

CREATIVITY IN BUSINESS

A GUIDE TO
INSPIRE NEW IDEAS
INTO ACTION

J | CONNELLY

CREATIVITY FUELS BUSINESS GROWTH

Creativity is the ability to transcend traditional ideas, rules, patterns or relationships and to make meaningful new ideas, forms, methods and interpretations. You don't have to be a graphic artist or a musician to be creative. Some people are naturally creative while others have to work at it, but everyone has that spark inside them.

But, simply having a supportive culture that encourages creative thinking may not be enough to make waves in your industry. That's why you must resist the urge to stand still. Adapt to change and be willing to take new risks.

Successful brands and leaders recognize the importance of empowering employees to be confident in their creative abilities, which can be ignited in the most interesting ways. This guide will help you open your mind to new experiences and encourage others to do the same.

"Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn't really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while. That's because they were able to connect experiences they've had and synthesize new things."

Steve Jobs

EMBRACE THE CREATIVE PROCESS

BRAINSTORM DOS

- Invite employees with varying backgrounds and titles.
- Invite enough people for an effective discussion. Anywhere from five to 10 people will offer enough variety in the discussion.
- Listen as much, or more, than you speak.
- Welcome every idea.
- Prepare an agenda with timeframes and a clear purpose.

Generating Ideas

Creativity doesn't have to be something brand new. It can also be building on others' ideas. Even a small change can produce a brand new concept.

Brainstorm sessions can be the best kind of collaboration, especially when they represent a level playing field for all participants. Unfortunately, this isn't always the case. Junior employees might feel intimidated to speak up in a room filled with executive team members. It's easy for the loudest and most comfortable people in the room to dominate the meeting, despite the fact that a great idea can come from anyone.

How can you create a setting that encourages teamwork while empowering people to find and voice their best ideas? Here are two different brainstorm techniques to try:

"Brain Chain" Brainstorm

Each person has the opportunity to contribute without feeling the pressure of the spotlight. This is a welcome format for those who would otherwise feel apprehensive in a brainstorm.

The session organizer should follow these steps:

Step 1: Set the one ground rule: there are no bad ideas.

Step 2: Spend five minutes giving pertinent background information. Limiting the time helps prevent information overload and tunnel vision, which stifle creativity.

Step 3: Pose the first question to the group. Give everyone a sticky pad and ask them to write down as many ideas or fragments of ideas as they can in five minutes (one idea per sticky note).

Step 4: Collect each sticky note and group them together by similarities.

Step 5: Break everyone up randomly into a few smaller teams so they each have a couple of sticky pad groupings. Over the next 10-15 minutes, each team should

brainstorm amongst themselves to come up with a few concepts inspired by the sticky notes.

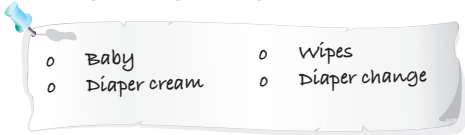
Step 6: Each team presents their best ideas. Continue to narrow down from there, whether you ultimately need one or a few ideas to consider.

"Creative on Demand" Brainstorm

Don't have time on your side? People who work in a fast-paced environment may find it difficult to set aside even a few moments to be creative. This type of brainstorm helps you shift your thinking and can jumpstart your idea-generating abilities. The organizer should follow these steps:

Step 1: Ask the group to think about the product (or service) and list its attributes

Example: Pampers Diapers

- 
- | | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| o Baby | o Wipes |
| o Diaper cream | o Diaper change |

Step 2: Create a random list of 5-10 things that are not related to the main subject in any way. After the list is completed, write descriptions next to each item.

Example: Random List

- 
- | | |
|-------------|------------|
| Porsche | o Colorful |
| o Fast | o Sparkly |
| o Expensive | Boat |
| o Fancy | o Big |
| Nail polish | o Speed |
| o Pretty | o Travel |

Step 3: Think about how the descriptions from the generic list can add a creative twist to your product's benefits and attributes. In this case, you might come up with "Pampers: the fastest diaper change." That gives you a starting point and now you can build out the rest of the campaign pieces (or continue to come up with more concepts).

BRAINSTORM DON'TS

- Don't invite only your immediate team members. It's helpful to get a different perspective from someone who can offer a fresh look at the issue.
- Don't go overboard and ask more than 10 people to join the conversation. Unless you're breaking up into smaller groups, it leaves too much room for tangents, interruptions and unproductive participants.
- Don't talk over everyone and control the entire session. It's frustrating getting interrupted during a meeting. It gives people the impression that you don't value others' input.
- Don't poke holes in ideas during the brainstorm. This is the fastest way to discourage someone from speaking up the next time. Not every idea will come to life, but it's important to consider everything up front. You never know where a great idea will come from.
- Don't allow a chaotic session. Structure is important to keep everyone on task.

IDEA IMPLEMENTATION

When the brainstorm is over, it's time to decide which idea to put into action. You may have a few great ones, but you want the best, so measure each against the same list of criteria. Then go with the one that checks all the right boxes and meets the needs of the campaign. To start, here are a few standards a good idea should follow:

- **There are few assumptions.** If there are more questions than answers, you run the risk of facing roadblocks along the way. There should be enough balance between knowing what to expect and taking a chance on something great.
- **It has a sufficient shelf life.** Is the idea based on a current fad that has the potential to disappear quickly? Depending on what your goal is, you might want to consider how long you need it to last.
- **It fulfills customers' needs.** Whether the idea is a new service, content topic or even an event, it should always focus on solving a problem or meeting the needs of your target audience. Don't assume that if it's important to you, it's also important to your customers.
- **It fits within the overall business strategy.** The fastest way to get support from all departments is to make sure the idea fits within the organization's overall business strategy. It should fulfill a need that is part of the big picture and contribute to the growth of the company.
- **Is the idea profitable?** This is a no-brainer, but not always apparent early on. The goal is to of course contribute to the company's ongoing success, but there is always some level of uncertainty. Will this idea actually work? If it meets the rest of the criteria, it's a step in the right direction.

HOW TO FOSTER A CREATIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT

5 TRAITS OF CREATIVE LEADERS

1. They challenge the status quo. Creative leaders are constantly looking for new ways to grow and evolve their business. They understand the importance of being in the know on new trends and are not satisfied with doing something just because that's the way things have always been done.
2. They are in tune with their intuition. Leaders with an open mind who are receptive to their gut feelings and take risks, often reap the rewards. True creative leaders let their logic and intuition work together.
3. They put ideas into action. It's one thing to talk about good ideas in theory, but creative leaders make them a reality and they do it fast because striving for perfection is just an excuse to procrastinate.
4. They aren't afraid to fail. Creative leaders are never quiet during a brainstorm. They are not scared to speak up, try new things or get it wrong. Making mistakes is how we learn. Every misstep is an opportunity to continue experimenting until you land on something amazing.
5. They are hungry to learn. The more experiences you have and knowledge you soak in, the better able you are to think in new ways and view problems from different angles. Creative leaders don't limit who they can learn from. They respect their team's opinions and are receptive to disagreements.

Sitting at a desk for eight hours will rarely breed innovative ideas. Inspiration can take hold anywhere and in unconventional ways. When employees have the freedom and space to be productive in ways that work best for them, creativity can flourish.

Create a company culture that values ideas and opinions from the entire staff. When people feel like their voice is not only heard, but respected, it reduces the fear of speaking up.

Whether you have five employees or 500, been in business one year or 20, there are steps you can take to stimulate creativity. From the physical space to allowing more flexibility, companies that think about what's best for their employees not only attract the best and brightest professionals, they also inspire their teams to give their all, every day.

It Starts in the Workspace

There's a reason why companies boast about being fun places to work. When you work hard and play hard—as the saying goes—the byproduct is stellar results. Encourage employees to let off some steam with a game of ping pong or a round of pool.

Another idea is to offer different kinds of work stations, like standing desks, comfortable spaces with couches and even tables located outside. No one wants to spend an entire day working in a cubicle or behind a closed office door. Having the option to change the scenery reduces the monotony often associated with work.

Collaboration fosters creativity, so give employees spaces that encourage teamwork like big conference rooms with white boards and an open-concept work area. Tempt your employees to eat lunch together by setting up group tables in the kitchen.

Flexibility is Key to Productivity

Everyone's work flow is different. Some people do their best thinking early in the morning while others take a little longer to warm up. By the same token, there may be fewer distractions working outside the office and someone may perform best hunkering down at a Starbucks while on a deadline. Instead of holding a meeting in the conference room, a small group of employees may want to talk while walking around the campus or neighborhood.

As long as the quality of work isn't suffering, allowing people to work on their own terms (within reason) is a great way to nurture a creative staff.

Everyone Needs a Break

Working 24/7 isn't as effective as it sounds. You think you're getting more done, but the quality of the work suffers. In fact, research shows that the average office employee is only productive for three hours a day. Encourage your team to take a lunch break every day. Don't waste vacation days, even if that means staying home and relaxing. Breaking up the routine will invite new ways of thinking.

Have Respectful Debates

Build a level of trust with your employees so that when they disagree or have an idea for a process improvement, they feel safe in voicing their opinions. Debating a concept can open the door to new, untapped ideas. If everyone agreed all the time, there would be far less growth. Not to mention it would be boring.

3RD PLACE



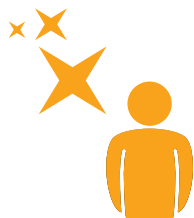
According to The World Economic Forum, creativity will be the 3rd most important work skill by 2020, up from its 10th spot in 2015.

60%



According to *Fast Company*, 60% of CEO's polled cited creativity as the most important leadership quality.

75%



According to an Adobe study, 75% of people don't believe they are living up to their creative potential.

BREAK THROUGH CREATIVE BARRIERS

While brainstorming and collaborating with colleagues is a great recipe for creative thinking, so is alone time. Don't underestimate the power of your own brain. Every day you're faced with questions and challenges from colleagues and clients for which you have to come up with solutions and strategies. Nearly everything we do requires some level of imagination.

Don't rely on that rare "light-bulb" moment to give you a fully baked idea and don't be discouraged if it never comes. In fact, good ideas are a direct result of a process, which may include a mix of collaboration, education, experiences and intuition.

When you hit a wall, one of the best things to do is step away. Tapping into your creative genius may be as simple as distracting your mind from the task at hand.

Here are four easy ways to stop what you're doing and trigger your creative side:

1. Open your senses by experiencing the world in a leisurely way. Allow yourself to daydream during a walk or a jog and see where your mind takes you.
2. Get lost in another world by listening to music, reading a book or watching TV. Put your focus on something else.
3. Participate in another creative activity like coloring or journaling to release your stream of consciousness.
4. Exercising your brain means it also needs to rest. When your subconscious is awakened through sleep, you never know what thoughts will emerge. Write it down so you don't forget them!

Avoid Creativity Crushers

Finding ways to let our creativity thrive is crucial to idea generation. Not surprisingly, there are also surefire ways to kill creative thinking, particularly at work. *Psychology Today* reported on research from Harvard that uncovered five common offenders that put the brakes on creativity. Leaders should take note to avoid these idea suppressors.

1. Employees may have difficulty producing their best work if they're in a job that is not right for them. Not only are they unhappy, but they may not feel motivated or confident in their abilities, which doesn't promote creativity.
2. A lack of resources can quickly put a damper on creativity, especially if those resources are time and people. You need time to dedicate to the creative process, which can be different for each person. Some people like to look at a number of different solutions from various angles before landing on one idea. Whatever the method, it's important to spend the time doing it. This also relates to workload and the size of the team. People need space to create. That can't happen if new projects are constantly taking priority.
3. Even if it isn't said outright, people can pick up on subtle cues that stifle new ideas. If you dismiss good ideas because they don't fit into the norm, the company can't grow and, even worse, the ideas will eventually dry up.
4. Positive feedback is crucial for high performance—and getting more ideas! If an idea produces great results, share it with the team to raise morale. People like to know when they're doing a good job. Celebrating success is just as important to employee development as constructive criticism.
5. Make it a habit to interact with different people in the office. If you don't diversify your social groups, you won't get the opportunity to meet people with varying backgrounds, experiences and opinions.

Encourage Creativity

The bottom line is leaders must take responsibility for building a culture of creativity. It's the only way to enable your people to dive into their creative genius and generate ideas that take the business to the next level. Companies are only as strong as the people that hold them together.

NEED SOME INSPIRATION?

Contact **Chris Cherry**,
Chief Engagement Officer, to learn
how JConnelly can help generate
ideas for your business.

ccherry@jconnelly.com
or call us at **973-850-7329**

FIND INSPIRATION AT
blog.jconnelly.com