

Innovation Tips and Tricks

Many people believe that you are either a creative person or you are not. Not true. These tips and tricks can be used with your team (or in your personal life) to find innovative solutions to problems or find new paths to grow.

Encourage sparks.

Not all innovation starts as a fully formed idea. Consider iterative innovation that makes small changes with an idea or process that restarts and morphs over time. The results may not be noticeable in the short term, but the smaller proactive approaches will add up to fewer reactive solutions.

Create space for slow-moving growth.

We like to count data that shows growth and more: more sales, more customers, more savings. Proactive solutions do not always address an immediate more; they are about an idea that needs to be planted, nurtured, and pruned. Be realistic at how many months (or years) may be needed for truly innovative idea to reach fruition.

Rethink the SMART goal.

Consider providing a hypothesis as a goal rather than a set of numbers – the opposite of the SMART goal. SMART goals are often about operational work, not innovative work. While the workplace does need SMART goals, it should not limit itself to just SMART goals.

Make space for bad ideas.

Praise the innovative effort or idea even if it does not lead to the next big thing. Failing small and failing fast can lead to more collaborative innovation and iterations to problem-solving. Mention failed efforts in reviews as a positive aspect of work. The courage to present or try a new idea means your team members are engaged in their work and invested in your organization – and that leads to other adjacent benefits.

Provide prompts.

- What will our department look like in 5 years?
- What technology will our customers be using 3 years from now and how will it affect our products/services?
- What new product would appeal to our current client base?

- What process could we subtract and never miss?
- What would be an exact opposite product or service from what we are doing now? Why would it be valuable?
- What options would we have to combine a product or service for something new and valuable?
- How can we spend less time doing....?
- What would it look like if we eliminated ...?
- What are the innovations I love from the products and services I use, and how would that show up in our own business?

Provide a framework for innovation.

Blank slates are often stagnating. Starting with a draft or part of an idea to build on can be helpful. Or, providing realistic constraints or boundaries to work within can spark creativity.

Think “Inside the Box” for the sweet spot of innovation.

Systematic Innovative Thinking is about using patterns for creativity. They include the following:

- **Subtraction**
Take out a feature or process step for a new result. Your shipping address is saved in your favorite online shop.
- **Multiplication**
Take a beloved feature and add to it. A kitchen trash bin slides out like a drawer with a recycle bin added.
- **Division**
Divide a current product into parts to locate flaws and opportunities. Using rug squares in place of wall-to-wall carpet so that damaged squares can be easily swapped out.
- **Task Unification**
Combine two separate components into one. A suitcase and a cart to transport suitcases were once 2 separate items. Now suitcases come with wheels to eliminate the cart.
- **Attribute Dependency Change**
Add a desired attribute to a mostly neutral feature. Color-changing eyewear lenses eliminate the need for prescription sunglasses.