

Jump-start with a Brainstorming Session

Whether it's a major marketing proposal or a commitment to lose 10 pounds, any project you embark on can benefit from a brainstorming session, either alone or in a group. Try these tips:

Find a quiet place with no distractions.

Set a time limit and write down as many ideas as you can think of.

Look at the status quo in a new way. Who else can contribute to this project? If I did the opposite of what I'm doing now, what would happen? What if I was free to change anything I wanted?

If you're with a group, set ground rules. No negative comments or criticism allowed ... all ideas will be included and considered ... save the "weeding out" for later.

If you're alone, silence that inner critic. Ideas that can seem far-fetched at first sometimes work best.

Remember: The goal of brainstorming is to generate many ideas in a short period of time and encourage creative problem solving. Have fun!



Everyday Creativity

Being more creative in your personal time can help you solve problems creatively at work as well. The following ideas may help get your creative juices flowing:

PLANT a garden.

TRY a new recipe.

MAKE a card for someone you care about.

KEEP a journal.

JOIN a book group.

WRITE a poem.

TAKE pictures of a favorite place.

START a scrapbook.

REARRANGE your furniture.

The point is to have fun, relax and maybe learn something new. You just might return to your routine with a new attitude.

A few lifestyle changes can keep your brain functioning well — try exercise, a healthy diet and stress management.

The bottom line: True, the word "creative" can be intimidating. Most daily tasks are more left-brain oriented — verbal, logical and straightforward. It's easy to forget that there's another side to you. But everyone has an imagination, and there's no "wrong" way to be creative. Remember that a creative mind often finds the best solutions.



Creative Problem Solving

How to Keep an Open Mind



TACKLING A PROBLEM OR PROJECT?

Be realistic about how to achieve your goals. Break down large projects and long-range plans into small, attainable mini goals. Set deadlines and schedules that you can reach, and celebrate every success. When you feel overwhelmed or uncertain, recall past achievements to help restore hope and a sense of control.

New Mind-set, New Solutions

People are creatures of habit. Chances are, when a problem comes your way, you tend to use the same approach you've always used to solve a problem. Most likely it will be successful but sometimes it won't, or the outcome could have turned out much better.

Why not try something different next time? Let your imagination take hold and solve problems using creative approaches. There are several ways to latch onto innovative solutions. **The tips** in this brochure can help.

3-Step Start to Creative Problem Solving

Step 1

Study the details. A better understanding of the problem can boost your confidence and spark new ideas.

Step 2

Keep a pencil and paper handy. If you've moved on to another task while your problem waits, be prepared for productive thoughts that could help. Be ready to write them down. Even at night, after your conscious mind has quit working on the problem, your subconscious may take over. Record midnight revelations.



Step 3

Ask yourself, "What if?" Write down as many questions as you can about the problem that start with "what if ..."

- What if we sold off our inventory?
- What if I canceled our weekly meeting and asked people to e-mail ideas to the team instead?

Write down all your ideas, no matter how outlandish they may seem. They'll help open up new pathways to problem solving.

Inspire Great Ideas

- **Relax.** There is a Zen saying: "The bow kept forever taut will break." You need to release tension and create fertile ground where new ideas can blossom. Take some time to play.
- **Open up.** Train your mind to be more receptive to what's around you and inspiration may follow.
- **Try something new.** If you're working on a difficult problem, taking a break from it might be the answer. Give your mind a chance to process what you've been working on and renew your thoughts by engaging in an unrelated activity.
- **Activate your creativity.** Flip through a glossy magazine or art book or stroll through a gallery or museum. Turn pictures on your desk or your calendar upside-down for a day. Activities like these engage the nonverbal, spatially oriented and creative right side of your brain.
- **Make stress work for you.** By choice or necessity, problem solving is a part of life at work and at home. Set aside your worry and stress, and look forward to a positive outcome.



Did You Know?

"Good" stress, called eustress, is vital to performing your best. When you feel motivated to work hard, excel or get ahead, you're experiencing eustress. However, when stressful feelings take over your life in a negative way, the results can be damaging all around. A sense of balance can help you feel happy, confident and satisfied with who you are.

Out of Ideas? Go Exploring

Wrestling with a problem you just can't solve? Instead of grinding out a solution, why not "go exploring"? Spend your lunch hour **someplace that stimulates thought**. It could be a cafe where you can people watch, a museum, a public garden, a store that sells games and puzzles ... spend time walking or sitting and thinking about what you see.

Look for **solutions in unlikely places**. Get out of your home or office and look at your surroundings. Walk down by the docks, through the business district, or by the supermarket. Notice how people go about their day, and imagine how they solve the challenges they encounter.

You can even see problem solving in your own backyard — ants carrying food back to the anthill, plants bending toward the sun. **Maybe the answer to your particular problem is easier than you think.**



Give Your Brain a Wake-up Call

Commute to work a half-hour early and use the extra time for a walk before you start your day. Try eating picnic-style in the backyard on your day off or going to a new restaurant or movie that you wouldn't normally consider. Make small changes to things you do every day. Break out of your normal routine. It's like new movement for an under-used muscle.