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A whole bunch of people define the essence of creativity as being able to see things differently. Here are five techniques that help you do exactly that – and they're pretty fast to implement, too!

Be Your Hero

It's hard to communicate how effective this first approach can be – sometimes! It requires imagination and conviction more than anything... The idea is to picture an appropriately inspired thinker – and then have a crack at solving the problem in their style! So one might take the devil-may-care approach of Orson Welles, or the adventurous spirit of Richard Branson's thinking – and apply it to any creative scenario. By adopting different personas, you have a number of ways to come at issues: how would Da Vinci handle it? What would Spielberg do? While we think of it, by the way, "What would Spielberg do?" is practically the mantra of the endlessly inventive J.J. Abrams! But long before Abrams was asking "What would Spielberg do?", Spielberg had a question of his own... "What would Hitchcock do?"!

Be a Brand

Along the same lines, you can also try imagining how distinctly different brands might do things! For example, if you want to design a garden bird house, say, and are wondering what it could look like, you might choose to imagine Apple tackling it! Then consider the same problem being addressed by the Early Learning Centre, or Marks & Spencer... No doubt imagining the ELC approach would conjure a large, colourful and bold bird house; it might resemble a castle or a doll's house, with painted windows and doors.

The Marks & Spencer design would be much more traditional; a sturdy, low-key solution, whilst Apple would no doubt have either a camera in the house so you can watch what's going on inside, or perhaps even link up to an app that lets you open and shut an automatic feed tray! You can probably see how even a moment considering a few different brand attitudes creates enormous shifts in perspective!

Work in Metaphors

In some therapy approaches it's quite common to use metaphorical language to represent an issue... If a client says "I can't stop smoking; I don't enjoy it but it's like a monkey on my back!" then the therapist might very well talk in those terms: "When the monkey's gone, though, what will be different?" Daft though it might sound, this actually avoids a lot of nonsense! If the therapist had said, "When you do stop smoking, though, what will be different?" there's a good chance the smoker would think: "Aren't you listening? I said I CAN'T stop smoking!" The metaphor – to an extent – helps bypass some pretty wobbly reasoning...

The same thing applies to creativity: what if solving the problem is like climbing a mountain? Where would base camp be? What equipment would you need? What would make it easier? What if the issue is like having an illness? What would stop it spreading? Can you cure it? If not, which symptoms can you treat? How? The beauty of this approach is that there's almost no limit to the metaphors and similes available to you.

"From start to finish, DMI respects our interests, vision and - most importantly - our mission."
Sioban Kerr, Director, Brand Marketing and Communications, Make-A-Wish International

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Change the Wording:
Along similar lines to the above is the technique of changing key words in a problem statement to see what happens. A real-world example of this is our own Christmas piece from 2014. This was initially discussed in terms of being a LEGO 'stop-motion' video; you can see it here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3T4s26z7fo

In any case, our contemplating it as a stop-motion video put tremendous limitations on our thinking... But when we began to refer to the piece in other ways, problems melted away: we thought about it as making not only a music video and a travelogue, but also as an advertisement for a LEGO ski resort!

This thinking gave the video a great deal of its freedom. For example, it stopped us doing it entirely in stop-motion, and let us begin to include in-camera effects, magic principles, puppetry and vastly more complicated shots!

The same principles apply in business. If you're struggling to answer a question such as 'How do we cut costs?' you may generate different answers when one grabs a thesaurus and changes the verb! For example:

How do we slash costs?
How do we diminish costs?
How do we shave costs?
How do we swerve costs?
How do we minimise costs?

Can you see how this helps?! The ideas that come to mind when you look to shave costs can differ radically from those that come to mind when you plan to swerve them, or slash them! What's more, if you combine this technique with 'Factor Nudging', it can compound your thinking no end. See our Factor-Nudging Info Sheet here: www.dmiproductions.co.uk/info

Ask an Ignoramus!
One of the most obvious ways to gain a different perspective is to ask an expert! But much as that can help, experts can be very set in their thinking. In any case, it hardly warrants an entry here! However, doing the exact opposite – asking someone who knows nothing about the subject – can be surprisingly effective! How so? Well, it bypasses a lot of the presumptions that knowledgeable people make when they consider their own specialist experience. Simply put, experts can lack wider vision!

One story that illustrates this begins in the days before iPads and decent WiFi, at a company that said it needed to set up a new computer port in its warehouse office. The office was located at the end of the building farthest away from the main computer equipment...

The company's IT people explained what they wanted to the installation team. They then baulked when they heard it would take six weeks and £8,000 to implement because it involved gauging a channel into a wall and running wires down the length of the building to the nearest junction. So... Enter our heroic ignoramus!

One of the warehouse staff, who had an encyclopedic ignorance of computers, simply overheard the conversation and recognized the word 'port' as having been used around that end of the building before: He asked, "Isn't there a spare port in the marketing room next door?" Sure enough, when the IT boffins double checked, there was a spare port in the office next to the warehouse! When they later followed up with the consultants to ascertain why *they* hadn't suggested it, the IT team was told: "Yeah, we knew the port was there! But you said you wanted one set up in the warehouse office!"

So somebody who knew absolutely nothing about computers solved the problem because he wasn't remotely set in his thinking: he understood that the interest was getting a computer in the warehouse and didn't get sucked into a long conversation about ports, trunking, costs or any other nonsense! In the end, the IT folk picked up a network cable from PC World, knocked a hole in the plasterboard and sorted it all out in half an hour – for about £12!