It also 'controls' our reflexes, and our natural processes of repair and recuperation. These are all the vital and necessary body functions we don't need to think about – and which we can't override.

The rest of your brainpower – incredibly, more than 82% – is your subconscious mind.

You'll see from this that your subconscious mind is more than ten times more powerful than your conscious mind. But the problem is that while we're awake, and engaged, and concentrating and trying hard to think, our conscious mind 'overpowers' our subconscious.

So when we're trying to contribute to a brainstorm, or talking about a problem and concentrating attentively, our subconscious can't get a look in. But the brain, as we know, is a wonderful thing. It 'stores' the problem, and when we're drifting off to sleep, or gazing out of the window of a train, or running or driving or walking on 'automatic pilot', it allows the subconscious to take on the problem.

And of course, this means we're using a lot more than a tiny proportion of our brainpower. Now we're using more than eighty percent! That's why we get our ideas in bed, or in the bath. It's why those flashes of genius come not when we're in a brainstorm, but when we're in the park, or playing golf, or 'drifting off' when a colleague is talking. And by exploiting this knowledge, you can make sure you don't miss those great ideas your subconscious is giving you – as long as you Capture Your Genius.

Capture your genius

Tip number one – you are extremely unlikely to get a breakthrough idea while concentrating on the problem.

Does this mean I think brainstorm meetings are a waste of time? Not completely – they allow us to set the parameters of the issue or problem, and they allow us to pick off the 'low hanging fruit' ideas. These are the immediate thoughts we generate, which look good on first examination. When you think a bit more about them however, you'll find they are rarely innovative, powerful new answers to the problem. To get to new, innovative, breakthrough ideas, you need to engage your subconscious – and capture the ideas it will throw at you!

The major reason we don't generate new ideas at work is the way most companies and organisations run brainstorms. They tend to be uninspiring, the same people always there, too many people who are good at criticising new ideas – and less good at coming up with new, untried ideas themselves. No thought is given to engaging the subconscious – which means an awful lot of time is being wasted without really 'thinking'.

You can change this, however. Once you've had a look at the problem or the issue at hand, and understand the challenge and have an idea of what a successful solution would look like, you need to stop thinking!

Only when you stop concentrating will your subconscious get to work on the problem.

Tip number two – the idea will come to you when you do something else.

So go to work on another project, or even better, head out to the park, or a gallery, or the golf course or the gym! For once in your life, don't work through lunch with a sandwich at your desk – go to a coffee bar on your own, or take in an early evening movie or art exhibition, and just relax.

You don't even need to do this literally – simply switching off or daydreaming at your desk will do the trick. I'd suggest you tell the boss this is an important part of the creative process before you do this at work!

Tip number three – be prepared to capture your genius.

When the idea strikes, what have you done to prepare for it? I've been lucky enough throughout my career to work some of the most highly creative people in the country – writers, comedians, artists, and designers. All of them (or at least the successful ones) make sure they are ready to capture their great ideas wherever they might strike.

They ALWAYS carry a little notepad and pen. They have notebooks by the bed, by the kitchen sink, on the table halfway down the stairs. Many even have a Dictaphone™ in the car, so that they can capture their genius while driving.

Where will you be when your genius strikes next? And will you be prepared to capture it?



Kenny Harris