



Ways to Improve your Creativity at Work

Paul Sloane

It is easy to get into a rut at work. The longer you have been doing the job the greater the tendency to keep doing things the way you have always done them. That is easy and straightforward – and boring.

In almost every job there are opportunities for creativity and innovation – sometimes they are small procedural improvements and sometimes they are big risky innovations. How can you put some imagination and creativity into your work? Here are seven key steps:

1. Recognise that every product, every service, every method and every aspect of your job can be done differently and better
Think of the service of providing music to music fans. Once it was only in live performances. You had to go to a draughty hall, sit still and listen. Then we had vinyl records. Then tape cassettes followed by CDs. Now we can listen to music downloads on our cell phones as we walk in the park. It is the same with industrial, office and business processes. Each gets replaced by something better. Approach every task with the attitude that the current method is temporary and that your job is to find a better way to do it.

2. Ask people

Ask customers what problems and issues they have with your

products or services. Ask suppliers for ideas for cost savings and quality improvements. Ask colleagues in other departments what could be improved. People in other places have other viewpoints and can see problems, gaps and opportunities. Network outside of work with people in other fields and discuss their approaches to some of the topics that concern you.

3. Run regular brainstorming sessions

A well-facilitated idea generation session or brainstorm with a diverse team will generate plenty of great ideas for any business challenge. You should hold them often with your team (and a sprinkling of provocative outsiders) to tackle the issues that are crying out for fresh approaches. Start with a clear statement of the issue and some broad criteria for what a good solution might look like. Turn the brainstorming into action by implementing the best ideas.

4. Look far outside

How do other organizations in different fields tackle the sorts of challenges that you face? What do they do in the entertainment industry, or in retail or in charities? What do businesses similar to yours but in Singapore, Holland or Shanghai do? Research them on the internet. Can you pinch some of their great ideas and apply them locally?

5. Discuss it with your boss

Find out what his or her big issues are. What is the corporate strategy? Maybe you can contribute a few ideas of your own which will help your manager or the company at large. Talk about the challenges and your proposals and suggestions. Show that you are a positive contributor of ideas.

6. Build prototypes

Show people how the idea would work in practice with a mock-up

or a prototype. Ask for their input and ideas. Make the idea real and you will get feedback. Test new product and service ideas with customers.

7. Change your attitude to failure

If everything you try works then you are not being bold enough. Innovation involves trying some things that don't work. Treat each failure as a learning opportunity. The innovator's motto is, 'I succeed or I learn but I never fail.'

Every CEO says the same thing, 'We need more innovation here.' Yet everywhere we see people frightened to try new things. We tend to think that it is just the marketing or R&D departments that should be creative. The truth is that we desperately need creative thinking everywhere in our workplaces. It can start with you.

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About the Author

Paul was part of the team which launched the IBM PC in the UK in 1981. He became MD of database company Ashton-Tate. In 1993 Paul joined MathSoft, publishers of mathematical software as VP International. He became CEO of Monactive, a British software company which publishes software asset management tools. In 2002 he founded his own company, Destination Innovation, which helps organisations improve innovation. He writes and speaks on lateral thinking and innovation. His latest book is *The Leader's Guide to Lateral Thinking Skills* published by Kogan-Page.

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Publication issued on: 1 February 2014