How to Brainstorm

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It's hard to draw a line between work and play at Tiltfactor, the interdisciplinary lab dedicated to game design and research. Film and media studies professor Mary Flanagan brought Tiltfactor to Dartmouth from Hunter College in 2008 to explore creative ways of enacting social change. "We aim to develop games that are fun and also do great stuff for the world," says Seidman. A big part of game design is the brainstorming process, he notes. Here are his tips to bolster your own brainstorming performance.

GET AWAY

"Don't just mentally search for inspiration in the ideation process—make it physical. Going to new places and getting out of a routine can help your mind think outside the box as well. Some of my best work has been a product of changing my environment, and I'm constantly on the search for new places. It's not about the actual location, but instead about the unfamiliarity. I used this strategy to brainstorm three games: Pathways, Gut Check and Bill of Health. I drain places of their resources though. Soon I will have to travel outside of Hanover to have any good ideas."

BE DERIVATIVE

"Read voraciously in the subject matter you're interested in: Observe it, draw it, listen to it. One of Tiltfactor's bestselling games, Awkward Moment, is essentially the same concept as Apples to Apples, with a twist. Instead of pairing random words together as in Apples to Apples, players of Awkward Moment are challenged to play Reaction cards in response to Moment cards, which describe awkward social situations. For example, one says, 'You see your friend walking down the street toward you so you wave like crazy. It turns out it's not her.'"

STAY POSITIVE

"At Tiltfactor we have every team member brainstorm three to five concepts to pitch and then discuss them as a team. Instead of saying 'No, I don't like that idea,' say, 'Yes, *and we could also*....' Riffing off, rather than dismissing, ideas creates a positive and generative environment. It will inevitably generate a lot of ridiculous ideas, but that's a necessary step in generating good ideas. Even if the original ideas don't work out, they often generate new inspiration. You never know if things are going to work until you try them."

KEEP IT OPEN

"Constrain your ideas as little as possible. At Tiltfactor our ideas must address the topic at hand and be fun, but otherwise we try to leave things open. We are media agnostic—we will design digital or card or board games or apps, depending on what is most appropriate for the project. We recently considered programmable jewelry as a way to interest girls in computer science. Brainstorming with people from diverse backgrounds and perspectives is also helpful—the Tiltfactor team includes media and film, research, graphic design, management and computer science backgrounds."