



## Operations and Fulfillment

### **Brainstorming for Fun and Profit?**

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Mar 2, 2005 1:21 PM

If you recognize a need to create a process for innovation within your own company, then *Innovation at the Speed of Laughter: 8 Secrets to World Class Idea Generation* (Aerialist Press, 2005, ISBN: 0-9762184-0-2, \$24.95) may be just the tool you need. Author John Sweeney, owner of the satirical comedy theatre and school for improvisation Brave New Workshop Theatre in Minneapolis, has combined business insights and a passion for improvisation to write a book that shows how to help employees generate ideas, put them through a seven-step "creative funnel" to find the best ideas, builds a collaborative structure, and finally results in a marketable product.

Sweeney's technique assumes that an emphasis on the sheer quantity of ideas produced means that the best will rise to the top; that scheduling time to work on innovation automatically prioritizes the process; that the improvisational aspects of the process help everyone contribute and simultaneously encourage buy-in from employees; and the challenge, stimulation, and empowerment engendered by the process help companies retain their greatest asset: good people.

Here's a preview of the eight ideas of the title: 1. Accept all ideas. The more you start with, Sweeney says, the better the end product.

2. Defer judgment. It's important to provide an atmosphere of spontaneity that will help ideas grow.

3. Share focus and accept all styles. Spoken or written, give all participants an equal chance to propose their ideas.

4. Declarations. Facilitators need to ensure an atmosphere of creative safety in which people feel safe to say what they really mean during the actual process.

5. Create a status-free environment. Flatten the hierarchy so that there are no leaders, no followers, people are free to present their concepts in a status-free environment.

6. Create a reward system that recognizes innovation and creative risk-taking. Reward participation in the process, not the final result.

7. Yes, first! Use this phrase instead of its opposite, "No, but." Following the structure of improvisational comedy, one person states an idea, then a second affirms the idea and builds on it.

8. Perceiving change as fuel. Innovators embrace change. Try to get your employees to use their energy to live in the moment, enjoy the possibility of excitement related to change, and not use their energy worrying about future variables.