



# How to be an Idea Guru

U.S. DEPARTMENT  
OF INNOVATION,  
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*BRYAN MATTIMORE*

PLEASE NOTE: The following is a transcript of the introductory workshop for the Department of Innovation's, How to be an Idea Guru program, held from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM on April 1, 2018 at the Department of Innovation's Training Center in Washington, DC. The Presenter is Dannel Malloy, Secretary of the Department of Innovation. The Guest Speaker is Bryan Mattimore, Cofounder and Chief Idea Guy at The Growth Engine Co.

I would like to welcome all of you who are here in person, and the other 5,300 of you who are viewing this workshop on-line. This is the Department of Innovation's kick-off meeting for the Idea Guru training program. My name is Dannel Malloy, and I am the Secretary of the Department of Innovation. As most of you know, the Department of Innovation was created in early 2017 to deliver the new administration's promise to restore the greatness of American ingenuity to every institution within our society. Our mission is to "pioneer, popularize, and promote the application of state-of-the-art ideation and innovation processes to generate new ideas for the benefit of our citizens, our institutions, and the U.S. economy."

I want to congratulate all of you for being a part of this ground-breaking innovation initiative. By being accepted into the Idea Guru program, you have been acknowledged as a creative pioneer. With your training as world-class ideation and innovation process facilitators, this administration is hoping to exponentially increase the quality and number of ideas and innovations that America, its citizens, and its institutions create in the next twenty years. The ideas you will help create will not be limited to new inventions or scientific discoveries. You will be asked to design and facilitate group ideation and creative problem solving sessions on every imaginable business, societal, and organizational challenge. One week you might be leading a session to generate innovative cost-cutting ideas for the military, the following week inventing new, better-tasting sugar free cookies for a major U.S. cookie manufacturer, and in yet another week looking for ways to improve customer service at a state motor vehicle department.

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We have a thought-provoking and fun program planned for you today. To give you an overview of the content of your ideation and innovation training, and what the requirements will be for successfully completing the six-month Idea Guru training program, let me introduce Bryan Mattimore, Cofounder of the Growth Engine Company. Bryan's book, *Idea Stormers: How to Lead and Inspire Creative Breakthroughs*, published five and one-half years ago in September of 2012, was both the inspiration and the blueprint for the design of this course, and the seven modules that are the heart and soul of the Idea Guru training are covered in his book. I know that many of you have already read it, but if you haven't I hope you will. Please join me in welcoming Bryan Mattimore.

*(Wild, deafening Applause)*

Thank you Secretary Malloy!

Let me begin by asking you all a simple question. "How many of you are creative?" For those here live, please respond using the keypad on the back of the chair in front of you. For those of you on line, please check one of the three boxes on your webinar page:

1. "Yes, I'm creative."
2. "I'm not sure if I'm creative or not."
3. "No, I'm not creative."

I'll give you a second for you to record your answer and for the summary of the survey results to appear on our computer.

Alright, the results are in. Approximately 31% of you say you are creative. 64% of you say you are not sure. And 5% said you are not creative.

Lesson number one for 69% of you is that it is critically important that you define yourself as creative. Why? Because being creative is, to a large extent, a self-fulfilling prophecy. Creativity is less about being a creative genius and very much more about persistence. We are all born creative. Unfortunately, when confronted with a creative challenge, those of us who no longer think of ourselves as creative invariably give up too soon.

Why? Because we are “not creative!” Conversely, those who see themselves as creative keep working a creative challenge until they get a creative answer. It's that simple.

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Let's now turn to the seven creative modules. You'll see on this slide the title of each module, as well as how much time each we'll be devoting to it in your six-month training as an "Idea Guru."

1. **Seven Creative Mindsets** (Two weeks)
2. **The Seven Greatest Ideation Techniques** (Two weeks)
3. **Different Techniques for Specific Creative Challenges** (Five weeks)
4. **A Practical Innovation Process** (Two weeks)
5. **How to Invent New Ideation Techniques** (One week)
6. **How to Design and Facilitate Ideation Sessions** (Ten weeks)
7. **The Idea Guru as Teacher** (Two weeks)

I want to briefly explain what each module is, and why it will have such critical role in your training as a world-class ideation and innovation facilitator.

## Module 1: Seven Creative Mindsets (Two weeks)

The best ideation-session facilitators are themselves creative, so in this module we will cover seven critical creative mindsets that can help you realize your creative potential. Today, I'll mention just one of these mindsets: principle-finding/principle transfer.

What's principle-finding/principle transfer? Research into the history of invention has shown that this is the mindset inventors use most often to create a new invention. Let's do a multiple choice test to demonstrate this mindset:

One of the following four multiple choice answers is correct. Can you guess which one? Samuel Colt's inspiration for the six shooter revolver was:

1. a pitchfork he saw thrown into the side of a barn
2. a ship's wheel
3. the musical score from Amazing Grace
4. six buttons he saw on a military officer's coat

Please record your votes, and we'll see how the group does.

Okay, here are the results:

5% of you said it was the pitchfork into the side of a barn.

82% said a ship's wheel.

2% said the musical score to amazing grace, and

11% said the six buttons on a uniform.

The correct answer is a ship's wheel, which more than four out of five of you got right.

So how did you do it? I'm guessing that in your mind's eye, you visualized the six shooter pistol.

You also visualized the ship's wheel. Then, you made the connection between the rotating

spokes of a ship's wheel, and the rotating bullet chambers on a six-shooter revolver. Am I right?

You just exhibited the creative thinking mindset of principle finding/principle transfer.

The point of this example is to convince you that you already know how to be creative.

You just have to rediscover the talent that you may have lost over the years.

*“ You already know how to be creative. You just have to rediscover the talent that you may have lost over the years.*

## Module 2: The Seven Greatest Ideation Techniques (Two weeks)

In my lifetime, I have facilitated over 1000 ideation sessions for every conceivable kind of business challenge. All this designing and facilitating of ideations sessions showed me, after much trial and error, that there are:

1. certain brainstorming, or what we call ideation techniques, that will work better than others for addressing different kinds of business challenges; and that
2. these techniques consistently help teams generate a large number of high-quality ideas.

Some ideation techniques simply seem to work better than others. This module covers seven of the all-time best ideation techniques: what they are, as well as when and how to use them. Think of these seven easy-to-learn techniques as your basic toolbox for all of the idea-generation sessions you will be designing and facilitating.

One of these techniques is the exact opposite of the best technique you could ever imagine.

For those who have read *Idea Stormers*, you've probably already guessed that I'm talking about the Worst Idea technique. Instead of trying to get a group to come up with good ideas, ask them to create bad ideas, terrible ideas, the worst ideas they can think of. That's step one.

Then you ask them either to reverse the worst idea, or to consider that how it could inspire a good idea. It's a lot of fun to facilitate this technique, especially if you have a group of cynical people in your ideation session. They love this technique! And no one ever takes offense when you tell them that their idea is not bad enough!

The surprising thing about the Worst Idea technique is that when we analyzed the results of our ideation sessions, it's almost always one of the most productive in the number and quality of the breakthrough ideas it generates. Even though it may sound silly, it's a very effective technique!

## **Module 3: Different Techniques for Specific Creative Challenges (Five Weeks)**

This is the first module where you'll feel yourself moving from interested student to a true ideation-facilitation expert. You'll notice that this module is more than twice as long, five weeks, as either of the previous two modules. You'll not only be learning new techniques, you'll also get a much better understanding of which techniques might have the greatest chance of succeeding for a specific kind of creative challenge. So, for instance, if you've been asked to facilitate a strategic planning session you will want to use strategy ideation techniques like Questioning Assumptions, Company Takeover, and Positioning Continuums. If you are facilitating a new product ideation session, you'll use Semantic Intuition, and Triggered Brainwalking. And if you're

leading a branding, advertising or promotion idea-generation session, you'll use Headliner, Picture Prompts, and Target Market Wishing. We'll spend a great deal of time on this in the training, but for now, all you need to know is that different techniques will work better for specific kinds of business challenges. These distinctions will be critical since, as a certified Idea Guru, you will be called on to design and facilitate a wide variety of sessions.

## Module 4: A Practical innovation Process (Two weeks)

This module will train you in a process that organizations can use to successfully innovate, and bring new ideas to market. If a company asks you to go beyond your initial role of ideation session facilitator, and wants you to help them develop, say a new product idea—and all that entails: name, package, price/value, positioning, promotion and advertising, etc.—this two-week module will prove invaluable. This iterative process is easy to learn, and it's been shown to increase new product success rates from the traditional 10% to 20% to as high as 70% or 80%. The simple but profound idea behind this process is that the new product development teams must continually go back to the consumer (or customer) to evolve and refine all the elements of the new product mix until all the elements come together in an integrated and compelling way. It takes time and creativity and persistence and passion to get all the elements to work seamlessly together.

## Module 5: How to Invent New Ideation Techniques (One week)

In this module, you become a true master of ideation process by learning how to customize and invent your own ideation techniques to address unique, or specialized, creative challenges. There are five strategies for inventing new ideation techniques: Matching Like-to-Like Stimuli, Combining Techniques, Going to Extremes, Using the 5 W's, and Creating a Success Footprint. These strategies are not hard to learn, and they really work. This is the most purely imaginative and the most intellectually compelling section of the entire course.

So, for instance, let's say you've been asked to create an ideation technique to help a company invent new automotive hoses. If you were to use the "Matching Like-to-Like Stimuli" strategy, you might think to use inventions that were "like" an automotive hose, but at the same time different enough to inspire something new and original. To find these similar but different inventions, you could search the U.S. Patent database with key words such as "hose," or "air flow," or "suction," and select abstracts of patents containing these words while at the same time making sure they were not an automotive hose invention. So, maybe it's a new, more efficient "airflow passage" from a hairdryer, or a building's uniquely-designed "air duct system," or even an innovative new "suction wand" from a vacuum cleaner that could be used to inspire a new automotive hose invention.

We're only able to devote one week to this module, but with your other training and the fact that you're already so creative, we think you can master these creative thinking strategies in a short time. You're all creative right?

*“ Become a true master of ideation process by learning how to customize and invent your own ideation techniques to address unique, or specialized, creative challenges*

## **Module 6: How to Design and Facilitate Ideation Sessions** (Ten weeks)

The first thing you'll notice about this module is that it is twice as long as any other module in the training, a full 10 weeks. The first two of these ten weeks will be spent watching twenty-four hours of instructional videos. These videos show trained ideation facilitators leading a wide variety of real-world ideation sessions. There are highlights from 48 different ideations sessions in all.

The goal of these videos is to teach you the basic how-to's of group ideation facilitation: Things like not using the word “I” when you are facilitating, asking participants to “headline an idea” when they start rambling, or how to use leading questions to evolve a good idea into a great one. To make this section even more fun, we've made it into an adventure game we call Facilitator Quest—where you can't advance to the next level until you get the right answer. I think you're going to really love it.

The remaining eight weeks of this module you get to practice—with real world challenges—what you've learned in the previous three and one-half months of training. Each of you will be required to facilitate six half-day ideation sessions: Three will be for non-profits and three will be with for-profit organizations. Each ideation session will address a different creative challenge, and you will be responsible for both designing and facilitating all six sessions. So our group of 5,500 Idea Gurus-in-training will be facilitating over 30,000 ideation sessions with more than 250,000 session participants during this eight-week period!

## Module 7: The Idea Guru as Teacher (Two weeks)

The inspiration for this final module came from something a good friend once said to me. “You know,” she said, “no matter what else they do, all the good ones teach!” I’m not sure I have ever heard anything quite as profound.

In this module we’ll be asking you to be our teacher; and share with us your creative ideas for making this training better for those who come behind you. We’ve created a variety of forums to facilitate idea-sharing: on-line chat rooms for each module, interactive suggestion boxes, affinity groups, in-person and online Idea Guru Clubs... use whatever you feel most comfortable using. But remember, to be a true Idea Guru, you must be a teacher—of yourself, of others, and of us. Let me turn it over to Secretary Malloy for a final thought. (Applause)

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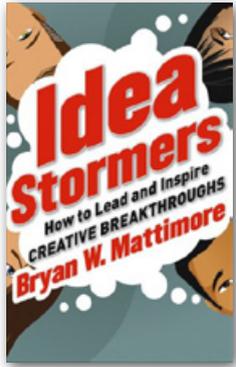
Thank you Bryan! I thought I would end today by sharing with you the new tagline for the Department of Innovation. In the weeks and months ahead this tag-line will appear on highway billboards, online, and even on T-shirts. And yes, if you're curious, you will all get free t-shirts. I just happen to have one here!

You can see there's a question at the top of this t-shirt: "Need a New Idea?" And below the D-o-I logo, is the answer: "Do I!" Everybody's been calling the Department of Innovation, "Do-I" anyway, so we used it in our tagline. What do you think? We hope you like it, because all of you will be in the vanguard of these efforts, and when people think "why, yes, I could use a new idea," you'll be the ones facilitating it.

We're looking forward to working with you in the months and years ahead to help our country rekindle the spirit of American ingenuity that has always made us great, and will propel us into the future as global innovation leaders!

**Congratulations, Idea Gurus! And Good Luck! 🍀**

# Info



**BUY THE BOOK** | Get more details or buy a copy of [Idea Stormers](#).

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR** | Bryan W. Mattimore is president and co-founder of The Growth Engine Company, LLC, an innovation agency based in Norwalk, Connecticut. In the last 25 years, Bryan has facilitated over 1000 brainstorming sessions, moderated over 500 creative focus groups, and managed over 200 successful innovation projects for a wide variety of Fortune 500 clients. He is the inventor of the creativity training game, Bright Ideas.

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