



Seeing tomorrow's ideas...Today

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## Focus on Innovation

Focus on Innovation is a monthly electronic newsletter designed to provoke thoughts and ideas on how to bring innovation to life within the organizations in which we work.

### For Those on the Run

The quickest and easiest way to increase your creativity is to develop skills in generating alternatives as part of the problem-solving process. This month's newsletter provides three creative techniques for generating alternatives.

### Individual Creative Techniques

*"The best way to get a good idea is to get a lot of ideas."  
- Linus Pauling*

People tend to think that having really good ideas is possible for only a few, and that the rest of us, who don't have special "intuitive" talents, cannot be creative. Nothing can be further from the truth. Each of us can become more creative if we learn and practice skills in generating alternatives. Here are three creative techniques that will help you produce results quickly and easily.

#### Rolling in the Grass of Ideas

This is a great technique when you need to gain new insight, combine ideas, and solve complex problems about which much is known. The technique involves collecting as much material as you can about the problem at hand in an easily readable form - for example, summaries of related articles and books, the experiences of others, ideas that others have given you, and competitors' actions. You read through this material as rapidly as you can in one sitting. Then you ask yourself what it all means. Are there any patterns? If so, what do they suggest? What solutions pop into your head?

#### Summary of Steps

1. Collect all information about your problem, making notes in an easily readable form.
2. Read through all of your notes in one sitting so that all the ideas are in your brain at one time.
3. Allow natural incubation to occur and see what ideas develop.

#### Free Association

Free association is a great technique to use when you need lots of ideas quickly and a way to relate them to problems and/or when normal processes haven't provided many ideas. Free association involves making a mental connection between two objects or ideas. In free association, you say whatever comes into your

mind relative to a word you just wrote or relative to a one-or-two word definition of a problem. A trail of thoughts is pursued in this way. The purpose of free association is to simply get thoughts on paper that will trigger new thoughts about a problem. You don't expect to find solutions per se; rather, you are looking for thoughts that may lead to solutions. For example, product developers from the Campbell Soup Company began by randomly selecting the word "handle" from the dictionary. Through free association the word "utensil" was suggested. This led to "fork" which led the group to reason that you can't eat soup with a fork unless it was thick with vegetables and meat. This led to the development of Campbell's Chunky Soups line; an extremely successful product line for Campbell's.

### Summary of Steps

1. Start with a one-word summary of your problem on line 1.
2. On line 2, write down the first word that comes to your mind after looking at line 1.
3. On line 3, write down the first word that comes to mind after looking at line 2. Continue until you have ten words (Twenty to thirty is even better).
4. Look at these ten words. How do each of them gives you some insight into your problem? Can you use any to draw analogies that could lead to solutions? Take the words that grab you and use them to brainstorm solutions, or use them to form new associations that can be used to brainstorm solutions. Write your ideas on lines 1a through 10a.

1	1a
2	2a
3	3a
4	4a
5	5a
6	6a
7	7a
8	8a
9	9a
10	10a

The third technique for generating creative alternatives is **Mind Mapping**. For more on mind mapping read our October 2004 newsletter, *Making Connections with Your Mind* by clicking

<http://www.foursightconsulting.com/ideas/newsletter/Focus%20on%20Innovation%20v1.11%20-%20Making%20Connections%20in%20Your%20Mind.pdf>

### What's the Bottom line

We all have the ability to generate lots of ideas; however this requires skill, commitment, and practice.

This month's newsletter is adapted from James M. Higgins book, *101 Creative Problem Solving Techniques: The handbook for new ideas for business*, Winter Park, FL: New Management Publishing Company, 1994.



Please feel free to pass this newsletter on to others.

If you would like more information about the ideas and topics listed in this issue, contact Judy Laws, Ph.D. at

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