

Predictions for the Future

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Futurist Blake Godkin explained that a futurist is someone who helps others to make decisions based on the effects those decisions will have. Decisions are usually based on experience, but if instead people look to the future and base decisions on what would be best, their decisions will be more successful.

Futurists look at trends and scenarios and use such tools as brainstorming to forecast what might happen. Creativity is the bedrock of futurist thinking, and creative brainstorming is a “very dynamic forecasting tool”, Godkin said. There are four guidelines for successful brainstorming: defer judgment, strive for quantity, make associations, and strive for novelty.

To defer judgment, all evaluation—both negative and positive—is withheld until the brainstorming is over. The group

should generate ideas first and evaluate them together afterward. “Your brain is a lot like a car in the way of efficiency—you can’t hit the brake and the gas at the same time and expect to get anywhere,” Godkin said. “If you slam on the gas and drive the car down the highway, you’re going to get a lot more efficiency than in stop and go traffic.”

Attendees broke into small groups to participate in exercises exemplifying the four guidelines of brainstorming. For practice in deferring judgment, Godkin displayed a sketch, and members of each group listed what came to mind when they looked at it, without passing judgment on any suggestions.

Attendees next explored striving for quantity. Godkin said that the more ideas there are, the more innovative potential there will be. People usually expect to give only one idea, but they should generate multiple ideas to explore all possibilities. Attendees tried to come up with as many ideas as possible in the given time when Godkin displayed a second sketch.

In the third guideline, making associations, people “piggyback on” or “jump off” other people’s ideas. When a person in the group expresses an idea, it can trigger other ideas. Godkin said that true creativity does not happen in a vacuum and that making associations by combining seemingly unrelated things is a good way to be innovative and generate novelty. In the

exercise, one group member gave an idea, and other group members used it as a starting point to come up with other ideas. For example, an idea string might start with a sketch of a rectangle, and suggestions could begin with “building” and continue with “office”, “computer”, “mouse”, “cat”, and so on. Piggybacking can bring new ideas to the table.

In explaining the fourth guideline, striving for novelty, Godkin said that the only thing we know for sure about the future is that we’re going to need novelty and “massive amounts” of creativity to succeed. He said we need to think “wild and crazy” to come up with new ideas; many popular inventions of today started as what people thought were “crazy ideas”. To practice, members of the groups were to focus on looking for novelty when brainstorming about the sketch. Godkin challenged everyone to be creative and find new ways of looking at it.

As a closing exercise, the groups used all four guidelines to come up with innovative ways to communicate science. Some of the ideas generated included billboards, graffiti, coffee cups, rap songs, candy wrappers, skywriting, bumper stickers, and cereal boxes. 🔥