



Ten easy ways to get your creative juices flowing

LOLA RASMINSKY

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The pressure is on for all of us who work in competitive businesses. We need to come up with new ideas before the competition eats our lunch. Look what happened to Kodak and Groupon, for example. For many, learning to be more creative is not a choice – it's an imperative.

There's no need to go searching for a creative workout space. The stretches can easily be done in the privacy of your head. When we exercise our creativity, we use a variety of muscles. The good news is that even using a few of them can open the door to new pov.

1. Question your assumptions.

Assumptions are difficult to unpack because we take them for granted. We don't even know we're relying on them. IBM originally assumed that there was no market for personal computers. Detroit assumed small imported cars wouldn't pose a threat. Challenge your notions to prevent them from blinding you to new opportunities.



2. Ask questions. The practice will help you to develop an open mind and lead you in new directions. How many questions can you generate about your challenge? Why not follow the journalists' credo? Who? What? Where? Why? When? Be a skeptic. Question the received wisdom. Any one of us can develop the habit of adopting an exploratory mindset.

3. Notice more. In 1981, a young Howard Schultz, now CEO of Starbucks, noticed that Milan was dotted with hundreds of popular coffee bars – and that nothing like this existed back home. Inventions like penicillin, potato chips, ice cream cones and microwave ovens all resulted from chance observations. What more could you notice about your challenge? Look harder and keep asking yourself – what else might I see? What else can I hear? What have I overlooked?

4. Force connections between unrelated things.

Twenty years ago, could camera makers imagine they'd lose market share to phones? Garbage cans replaced by plastic bags? Well, someone saw those connections and industries were born. Build up your associative muscles: Take a string of unrelated words and use them all to create a story. As what if you put two seemingly unrelated things to create something useful. Think laser beam and printer. Or, robots and surgery.

5. Reframe what you're looking at. Viagra could have been seen as a failed blood pressure medication. Instead, Pfizer reframed it as a medication with an altogether different purpose. If you practice (or even imagine) looking through the lens of a camera, you will see the same subject from many different angles. Don't hesitate to zoom in on the smallest details, or broaden your perspective by seeing with a wide-angle lens.

6. Step outside your comfort zone. Einstein said: "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result." Try simple things like sampling new ethnic foods, talking to people outside your usual circle, or reading a book you'd normally ignore. Wear down those ruts that keep your thinking stuck.

7. Soften your critical eye.

New ideas are delicate shoots. They need to be nurtured, not stepped on. Many of us believe that other people are more creative than we are.

Breakthrough thinking happens when people feel safe enough to chance new ideas. Employing the critical eye too early in the creative process can extinguish that feeling of safety.

8. Perfection can be the enemy of creative thinking.

Setting your sights high is a noble pursuit, But demanding perfection can be stifling, and the fear of failure is paralyzing. The truth is that mistakes can be our very best teacher.

9. Trust your intuition. Sometimes we don't understand why we're drawn in a particular direction so we don't go down that path. Often, it's a gut feeling that brings us to a new and promising place.

10. Believe in yourself. All young children are creative. That creative spark is still somewhere inside us all. Commit to rekindling that spark and you will be surprised that you too are perfectly capable of thinking with imagination. Find a way to incorporate play into work, and see if your inner child can find a solution you can't.

Lola Rasminsky, C.M. is the founder of [Beyond the Box](#), which has been offering hands-on creativity workshops to corporate and government groups across Canada since 1998.