

METHOD OF ANALOGIES*

Method of Analogies is a “brute force” idea generation technique that exploits what Edward de Bono refers to as “lateral thinking” – the ability to bypass a blockage or dead end in our thinking through “random stimulation” that shifts our thinking into a new pattern.

Suppose we are trying to improve patient satisfaction with the waiting time in a hospital emergency room. We have analyzed all the steps involved, and are now looking for some radical new ideas to improve our interaction with and responsiveness to patients. The improvement team is meeting and needs a fun way to generate new ideas. The approach entails stating your challenge or problem, choosing a random word or phrase, listing attributes associated with *that* thing, then forcing a connection between each attribute and a solution to your challenge. See example below:

Procedure for Method of Analogies

1. State Challenge: Improve patient satisfaction with the waiting time in a hospital emergency room.
2. Choose random word: *Star Wars Jedi*
3. List attributes (Prompt with questions: What is it like? What does it do? What does it say? What does it have?):

<u>List Attributes a Random Word:</u> Star Wars Jedi	<u>Force a Connection</u>	<u>Implications for Challenge / Solution</u>
• Trained in martial arts	—————→	Train employees to welcome patients, perceive their needs
• Use lightsabers	—————→	Give patients a device like restaurants do that lights up when they're ready to be seen
• Use “The Force” to move objects	—————→	Make furniture movable to cluster patients and family members
• Use “Jedi mind tricks” to make people do what they want	—————→	Listen carefully, train employees in empathy skills to know what patients want them to do
• Travel in space ships with warp drive	—————→	Find ways so that sicker patients with urgent needs can “jump” ahead in waiting line
• Command droids like R2D2 to help them	—————→	Provide special computer screens for patients or staff to answer questions, access records, expedite check-in
• Use C3PO to translate droid language	—————→	Provide translators for non English speaking patients
• Say, “May the Force be with you!”	—————→	Provide scripting for key patient-staff interactions
• Blow up the giant Death Star	—————→	Personalize the interaction with patient, lose feel of “big institution”

Here are some random words you might select from. If the first word or phrase you’ve chosen doesn’t produce solutions, try another:

Bag Ladies	Dung Beetles	Termites	Pet Shops
Monopoly Game	Disco Dancers	Buck Rogers’ Rocket Belt	Star Wars Jedi
Flying Saucers	Loch Ness Monsters	Holy Grail Quest	Police Cars
Cowboys	Aircraft Carriers	Costume Parties	Airports
Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts	Big Foot Creatures	Drag Races	Ethnic Restaurants
Indian Swami	Shamans	Pirates	Ghostbusters
Camping Trips	Surfers	Fig Newton	Witches
Magicians	Harley Hogs	Harry Potter	Football Games
Cable Guys	Organic Farmers	Air Pumps	Séances
Erector Sets	Vampires	Plumbers	Scuba Divers

* Adapted from “BruteThink” method in Michael Michalko’s *Thinkertoys* (2nd Edition), Berkeley: 10-Speed Press, 2006.