Reverse Brainstorming

30 minutes

Remote Focused

The group brainstorms ways to make a problem worse, then flips each bad idea into a fix. It's a quick way out when a team is stuck on the obvious answers. You leave with a list of what to avoid and a few new solutions to the original problem.

H HOW TO RUN

1 Name the problem — 3 min

Write the core problem or challenge at the top of the board as a question, for example "How do we improve customer satisfaction?" Say: "For the next few minutes we're going to make this as bad as we possibly can. The worse the idea, the better."

2 Reverse it — 2 min

Rewrite the question as its opposite, for example "How do we make our customers as unhappy as possible?", and post it beside the original.

3 Brainstorm the worst — 8 min

Ask everyone to write ways to cause or worsen the reversed problem, one per sticky note. Aim for quantity; absurd is fine.

4 Look for patterns — 5 min

Ask the group to read the notes and drag similar ones together. Circle any that describe something already happening.

5 Flip them — 7 min

Ask each person to take two or three negative notes, starting with the circled ones, and write the opposite of each as a possible solution on a note of the second colour.

6 Pick the strongest — 5 min

Ask everyone to place three dot votes on the solutions with the best mix of feasibility and impact. Name the two the group will take forward.

O OBJECTIVES

- Identify hidden problems and weaknesses
- Encourage unconventional thinking
- Break through creative blocks with a fresh angle

M MATERIALS

- ☐ Online whiteboard with sticky notes in two colours: one for the bad ideas, one for the flipped solutions
- ☐ Timer

P PARTICIPANTS

3 to 12 people

F FACILITATOR NOTES

REMEMBER

- Reverse brainstorming works when a team is stuck, and it doubles as a way to spot failures before they happen and plan around them.
- Generating truly bad ideas is harder than it sounds: if the first notes are polite, give one outrageous example of your own to show how far to go, and encourage the team to be bold and even a bit absurd.
- When flipping, skip the pure jokes and start with the notes circled as already happening; they turn into the most useful fixes.