



## CREATIVITY

### Be more creative: easy ways to boost your thinking!

**Relax!** Right at the top of the sheet, the best possible advice is this: R - E - L - A - X. Your creative mind simply works better when you chill out.

Plenty of people will tell you they work better under pressure. There's a neurological term to describe such claims: 'Balderdash!' When we feel stressed, our brains begin to think in very basic black and white terms. So get yourself good and relaxed before you try to be creative!

**Relax again!** When you've had a crack at the issue in hand, and worked at it some, have another relax! There's simply no doubt that getting worked up will stop you working at your best. In fact, some rather cool studies demonstrated the point brilliantly when folk were given word puzzles – dingbats, we used to call them – along these lines:

R O    CLOCK    K C

LOST TimeTime

VA



DER

For the record, the answers here are 'Rock around the clock', 'Lost to time' and 'Space invader' (!) but the point would be this: the people given a series of these questions were able to answer only so many. When given a break to relax and later come back to the list that had defeated them, though, guess what? They solved over a third of the conundrums that had previously beaten them! Why?

Because their good old brains had been primed with the problem, had a crack at it... Then been allowed to relax. At that point their unconscious minds took over the work and the answers just seemed to come to them.

**Prime the pump:** The above is an example of priming, which works in various ways. And one of them is demonstrated by studies that show how our expectations of ourselves set a template for our minds to follow. For example, calling a quiz team 'The Dunces' virtually guarantees that they'll perform worse than a team with comparable intelligence called 'The Einsteins'. So whether you set out with the expectation that you're going to be rubbish, or with the expectation that you're going to be hugely creative ... You're almost certain to prove yourself right!

**Make a note of that...** Just like a muscle gets stronger with exercise, a 'creative brain' improves with use, too. And if you carry a notebook around to jot down all your ideas, you'll soon find that you're actually having more ideas! Find out more about this in our Info Sheet 'Da Vinci's Creative Secrets'.

**Time's up!** Setting a deadline motivates you to come up with the goods and move past the stage where you just throw things around. So set a concrete day and time for the project's initial phase and stick to it.



**Interesting point:** Some studies have shown that people became significantly more creative when they - get this - simply worked in a room which had a picture like the one on the right...



People of a comparable intelligence worked in the same room, with the picture of all the arrows facing in the same direction, and produced fewer ideas! Unbelievable? Well, the theory is that the single arrow that's facing the wrong way in the second picture unconsciously primes our brains to think differently, and is a visual stimulant to that end. Put it on the wall and try it!

**Cross concepts:** The Chinese were eating ice cream 2,000 years before someone thought to stick it in a waffle and serve it as a cornet! Man started eating meat almost as soon as the species appeared on the planet. And we started making bread 3,000 years BC! But the idea of eating the two together as a sandwich didn't have wide appeal until the 19th Century...

Sometimes, you can take two or three old ideas and put them together to create something great! And feel free to explore other industries. The idea of changing the colour of 'clocking in' papers on a weekly basis, for example, is quite old, - but could revolutionize a mail order business that needs to prioritize older orders...

**What a fantastic mistake!** Columbus set off for the Orient and screwed up considerably when he landed in America. A pharmacist asked to mix a hangover cure used carbonated water instead of still and the result was Coca-Cola. And dear old Alexander Fleming wasn't in good humour when he found his carelessness had caused fungus to grow in culture dishes he'd been working on - until his mistake led him to discover Penicillin!

Sometimes a great thing is born out of a total cock up! Be creative with the mistakes you make: look at them and see if there's value there, even if it's not related to what you're working on. Ice lollies, crisps, tea, guide dogs for the blind, post-it notes, Levi jeans and even chocolate chip cookies were all the result of a mistake made good!

**Get out of the rut:** Most of the thoughts you have today will be thoughts you had yesterday and the day before... Our brains are designed to make connections that spare us over thinking: so things like the side of bed you get out of, what time you get up, which way you travel to work, when you should eat and so on are handled routinely. Well, creation lovers, time to shake things up a bit!

Go to work a completely new way. Or stop and look at something you hadn't noticed before en route. Sleep 'the wrong way up' in bed. Get up earlier - or later! Examine the pavement up close, or tree bark! Eat dinner at lunchtime - or have your dessert first and end with a starter! There are literally a million things that we can do differently to generate new thoughts in the noggin. And where there's one new thought...



**Dig deeper:** You've probably met the kind of person who has an idea, then pretty much stops thinking, right? The kind of person who thinks that that idea must be the idea, simply 'cos they had it? Well, for shame! A fantastic rule of thumb is to keep on going until you have at least three or four great ideas, no matter how much you love the first great one! If the first great answer were going to be your backup plan, what would be even better?

**Ask someone who knows nothing about it:** One of our number tells how former workmates struggled to squeeze in a new computer terminal. They announced a plan to install cables down the back end of the building, running from some high fulloutin junction at the front, then down to the appropriate office at an estimated cost of £7,500. Work would start in six weeks...

Our man, possessed with an encyclopedic ignorance of I.T. asked why they couldn't just knock a small hole in the plasterboard to the neighbouring office and use an extension cable to reach the spare port in there. Turns out they simply hadn't thought of that solution, which immediately went ahead – at a cost of £8.50!

**Sentence stems:** What's the one thing that your mind constantly searches for? If you know the answer to that, you'll understand how this next tip works. Write out the beginning of sentences, such as: 'The obvious answer to this is...'; 'the most elegant answer to this is...'; 'If I did have a second answer it might be...' Then, under the stem, write the numbers one to fifteen...

Now, you've created a beginning and an expectation for a number of endings; you've created a feeling of incompleteness. And completion is the answer to our question! Our brains always want an answer. Just fill in as many of those numbers as you can! Then take a break, relax, and carry on until you've got an answer next to all 15 – even if the answers seem absurd!

**Old wives' wisdom:** You know the sayings about things looking better in the morning and sleeping on it? You may have experienced people who awaken with solutions after praying before bed... And maybe you heard of the faddish self help movement 'The Secret'? Well the scientific explanation for all of these is the same!

Curious? Read on... In the same way as your unconscious mind will busy itself when you relax, so it will when you're asleep! And you can take full advantage of this by combining the stem and sleep techniques – write out a stem and dwell on it a few minutes before bed. Clamber on in and drift off with that thought in mind. Okay? And when you wake up, write down any thoughts that come to mind.

**Brainstorm – properly!** Perhaps the best known method to generate ideas... But you can probably get more out of it than you do now. How? Well, for one thing, studies show that when you just ask folk to turn up and join in, you get less out of the session than if you ask individuals for a list of ideas on their own!

So knowing what we do about priming the pump, always tell the people going to the meeting what the brainstorm is about in advance, and mention any restraints that absolutely do exist. Invite attendees to come up with 15 – 20 thoughts in advance of the meeting as well; with a minimum of 15 ideas per person to kick start the session, you can then brainstorm to generate more ideas.



**Be positive:** There's a time and a place for critical thinking and it's not the creativity meeting! We do need to think about the practicalities of ideas, but to shoot ideas down straight away can embarrass the thinker and stop them suggesting more! We strongly recommend Edward de Bono's book 'Six thinking hats' to get the best out of group thinking in particular.

**Make ideas fly:** With the simple KITES model that helps you to stay on target:

**Key issue:** In the very beginning is a need for an idea or solution. Simply determine, as precisely as possible, what it needs to do. Astonishingly, this definition stage is often overlooked, leading to the generation of lots of ideas... That don't fit!

**Ideate:** Once you've got the direction clear, the sky should be the limit! Use creative people, thinking tools and other resources to generate as many suitable ideas as possible. Keep going until you've got plenty of breadth, depth and range. Be positive and encouraging at all times: absolutely for bid criticism at this stage!

**Trim it down:** Now change focus! Reign in the thinking; ask experts what's possible - and what's ridiculous! Examine costs and alternatives; start to funnel and filter the ideas; narrow options down by looking at them through a critical lens. Work out the flaws, refine, reduce and reason!

**Examine:** Remember what the heck you were doing in the first place! Check that the ideas you've shortlisted actually deal with the issue you set out to address...

**Select:** Pick the idea or solution and go for it. Also, you might want to consider the 'tail end' - see if anything else can follow in the wake of the principle idea. Like the bows on the tail of a kite, there can be add ons and tie ins... They don't affect the flight, but they might make it look better!

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