WORKSHOPSKILL · PARTICIPANT KIT

Worst Idea First — Participant Workbook

The guide in print, a frame to write after every debrief question, and session notes pages.

Folder: `worst-idea-first` · Category: creativity · 3–4 per group · 20 min · offline + online · optional print · assessment-type

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optional print
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Worst Idea First — Facilitator Run Sheet

Reverse brainstorming: instead of “how do we make this succeed”, the group spends five minutes engineering failure — “how do we make this absolutely flop” — then flips every item. The worst ideas are easier to say, funnier to hear, and flip into the sharpest actions.

Objectives

By the end of the activity, participants will have:

1. Said the awkward things — <mark>inside a game that rewards saying them</mark>.
2. Watched criticism transform into actionable items with one flip of the frame.
3. Practiced the psychological-safety move: naming risks before they happen, not after.

Setup

Space: tables or breakout rooms, one group of 3–4 each. A shared wall or whiteboard for the flip.

Materials: none — sticky notes if the room loves them; the flip works as well spoken. An optional poker deck (target, sabotage, the worst, flip, timing) is in this folder for rooms that want paper in hand.

Grouping rule: groups of 3–4, mixed departments. The worst ideas come from people who see different failure modes.

Pick a target — say it out loud: one real project, product or event the group actually cares about. “This year’s customer conference.” “The new onboarding flow.” Real targets make the flip land.

Minute-by-minute script

Time	Phase	Facilitator does	Participants do
0–3	Frame + target	Name the target. “Question one: how do we make it fail? Badly. Five minutes.”	Form groups
3–8	Worst ideas (5 min)	Float. Push for quantity: “dumber, cheaper to say, faster”	Generate failure plans
8–10	Pick the worst	“Each group: your single most catastrophic idea. Say it proudly.”	Vote, laugh, present
10–16	The flip (6 min)	“Now flip each item: how do we prevent exactly this?”	Flip worst → actions
16–20	Bridge	“Each group reads its two sharpest flipped actions — they go to the owner list.”	Read out, transition

Then run the debrief — see `worst-idea-first-debrief.md`.

Known failure modes & rescues

1. **The worst ideas are boring.** “Nobody shows up.” Rescue: demand specifics — “nobody shows up *because of what we did*? Design that.” Sabotage is a creative brief.
2. **A group flips too early.** They skip the fun and start writing preventions at minute four. Rescue: hold the flip — “stay in the disaster a moment longer.”
3. **Someone’s worst idea is a real complaint.** The laughter dies; it was a genuine grievance in disguise. Rescue: honor it — “that’s the most valuable card in the room. Flip it first, and let’s talk after.”

Variations

- **Pre-mortem version:** the target is a real project plan; the worst ideas become the project’s risk register, verbatim.
- **Silent version:** worst ideas written on cards, shuffled, read aloud by another group — anonymity for rooms still building safety.
- **Online:** breakout rooms for the worst round, shared doc for the flip. The shuffle version works well with anonymous forms.

Props in this folder

- `worst-idea-first-guide.md` — this run sheet
- `worst-idea-first-debrief.md` — 8 debrief questions, 3 failure modes
- `worst-idea-first-assessment.json` — pre/post measure preset
- `worst-idea-first-prop-cards.pdf` — optional poker deck: target, sabotage, the worst, flip, timing cards
- `worst-idea-first-paper-form.pdf` — the A4 answer sheet: the measure as a print-and-fill form
- `worst-idea-first-workbook.pdf` — participant workbook: the idea in plain words, guided items, notes and action pages
- `worst-idea-first-slide-deck.pdf` — the slide deck for teaching or projecting
- `worst-idea-first-slide-deck.html` — the same deck for any browser, speaker notes on N
- `worst-idea-first-license.md` — what you may do with all of this, in plain language
- `worst-idea-first-activity-poster.pdf` — The whole activity on one wall (A3): meta, run of show, debrief questions, watch-outs.
- `worst-idea-first-start-here.md` — one page, thirty seconds, then print and go
- `SKILL.md` — machine-readable manifest for AI agents
- `worst-idea-first-run-sheet.pdf` — the print edition: this run sheet + the debrief sheet, bound as one A4 PDF
- `*-Letter.pdf` — US Letter editions of the print documents in this folder

Agent version

Every file in this folder has a stable public URL — an AI agent can fetch the guide, the debrief and the answer sheet with three curl commands (see `SKILL.md`). The exercise itself runs on a real target and one flipped question — nothing else.

Worst Idea First — Debrief Sheet

> 8 questions, 3 failure modes, one rule: the worst ideas are the data.
>
> Use with `worst-idea-first-guide.md`. Debrief runs 10 min after the flip.

The 8 questions

1. The easiest bad idea.

"Which worst idea was easiest to say out loud? Why that one?"

→ Easiest usually means safest to say — which maps exactly what the room feels free to criticize.

2. The one nobody wrote.

"What worst idea did you think of but not say? One word is enough."

→ Voluntary, anonymous, no follow-up. The gap between thought and said is the safety meter.

3. The comedy curve.

"Notice how the room got louder and funnier? What changed?"

→ Laughter is the audible sound of safety rising. Naming it teaches the group what it feels like.

4. The flip quality.

"Which worst idea flipped into the sharpest action? What made the flip sharp?"

→ Sharp flips are specific: 'make the invite boring' becomes 'rewrite the invite subject line' — not 'improve communication'.

5. The disguised complaint.

"If a worst idea was a real grievance in disguise — what made it finally sayable?"

→ Only ask if one surfaced. The answer is usually: 'because the game asked for it.'

6. The daily version.

"Where in your week do risks only get named *after* they happen? What would a five-minute worst-idea round have caught?"

→ Transfer question. Expect: launch post-mortems, incident reviews, 'we knew this would break'.

7. The one habit.

"Which flipped action goes on a real list with a real owner before we leave this room?"

→ Commitment question. One action, one name, one date — the minimum honest output.

8. The next target.

“What is the next project that deserves a worst-idea round — and when?”

→ Closing question. It schedules the exercise into the future instead of ending it.

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3 known failure modes of the debrief itself

1. **The debrief reverts to serious.** The fun ends and the room puts its guard back up.
   Rescue: keep question 1 playful; the analysis can ride on the laughter.
2. **The quiet group’s flip gets skipped.** Louder groups read more actions; quiet ones get cut by time.
   Rescue: two sharpest actions per group — cap the loud groups, protect the quiet ones.
3. **Everything becomes a risk register.** The room converts the whole exercise into process and kills the safety lesson.
   Rescue: question 2 and 3 re-anchor the debrief on what got *said*, not what got filed.

If you are running the pre/post measure (`worst-idea-first-assessment.json`), note these observables:

Observable	Points to
Room volume and laughter rise during the worst round	Safety rising
Specific sabotage ideas beat generic ones	Creative engagement
Flipped actions carry owners and dates	Commitment quality

The report your participants receive is a self-comparison, never a group ranking — keep it that way.

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Where in your week do risks only get named *after* they happen? What would a five-minute worst-idea round have caught?

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The next target.

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Session notes