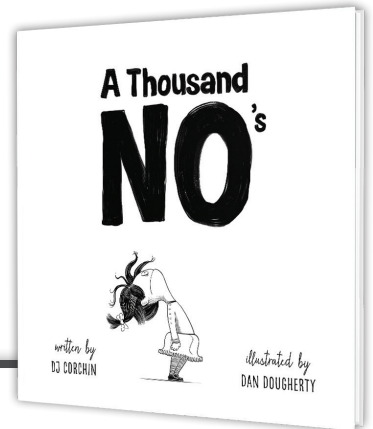




A Professional Guide for A Thousand NO's

By DJ Corchin and
illustrated by Dan Dougherty



The concept of **A Thousand NO's** is not just about dealing with rejection. It's about not seeing it as rejection to begin with and understanding that critical feedback and overcoming obstacles are essential to the creative process. In fact, without it, your idea can't be as good. It's a metaphor for embracing collaboration while giving yourself permission to not have all the answers.

Establishing a culture that thrives on using the best ideas from multiple perspectives produces physiological safety, team ownership of a project, and team members who get excited about their peers' opinions. Teams should see NO's as building blocks to their success that can both build up to a YES and be explored to uncover one as well.

Perseverance within the creative process can often be described as not listening to the naysayers and believing you have a great idea regardless of others' opinions.

A Thousand NO's is the opposite.

It's about not letting your expectation of what you think something **SHOULD** be get in the way of perceiving what it **COULD** be. It's about keeping your eyes and ears open.

THIS GUIDE:

This guide is designed to be just that: a guide. The questions are meant to be open discussion starters to help your group talk about working together to innovate. The "answers" provided are there to help provide direction if needed. Each theme should be explored in context of where the group is comfortable.

Let's define "NO" in the context of this book. "NO" is not just getting turned down or rejected. The author defines it as the following:

- The information gained from getting turned down or rejected, whether told directly why or extracted from the scenario. (Example: Your project idea was rejected by numerous leaders for completely different reasons. You might extract that your project's purpose was not clearly presented or was too broad.)
- Feedback that is considered constructive and would require a change to the original idea.

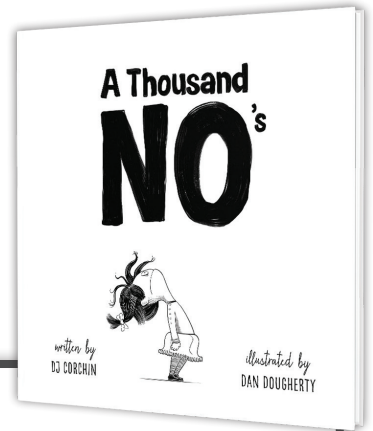
A THOUSAND NO'S THEMES:

1. NO's are inevitable and part of a thoughtful process.
2. Don't let your expectations get in the way of your perception.
3. Brainstorming is an essential and learned team skill.
4. The more inclusion there is in the process, the more diversity there is in the product.



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PRE-WORK:

Think about and come prepared to discuss:

1. Professional experiences where you did not feel heard when expressing ideas.
2. A team project you led where everyone had different ideas.
3. A time when your own expectations might have been an obstacle in accomplishing a goal.
4. An idea you have about something not related to your current job. It can be a creative idea, an invention, a concept, etc.

READ A THOUSAND NO'S TOGETHER

The Inevitable NO's

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS PART 1

1. **What do you think the meaning of the last page is?**
Look for answers such as "We get better as we learn from our failures," "Working with others can be helpful," etc. Let the conversation happen naturally and assess where the team's mindset is to begin with.
2. **What feelings can the word NO elicit in someone? How can those feelings change based on the relationships involved?**
Look for answers that discuss trust and intention.
3. **When can NO feel good? When can NO feel bad?**
4. **When has an idea been made better because of constructive feedback?**
Encourage personal examples, as well as individuals' feelings throughout receiving and using the constructive feedback.
5. **Have you ever quit a project or idea because an idea wasn't received well? Did you know the reason why it wasn't received well?**
Look for answers that involve ego or personal pride that possibly got in the way. Foreshadow the theme around expectations getting in the way.
6. **Has anyone been part of a project when everyone agreed on everything? If no, why not?**
7. **Was there ever a time you were surprised by specific, critical feedback you received? Were you ever surprised by who it came from?**
Look for answers involving individuals they trusted who gave them surprising negative feedback. How did they take it? Did it change their opinions of their peers?

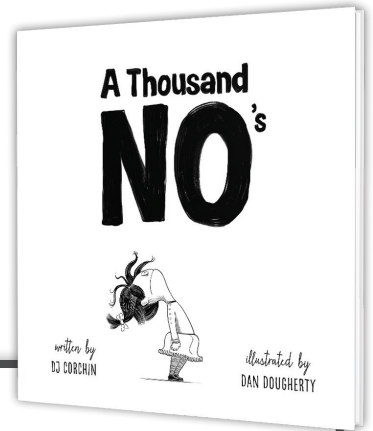
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS PART 2

1. **What can constructive feedback look like?**
Look for answers like a performance review, a random comment, comments like "It's terrible" or "I don't like that." There are many ways to deliver feedback. There are also many different tools, most directing teams to use specific feedback, especially when it's constructive, as it's the easiest to correct and the sting doesn't last as long. Many organizations use one form or another of a



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feedback grid. The author of *A Thousand NO's* agrees that specific feedback is the best, but is also stating that there is something to be learned from all feedback, specific or general. It's the recipient's job to search for the "learn" if it's not presented. (See definitions of "NO" in the first section)

2. What part of the creative process does critical feedback belong in?

Look for answers discussing that it's part of the entire process. Discover examples of critical feedback in all parts of your team's process.

3. How do you know who has the final word when multiple opinions are expressed? How do you want the team to feel once a decision is made?

Look for answers like "The boss has the final word," "We vote," "We don't know."

4. Can you describe your team's creative process?

Look to see what the team's understanding is of the creative process. Where are they aligned? Where are they not? Look to define this process and align together.

Expectations vs. Perception

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Would you consider yourself to have high expectations for yourself and others? In what context does that mean to you (personal, professional, something different or more specific)?

Look for answers that discuss them being hard on themselves and others, possibly setting themselves up for disappointment. Examples may be about being disappointed in themselves, others, or the outcomes.

2. Have expectations about the way something should be done ever created tension or negativity on a team you've worked with? Why?

Look for examples where someone had expectations but others didn't know them or couldn't meet them. In particular, where maybe expectations weren't communicated well or they were too limiting on the group.

3. Have you ever expected one result but ended up with another? Was it a positive or negative experience? What made it positive or negative?

4. Have you ever been so sure your idea was right but when the decision was made to go a different direction, it actually ended up being okay (or even better)?

Look for examples that show surprise around a better outcome and that it changed their approach the next time around.

5. Share a "Huh, I never thought of that" example that happened to you recently.

Look for discussion points around ideas that never would have been brought up without the inclusion of those individuals.

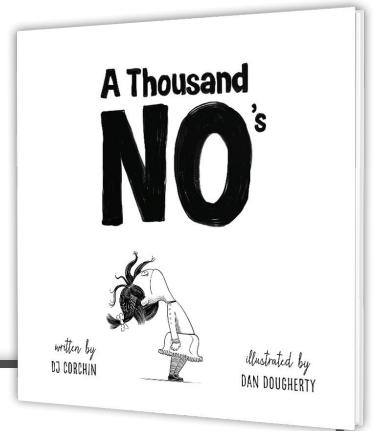
6. Perceiving possibilities is key to innovation. How can having a certain expectation be an obstacle? Have you experienced this?

Look for examples like "You're not open to other ideas," "You're looking for a specific answer, not whatever the right answer is."



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Brainstorming Is a Culture

It's not just that your thousand NO's make up your YES; it's also that if you don't listen to those NO's, you'll miss an idea-changing YES.

1. What is brainstorming? What might be considered good or bad brainstorming?

Look for "Good is when everyone participates," "Everyone feels heard or included," "People are okay with their ideas not being used" and "Bad is when people are afraid to throw ideas out," "People laugh at an idea," "There's a predetermined outcome."

2. Are you a good team brainstormer? Do you lose patience if you're in a brainstorming group and your idea isn't used?

Look for discussion points around when someone felt like they knew the answer and it wasn't heard. Or they were frustrated with the process so they stopped or got angry at a peer's suggestion.

3. What categories would you create to rate your team on effective brainstorming? (For example, comfort in offering ideas or ability to debate effectively)

Activity suggestion: Come up with categories and then anonymously rate.

4. What do team members need from each other and leadership to feel their ideas were heard and considered?

Look for examples like trust, safe space, etc.

5. Would team members feel like a part of the process if they offered up ideas and they weren't used?

This is about being honest about your own team's culture. Start to explore your team's culture of brainstorming.

6. Do you welcome others to have better ideas than you?

7. What does this team need to do to develop a culture of good brainstorming?

The more inclusion there is in the process, the more diversity there is in the product.

A Thousand NO's explores a girl who had an idea she thought was already great. In the end, not only did her specific idea change, but so did her thoughts on collaboration.

1. How would you describe her thoughts on collaboration before and after her journey?

Look for "She was hesitant to include others, as she thought her idea was great to start with," "She learned collaboration allows you to transform your idea into something it couldn't have been going it alone."

2. What are all the ways her idea changed from the first page to the last?

Look for bigger, different colors, different shape, made up of smaller ideas, etc.

3. What can "different perspectives" mean?

Look for answers that discuss life experiences, cultures, abilities, etc.

4. How does including more perspectives create more diversity?

Look for "By including different perspectives from different people, you can think of things/needs you never saw (or were able to see) before."