

Creativity is 99% perspiration and 1% inspiration Who said it was going to be easy?

By Bob 'Idea Man' Hooey

Bryan Mattimore's excellent creativity book, "99% perspiration" should be in your organization's library. Actually, it should be signed out, and being '*worn out*' by your team.

Our ongoing success and survival in business is directly dependent on our creative ability to profitably solve the problems in our client's lives and operations. We use our innovative solutions to help make their lives and businesses better. Accessing or tapping into our creativity can be hard work unless you systemize your approach.

We hear stories of the '*a-ha*' **moments** in history, business, and science. In reality these '*lightning bolt*' occurrences nominally come about after many hours of research and applied study into a particular topic. I know that is how it usually works in my writing and program creation activities. I research, read my brains out, and take copious notes before I start writing. They sometimes are '*mined*' from lessons drawn from past failures. Consider Thomas Edison and the 1000's of attempts to find a sustainable material for the filament for a light bulb.

Take the time to conduct systematic and well-rounded research, coupled with learning from your errors and mistakes. This will help fill your mind with the raw materials necessary for creative process development. This is, as you guessed, the '*perspiration*' part of the creative process and takes an investment on your part.

During the '*incubation*' period, let your subconscious mind chew on all this material and let it forge new connections with the seemingly unrelated bits of information. Your subconscious will then send these vague feelings or intuitions to the surface or conscious mind. The creative person knows to capture these thoughts, however vague, impractical or wild, for later evaluation and analysis. (*Use one of my Idea Catchers for this purpose.*)

Be open and accessible to all ideas – regardless of size

I've seen many people fall to the trap of waiting for the '*big idea*' – a completely novel idea for a product, project or service. They sit and wait for sudden inspiration or brilliant flashes of insight. Focusing on big ideas, we can easily become blinded from seeing smaller, otherwise 'good' and valuable solutions. Like the story I heard of an employee in the mailroom who noticed several packages being couriered to the same address. He checked into it, compiled them into one package with instructions on distribution at the receiving end. His '*small*' change in process saved his company 1,000's of dollars each year.

While not as flashy or showy, these smaller insights and ideas often represent very workable and profitable options. Some can even lay the foundation for other great ideas. Encourage your team to capture or share their ideas with you and investigate all of the options contained. Consider that the original idea for the \$1 billion dollar a year Levi Strauss Dockers line came from one of their employees in Argentina.

Time to sweat – perspiration activities

What can you do to fertilize your mind for enhanced brainstorming, or thunder thinking, as I like to call it? (Thunder thinking – when lightning strikes!) What kind of research or mental preparation or ‘*perspiration*’ activities will help?

Suggestions that have successfully worked for myself and other creative thinkers:

- Visit authoritative web sites and learn to use search engines to conduct on line research
- Challenge your existing assumptions and mindsets. No sacred cows!
- Remember to have fun! We learn best during times of enjoyment.
- Use Google’s news alert program to keep you informed on selected areas (other search engines and web based programs will provide this type of material often on a daily basis. I have several news topics on leadership, creativity and innovation and get emails with links to those stories on a daily basis.
- Read books and magazine articles on the issue of topic you are studying or researching. A copy of my ‘**Why Didn’t I THINK of That?**’ might be a good addition to your library.
- Map out the information you need, and potential sources where you might find it and ask open-ended questions to elicit the most usable and rich information.
- Ask carefully crafted questions of experts in the area of your study. They will often be able to kick start your creativity and give you a heads up that will advance your process to the next level.
- Don’t be afraid to ask seemingly stupid questions – there aren’t any!
- Learn to apply the four step creative process to fully explore your ideas: preparation; incubation; illumination; and of course implementation or action on the idea.

The 21st Century version of the 3 R’s

Most innovations are not entirely new; in fact many represent new combinations or modifications of existing services, products, technologies or materials. I’ve been able to do this in some of my writing and programs in drawing from previously done programs or writing in the creation of something more adapted or relevant to my audiences. Not re-inventing the wheel each time, but taking it a step up in the development of its use and scope. Fortunately, computers and word processing, and visual outlining or diagramming programs make it easier to gather, analyze and manipulate information fragments into new combinations or versions.

This allows you to apply the 3 R’s in your creative process.

- **Research**, retrieve, and record information.
- **Review** and revise the information you gather.
- **Recombine** or re-use ideas – make new associations between the idea fragments of information you’ve gathered.

A few concluding thoughts...

With the right kind of preparation, any one of your team members can experience an ‘*a-ha*’ moment. It takes training, but it is not something only an Einstein would be able to do.

A few final tips to help facilitate this creative process:

- **Know where to look** for information. Love learning – become a sponge for information on your topic or field of study.
- **Develop the skills** in asking incisive, well thought-out, open-ended questions that draw out the information, the insights, and the wisdom of those you approach.
- **Experiment with mind mapping** or other right brain stimulation tools to map out your assumptions, questions, insights, concerns, and needs for more information.
- During the interim between your ‘Thunder-thinking’ or brainstorming sessions, **remain open for additional insights**. Be a sponge starting with your industry or profession and flowing outward into cross-functional disciplines, business, social or other areas. The insight you seek may not be found in the place you live or work, but it is out there.
- **Cultivate an ‘insight-outlook’**. Be open to consider information, insights, trends, and other data mined from multiple perspectives and personal experience. Work to identify and understand the inferences, underlying trends or connections they may contain and how they might pertain or impact what you are working on in your study.

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Bob ‘Idea Man’ Hooley is a productivity strategist and creativity catalyst who regularly writes for North American Consumer and Trade Journals, on-line magazines and company intranets. He is the author of 10 books and the 48th person in the history of Toastmasters International to earn their coveted professional level Accredited Speaker designation. He is a professional member of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers and the International Federation for Professional Speakers. Visit his website for additional articles like this one: www.ideaman.net