

How to Be More Creative:

In looking at how to be more creative, it helps to see what truly creative people do to create useful ideas, and then try to be more like them in those ways. One thing they do is ask a lot of questions, and not always the kinds of questions you might expect. For example, whoever invented the first buffet restaurant may have asked the question, "What if customers served their own meals?"

At the time, this would probably have been considered a ridiculous question. It is these nonsensical questions though, which lead to the most novel - and sometimes profitable - ideas. After all, most of the more "normal" questions have probably been asked already, and the ideas they suggest already implemented.

Develop Your Questioning Ability



To get yourself thinking in new and more creative ways, then, you have to ask any question that comes to mind, and then explore it a bit. Whether or not it embarrasses you, you have to be willing to ask something like "What would monkey economics consist of?" And by the way, there have been economic studies done with monkeys, which have taught us something about the evolutionary forces involved in human financial decisions, which just goes to show you how seemingly silly ideas can lead to useful ones.

That's the key to the power of crazy ideas, by the way. They won't often be of any value by themselves, but they start a chain of mental associations leading to some more useful idea. For example, when looking at the issue of how single people meet, we might ask, "What if they all carried signs announcing their status?" This isn't likely to work, but it can lead to the idea of a transmitter/homing device that allows users who choose to use it to know who is single as long as they are willing to let others "home in" on their device. This has been tested with some success in the bars of New York, by the way.

Of course, there are many great questions you can ask that are not so "crazy." The best of these are perhaps those which challenge the assumptions or premises involved in existing ideas. For example, if you're looking at the problem of a slowing business, you might easily accept the common assumption that you need more customers. Challenging this can lead to the idea of offering higher value and higher prices, which might provide more profit with fewer customers. Asking "Does a razor need a blade?" might lead to the idea of a razor-like device that actually pulls the whiskers out instead of cutting them.

To test your questioning-ability, take an object like a toaster, a sink, a stapler, a chair, phone or any other household item, and see how many questions you can ask about it. Write them down, and try to be wild in the ones you ask. After practicing your creativity for a while, you can try this exercise again, to see if you are coming up with more questions and crazier ones too. Also work with each question to see what creative ideas you have.

Develop Your Elaboration Skills

Another important component of creativity is your ability to elaborate ideas - both your own and those of others. Want to see how good you are at this? Take one or more of the following ideas and explain them further:

- An "ice bicycle" that uses blades instead of wheels and travels on frozen bodies of water.
- Those who offend others are sent to "Sensitivity Training," but isn't it also a problem to be overly sensitive to their remarks? What kind of training should such people have?
- A stand-up restaurant that has no chairs.
- What we are lies beyond all our defining of ourselves.

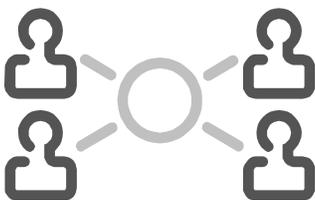


Be More Creative By Shifting Perspectives Easily

Okay, most of us have heard the true story of how Albert Einstein imagined riding a beam of light in order to develop his theory of relativity. a great example of using a different perspective. But how often do you use different perspectives in your thinking? Do you routinely try to imagine what someone with a differing opinion would think about an issue, for example? Creative people can more easily move from one perspective to another, and this is a skill or habit which can be learned.

Suppose we are considering the raising, training and selling of guard dogs. The common perspective is that large or dangerous dogs are needed to scare away intruders. Let's look at some of the other possible perspectives, and what they might suggest.

From the perspective of innocent bystanders, guard dogs can be too dangerous. More people are killed by dogs every year in the U.S. than by sharks, bears, mountain lions and snakes all put together. So what if we want a safer guard dog that still does the job? We might consider a dog that is not trained to attack, but is trained to act vicious. After all, the burglar won't know the difference.



Police may wish they had fewer dog attacks to respond to and more information on what criminals are doing. That perspective suggests that a system of cameras could be activated when the dog on the property gets overly excited (or stops all activity, indicating the worst). The images might be immediately transmitted to a security company, who can take a look and decide if the police are needed.

A person with less money might ask, "How do I get the benefits of the guard dog at a lower cost?" This suggests a recording of vicious dogs barking, which is activated whenever a house is approached. It might cost just a dollar's worth of electricity per month to "feed" such guard dogs.

What other perspectives are there? That of the neighbors who listen to all the barking. The feelings of the dogs themselves. That of doctors who see those injured by dogs. Consider things from many perspectives and you will be more creative in the ideas you produce.

To test and develop your ability to easily shift from one perspective to another, consider an issue that is in the news today, and see how many possible perspectives you can see it from. Then try to produce a new idea based on each. Try this exercise again to both make it a habit to use other perspectives, and to see if you are getting better at it.