

Becoming More Personally Creative

Creativity - the ability to come up with new ideas - is both an art and a skill. Some people find it easy to come up with new ideas. For others, it can be more challenging.

Here are some suggestions anyone can use to improve their ability to think up novel ideas:

1. Be more aware of your brain's thoughts. Most of us actually create new ideas, or bits of ideas, all the time. This happens as one stimulus collides with another (a song on the radio and an outdoor billboard while we are driving; reflecting on a meeting we had while watching television). What we fail to do is bring these connections into our consciousness and play with them further.

The next time you are working on a challenge, try being more aware of these 'mental connections.' Play with them and relate them to the challenge you are working on. Jot down doodles and notes - not fully fleshed out ideas, just a word or image. You'll be amazed at what may suddenly jump off the page in the form of new thinking!

2. Deconstruct and reconstruct. If you are working on a challenge, deconstruct the challenge, and explore its component parts. Try solving a little piece of the puzzle, instead of the whole enchilada. Then do the same to another part. Solution patterns will likely emerge to guide you to new ideas overall.

3. Have a conversation with someone who doesn't know anything about the subject area. Find someone with total naïveté and discuss what you are working on. Have them ask you questions. Have them offer up a completely off-the-wall idea of how to solve the issue. Use their perspective to gain new vantage points and then use those vantage points to generate new ideas.

4. Use all five of your senses. Unless you are blind, most humans rely on sight as their main information gathering sense. Try thinking about your challenge through your taste, touch, hearing and smelling senses: What comes to mind?

5. Immerse yourself in your subject matter. Literally. Are you trying to come up with some novel new product ideas for a food category? Experience the ingredients first hand, see the manufacturing process, visit the distribution network, talk to consumers of the category, talk to people who hate the category. These varied stimuli will provide new vantages for developing new creative solutions.

6. Create “forced connections”. An effective way to create new ideas is to link your challenge to something totally unrelated. For example, without thinking about your challenge, pick up an object near you and on a pad of paper, write down whatever comes to mind about that object. Fill the pad with random thoughts – no editing, just stream of consciousness. Then, think about your challenge and see if you can make a link between what is on your pad and your challenge....you will be amazed at the new ideas that come from “forcing a connection” between unrelated content!

