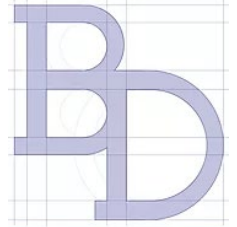


# CREATIVITY & INNOVATION EXERCISES

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## Exercise 1: Cultivating creativity in yourself

1. **Become more of an observer.** Observe people, situations, and places. Become more aware. If you have low emotional self-awareness, it will improve with this focus. Quick Exercise: Without looking, describe your phone home page and any other pages. What are the colors, icons, arrangements, etc? How did you do? How many times a day do you look at your phone? But do you really observe and truly see?
2. **Become more aware of your environment.** When you start to observe more, you will start to notice your surroundings in a different way. Try this exercise. Point at various things in the room and name them out loud. Example: chair, table, desk, computer, monitor, etc. Now point at various things in the room (they can be the same objects) and name the last thing that you pointed at. Example: point at chair, then point at table and say “chair”, point at desk and say “table”, point at computer and say “desk”, point at monitor and say “computer”. Now point at all of the things in the room (it can be the same objects) and name them ANYTHING you want to name them. Do this and then read the debrief.  
**Debrief:** Did you have “rules” with your pointing and naming the objects ANYTHING? Most people say no. Did you have the rule that you couldn’t name it what it really was? Did you have the rule that you name it a category like fruits or animals? Did you have the rule that you had to be clever and innovative when naming? Did you have the rule that you had to be really good at this? So maybe you did have some rules. The first point is that this exercise creates more awareness. Your brain knows what a chair is, so it doesn’t process that information. But when you point and name something else, your brain is forced to process that information. It creates a hyper awareness. You have awakened the brain from its sleep. Look around the room and see if there are things that you didn’t notice when we first started this exercise. The second point is that we all have these rules and limiting beliefs. Don’t automatically put things in categories or make rules. Be wide open to anything. If you want to do a final test, point and name things in the room and truly make it stream of consciousness. Truly name the items the first thing that pops into your head and be open and relaxed. It’s harder than it sounds.
3. **Build in reflection time every day.** There are hundreds of stories about “eureka” moments in the shower or sitting under a tree. This allows your brain to process and make connections.
4. **Get out of your routines.** Drive a different way to work, towel off from the shower differently, dress with a different order, use your opposite hand all day, or tie your shoes differently (don’t use your thumbs). Do anything to get your brain out of a subconscious fog.
5. **Expand your knowledge.** Know a little bit about a lot of different things. Creativity comes out of the merging of different ideas. The more ideas floating around in your brain, the more possibility for connections and creative thought.
6. **Play like a kid.** Play. Make mistakes. Be silly. Dance. Pretend. Make stuff up. Be with kids.
7. **Disconnect from the world.** I encourage everyone to completely disconnect from the world: no television, no email, no phones, and no tablets. And something miraculous happens around the third day. Everyone starts freeing their brain and getting amazing insights and thoughts. Try it!
8. **Get a little crazy.** Do something weird, yell at the top of your lungs or talk in a strange voice.
9. **Do something outside your comfort zone.** Join a dance class, acting class, or improv class. Learn something new like chess or rock climbing or computer code writing.
10. **Know that everyone is creative.** Creativity is like a muscle; it can be developed. When you look at the typical profile for most construction partners, they score high in reality testing (black and white thinkers) and problem solving and low in flexibility. This is not an ideal profile for creativity, but the good news is people can change.
11. **Accept that more heads are better than one.** Bounce ideas off others. Brainstorm in diverse groups without any censorship. Different perspectives can generate amazing creativity.
12. **Start writing things down.** Make lists. When you get an idea, capture it. Keep writing, even after you have exhausted all possibilities.
13. **Reframe the problem.** Create an unusual solution and then ask yourself, “Why is this a great solution?”
14. **Use a ridiculous correlation.** Randomly put your finger in a book, look for the nearest noun and ask yourself, “How is this problem like a [fill in the blank]?” Brainstorm in this manner will help give you some perspective on the problem.
15. **Don’t say “no” or “yes, but...” or “I tried that before and it didn’t work.”** Say “yes, and...” to build on the ideas generated.

16. **Use Your Subconscious.** Plant a problem in your brain before bed and see what your subconscious comes up with the next morning. Think of a problem you are struggling with, then take a walk in nature and DON'T think about the problem. When you return, see what your subconscious comes up with.
17. **Know you are truly unique.** Your brain is the only brain that thinks like you do. Celebrate that and promote that and know that you can break through anything. Lack of experience can be an asset. Sometimes a master can't see past how he's always done it.
18. **Get physical.** While you are thinking, do a physical activity such as walking, stomping, shaking, dancing, or running. It will help your brain work better.
19. **Ask the right questions.** Instead of asking "paper or plastic?" ask "how would you like to carry your groceries home?" A canvas bag might be the "right" answer. Try this exercise: Download the nine dots. Connect the nine dots by drawing only four straight lines. Now look at the solution.

## Exercise 2: Creating innovation in your company

1. **Start each meeting with an innovation exercise.** There are thousands on the internet. Example: This is a pen. Hold up a pen and say, "this is a pen". The next person takes the pen and says, this isn't a pen, this is a \_\_\_\_\_ and makes something up. It can be anything. The next person takes the pen and says, this isn't a (the second person's idea), this is a \_\_\_\_\_. Keep it going for as long as you come up with interesting ideas. You can also make it practical. Ask about current company or project issues. This is a great way to brainstorm.
2. **Innovation roundtables.** Create diverse innovation roundtables that meet periodically. Use "Yes, and ..." and brainstorm. Ask the question: Why are we still doing this? How can we do it better? Is there a technological solution?
3. **Play at least 20 minutes per day.** For 20 minutes every day, make it a rule that everyone must play. Have games at the office and on the project. Let your brain take a break and just have fun. You will be amazed at what this creates.
4. **Create a physical environment for innovation.** Incorporate a lot of colors and textures things that excite your brain. Have common areas for collaboration and play areas to have fun.
5. **Reward Innovation and take more risks.** The risk-averse nature of the construction industry stifles creativity and innovation. Reward innovation, cultivate it and revel in it. Don't condemn ideas that didn't work; just move on to the next one. Edison found 999 ways that a light bulb didn't work before he came up with one that did.
6. **Add quiet rooms.** Create a room to listen to music, have quiet time, or take a power nap. There have been dozens of studies showing spikes in productivity with this type of setup.
7. **Make every employee do anything other than work for one hour a day.** It can be anything from surfing the web to rollerblading. This gives them some downtime and clears their head for thinking in innovative ways. Employees will be more creative, less stressed, and more satisfied.
8. **Let employees bring pets or children to work.** This decreases stress and can increase employees' time at work.
9. **Create a results-oriented work environment.** Let employees set their own work hours and self-direct what they want to work on. Management can set work goals, but not tell employees how or when they need to be done. Depending on the position and the project, there are many days where employees could work from anywhere.
10. **Collaborate with each other (industry-wide, even competitors) on best practices for marketing, purchasing, procurement, and delivery.** Help each other and share the rewards. Come from a place of abundance where there is enough work for everyone.
11. **Give employees as much time off as possible during the workweek and for vacation without checking in.** This is vital for your employees to recharge their health and well-being, as well as their longevity.
12. **Spread love inside and outside of the company.** Work doesn't always have to be serious.
13. **Re-brand the company and fill it with spirit.** Most contractors' and engineers' brand says trustworthy, reliable, stable, ethical and probably a list of other very nice words. But these words are a bit stuffy. Look at most commercials on television for a variety of products and services. All of them are filled with positive emotions: *Coke: Open Happiness. Love: It's what makes a Subaru a Subaru.* Harley Davidson doesn't sell motorcycles—they sell freedom and independence. Construction has really missed the boat. The company that figures out how to brand itself with fun, love, humor, innovation, and creativity will rise above the competition.