



## CHAPTER 15

# LET'S JAM!

**“JAMMING” IS BOTH A CORE VALUE** and a differentiator for our firm. A LABOV Jam Session™ is our proprietary process of listening, collaboration, ideation, and team building designed to result in uplifting, *actionable* concepts. This is a way of life for our company as we conduct—with clients as well as internally—hundreds of these collaborations a year to generate breakthrough thinking.

A Jam Session is a tool to help tackle our clients’ challenges and opportunities. We invite their “entire band” to join in, including executives and their sales, engineering, customer service, and marketing teams. Everyone has a voice.

Throughout this special day, we focus on creating concepts that are inspiring and can be realistically achieved by the organization. We’ve helped companies relaunch their brands, create groundbreaking marketing programs, devise new service offerings to overcome marketplace competition, and other exciting challenges.

We employ Adult Learning Principles, which include creating a safe environment to express yourself, providing variety with small teams (three to five participants) as well as entire group collaboration, and ensuring it is fast paced with no activity lasting longer than 45 minutes. For clients, the experience will fly by quickly and seamlessly.

For my team, it is a choreographed performance that is uniquely rewarding for the audience.

The LABOV Jam team is led by Account Supervisor, Sal Farias. Sal's passion for people and camaraderie are key in making our jams productive and positive experiences. Joining him as his jam partner is "bandmate" Sara Petrie who has a gift for leading and engaging people. Here's how we orchestrate a Jam Session:

## **1. Pre-Work**

One week prior to the session, we ask participants to submit their strongest three solutions to the challenge we're tackling, such as identifying your unique differentiators or creating a brand-new service offering. They digitally send their ideas to us prior to the session. This step creates engagement and momentum *before* the jam begins. Depending on the size of the audience, we will receive thirty to fifty ideas or more. While the majority are just basic "thoughts," they serve as a foundation for the collaborative ideation to come. Then, it's time to attend the jam!

## **2. "We're the Beach Crüe!"**

As they arrive, participants are assigned to small table teams of usually three to five people. After introducing themselves, they immediately face their first task: naming their team or "band." This generates entertaining discussions regarding each person's favorite performer, from Taylor Swift to Miles Davis to Toby Keith. We've seen some creative names like "Beach Crüe" (a combination of the Beach Boys and Mötley Crüe) and the pandemic-themed "Straight to Quarantine." Teams begin the process of collaborating as they discuss and broker which identity they will be known as for the next six hours or so. This serves as an "icebreaker" and is their first jam of the day.

### 3. Jamming 101

This is where we explain what a jam is and what the participants should expect from the day, as it will not be a standard meeting. We'll inform everyone that jamming is all about listening: listening to a team member, then responding with your input as others consider your thoughts and do the same. You cannot create without sincerely listening and contemplating what others are saying. This give and take, without judgment, will unleash great thinking.

And we share that it's not about being perfect; it's about experimenting and considering possibilities, allowing new ideas to be considered without immediately filtering or dismissing them. In the corporate world, there is great pressure to avoid mistakes, to be perfect—this experience is fun and a safe place for people to open up and share.

One more point: One of our ground rules for the session is we focus only on what we can affect or influence. No wasting time or energy on politics, the economy, future pandemics, or military conflicts. This allows for a positive, refreshing day for all.

### 4. Scenarios of Your Future

Here, we will present three future scenarios for your company. This creative “device” allows a person to get out of the moment and safely start their creative juices flowing. After each scenario is presented, the entire group will share their responses. These can lead to powerful revelations as well as interesting ideation. Be forewarned, it's a bit of a roller coaster ride as we explore the fears and hopes of the group.

Our first scenario is not a positive one and is set three years, exactly to that day, in the future. We'll project onto a screen a “mock” headline from a local newspaper or trade magazine. It will represent a concerning, troubling message: *XYZ company loses market share, is now up for sale. Once having a proud future, now searching for a buyer.*



The mood is understandably low as the group contemplates this coming to pass as well as how it would feel if this was reality. The next few minutes is an open dialogue on why and how this happened, exploring what they did and what they did not do that enabled this to take place. Often, people will share how much it would disappoint them if the company fell short. As difficult as this discussion will be, it is ultimately positive as everyone is aware it's not reality and that there are opportunities to make sure it never happens.

Next, we reveal a far more positive headline, again set three years in the future: *XYZ company sees record growth, expanding to new markets, the sky's the limit.* The group responds to why and how it occurred. Their emotions in discussing this usually include pride and confidence. They delve into what was done to accomplish this as well as what they stopped doing. There's a feeling of confidence as the entire group envisions a

brighter future. More than just a feel-good moment, this is where the group leverages the failures from the first scenario to steel themselves, moving forward boldly with new resolve. Next, there's a *twist*.

We then unveil a surprising, final, third headline. Unlike the previous two, this is set in the present day: *Leadership group from XYZ company (the people in this jam session) takes control and acquires it.* This is a pivotal moment designed for participants to imagine they take full ownership of the situation, no excuses. At that point, we will often hear, "Oh, my gosh" or another expression of surprise.



Usually, an even deeper level of seriousness takes place as all discuss issues and opportunities that now must be focused on. It's a reality check, in that what is concluded is what actually should be going on today. This is a call to action preparing the group to create realistic, actionable concepts throughout the remainder of the session. It sets up the remainder of the day beautifully, turbocharging the intensity.



## 5. Ideation Begins

Each small table team then reconvenes. They review the *pre-work* they sent prior to the meeting, plus any ideas that were discussed or developed based off the scenario exercises. Each participant shares what they believe in and why. Everyone is listened to, and each idea is given focus and never rejected or judged harshly. It's common for more than a dozen ideas to be shared. And this is where candor, vulnerability, and teamwork take place. Participants not only discuss, but also roll up their sleeves to help others strengthen their concepts.

## 6. Top Five

Next, the table teams cull the dozens of ideas down to their “Top Five,” refining them and getting serious. We guide them to validate and improve each concept by naming it, identifying the audience, exploring

how to market it, and predicting the potential value delivered as well as its cost to the enterprise if adopted. At this point, there are exciting interactions and collaborations. Often, several ideas will be combined into a single, superior one. The teams act with an elevated sense of ownership, making sure each of their “Top Five” is as strong as possible.

## 7. The Hit Parade

Now that your table has determined its “Top Five,” we ask you to step away, so other teams can review your work and vote on their favorites. This independent review is cathartic; it allows you to learn what others see in your ideation. And, you’ll do the same as you review and vote on the masterpieces created by the other teams. In the end, the top three ideas from each team are identified. Those are the only concepts focused on for the rest of the session, focusing all attention to the best thinking.

To reiterate, you do not vote on your own ideas; others with fresh eyes choose them. Just like in a rock band, you may love the song you wrote, but it’s up to the audience to buy the record or not. If they love it, you’ll make the Hit Parade! This is critical because often a person will have their own “pet” idea that they fight for. It’s human nature to love a concept and constantly push for it, only to be frustrated as it never is realized. Our process eliminates the person and their team voting for that favored concept; it must pass muster with others.

Prior to a Jam Session, a healthcare client confided, “I’m concerned that Molly will fight for an idea she’s been pushing for years. It’s a point of contention with several of us on the team.” Molly did argue for her concept, and with her urging, it was chosen as one of her team’s top five ideas. But it did not receive a single vote from the others in the Hit Parade portion of our jam, missing the cut. Her response, “Well, I guess I need to focus on other things. My idea isn’t bad, it’s just that we, as a team, have stronger ones to dig into.” Problem solved.

## 8. Break Time

Here, we allow everyone to exhale, grab lunch, and learn how to write a song while a band of musicians joins us to perform a real “live” jam. The participants will take part, creating a beat, and picking a “key” (as in the key of G or A) out of a basket for the musicians to play in. Immediately, the entire group is engaged, creating a piece of music that never had existed before. How many times do you write a song at lunch?

Then, after we’re refreshed, we all jump back into the session to refine and present the day’s ideas.

## 9. Ship It

We now focus on each team’s top three ideas, as voted on during the Hit Parade step. This is where concepts come to life and are fleshed out. Each will be given its own name, slogan, and visual identity. Its target audience will be determined, as will the steps needed to best ensure success. We’re compressing a month’s worth of ideating in only minutes to create the deepest, most high-impact ideation. There’s plenty of listening and volleying of concepts between the teams as they hone and refine each vision for maximum potential. After they’ve hammered all this out, each team will determine who will present their ideas. Often, it’ll require several people working in harmony to position the concept at its strongest. It’s time to go on stage and perform.

## 10. Let’s Vote

Each team has finally reached the point where they’ve listened, collaborated, and then created their top concepts. Now, it’s time to present to the entire group and see their reactions.

The Rolling Stones used this technique when they were writing songs for a new album. Before recording them in a studio, they’d evaluate new songs in front of small audiences at local clubs in England. It was eye-opening for them to witness which tunes went over well and which needed more work.

Now, each table team does the same as they share their opuses. There's a little nervousness, but it's fun, and often the entire audience will participate by suggesting tweaks to make ideas even stronger.

After all are presented, the group casts their votes for their favorite. It doesn't matter which one receives the most votes because they are all winners and will soon be presented to the leadership team.

## 11. Vision of the Future

One of the benefits I have at the company is the ability to use our team's talents in unique ways. Matt Hakey, our Associate Creative Director, and Marcus McMillen, Partner, are tremendous graphic artists, who will create an original "portrait" of the participants' unique vision of their future. This sketch will have been conceived and developed throughout the day as they observe the group, listening to them describe their hopes for the future of the company. Because everyone will have been so involved jamming with their table teams, few will have noticed this had been taking place until it's revealed.



Matt and Marcus share it with all, gain input (sometimes even refine it on the spot), and then ask everyone to sign it. This memorializes

the day and deepens the commitment for all. This commemorative masterpiece has often found its place on the walls of our clients' offices. It's an emotional, galvanizing send-off for the group as they leave knowing they accomplished so much in a relatively short period of time. Then, we make sure that these concepts live on.

## **12. Jam Session Package**

We will organize the entire session into a single document, including all concepts, action plans, and photos from the day. Within twenty-four hours, we send our clients this powerful manifesto. It's in their hands and ready to share with decision-makers.

In some cases, our clients' leadership teams have adopted or piloted at least one, often two, Jam Session concepts within forty-eight hours—unheard of speed for most corporations.

## **Encore Sessions**

The success of these experiences has been so powerful that they've given birth to "Encore Sessions," which take place shortly after the initial session itself. Our client will choose two concepts from their Jam to explore even further. Often, these have great potential, but are more complex and require in-depth focus. Encore Sessions are conducted with our small cross-functional teams to allow for quick feedback from all constituents. As with the Jam Sessions, the recommendations are to be shared with decision-makers within forty-eight hours of its conclusion.

## **Perpetual Ideation**

Jam Sessions are transformational one-day experiences. But to truly change the corporate culture, we create year-round ideation, using both Jam Sessions and Encore Sessions to stimulate ongoing, flowing inventiveness, engaging internal as well as external participants such as customers, sales channel, and industry experts.

## **A Healthier World**

Today's healthcare industry is fraught with challenges. Parkview Regional Health CEO Rick Henvey and Dr. Greg Johnson, Regional Market President, are two leaders who have pushed the envelope to re-imagine a healthier world. They were champions and cheerleaders of our Jam Session concept, gathering doctors and administrative leaders to listen, learn, and create a more caring, healthier future for their enterprise and the thousands who represent it.

## **Jam with James**

Worldwide, there are over 5,000 distilled spirits brands. A gin, brandy, rum, vodka, tequila, or whisky label can easily be lost on the shelves of the local grocery or liquor store. James Bowers, leading consultant and advocate in the alcohol and hospitality industries, knows this well. He is also an established recording artist, with several albums to his credit, which explains how he approaches his relationships with supplier-partners. James loves to collaborate. Our team has conducted numerous *Jam with James* sessions, creating dozens of concepts to help better differentiate the spirits brands he represents, which are among the world's most revered. Interestingly, James is not only a fantastic performer, he also plays the role of "producer" in his Jam Sessions, bringing out the very best of everyone.

## **Steel Guitar**

Barry Schneider is not only the President and Chief Operating Officer of Steel Dynamics, but he is also an avid music enthusiast who restores, refurbishes, and refinishes guitars. He often creates his "masterpieces" for friends and business associates. He takes that passion for music and creativity to his team, encouraging them to jam and freely collaborate in order to push further in their engineering and sustainability innovations.

## Thinking Outdoors of the Box

Marc-Andre Dubois, or “MAD” as he is affectionately known, is a dynamic visionary. During his tenure at BRP (makers of Can-Am, Sea-Doo, Ski-Doo, and other worldwide brands), he led his team to overcome the pandemic and resulting product shortages. Under his leadership, we facilitated Jam Sessions focusing on two different regions of the U.S. where BRP looked to step up its market share. We engaged a widely diverse group of regional as well as international BRP leaders, producing strategies to propel the brand to dominance in those locales. Several programs born in the jams were initially piloted and later perfected to build market share. Instead of allowing his team to be victims of the pandemic, Marc-Andre Dubois saw it as an opportunity to expand on their differentiation.



The outcomes of a Jam Session include ideation, enhanced team building, and the establishment of new behaviors such as listening and, of course, collaboration.