

Eliminating Innovation Obstacles

If you are looking to innovate, you need to get rid of things that get in the way of new thinking. Here are some recommendations to help you discover new ideas:

- 1. Have a clear understanding of what you are trying to achieve.** If you can't write it down in one, action-oriented sentence, then you need to refine your objective.
- 2. If you are working in a group, make sure everyone understands the session's objective.** Make it clear and visible; it will help keep the session on-track.
- 3. Create an environment conducive to thinking.** Formal environments (board rooms or classroom set-ups, for example) are poor for effective collaboration. Instead, seat people in a circle or u-shape. A relaxed, 'living-room' style set up with low coffee tables and comfortable furniture is optimum.
- 4. Keep groups to a manageable size.** Groups that are larger than 18-20 are counterproductive to high-quality output
- 5. If you are working in a group, understand each person's role in the session.** Has someone been designated as the facilitator? Who has decisionmaking responsibility? Try and avoid having full-group, consensus decision-making, where possible. It tends to result in lowest common-denominator decisions.
- 6. Allow yourself to address challenges from paths other than the linear one.** Seldom are new ideas created or problems solved with a direct attack. (Albert Einstein said, "No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.")
- 7. Invite a diverse set of people to any ideation or problem-solving session.** Diversity of expertise and perspective are an essential element of seeing things in a new way.
- 8. Provide time for both divergent and convergent thinking.** Often people will generate lot of ideas (divergent thinking), but never then agree on which ideas to pursue (convergent thinking). Without convergence, nothing will be implemented and frustration will result.
- 9. Use meeting "groundrules" to set up norms for interaction.** These groundrules should allow people to offer up beginning (i.e., not fully thought out) ideas for the group to "build" upon.
- 10. Give yourself mental permission to offer up these beginning ideas.** It is often from such fledgling ideas that great innovations are built.

