

FINDING CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

Linda Naiman

“WHEN YOU’RE FACED WITH UNPRECEDENTED PROBLEMS, CREATIVITY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER.”

WHY CREATIVITY IS IMPORTANT TO YOUR BUSINESS

Whenever there is a crisis, there is also an opportunity. The question is, how do you discover opportunity in times of turbulence and chaos? Creativity gives you the ability to perceive the world in new ways, to find hidden patterns, to make connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena and to generate solutions. When you’re faced with unprecedented problems, creativity is more important than ever.

You might think that creativity takes up too much time and that as a small-to-medium-size business, you don’t have the resources to be creative. Know this: If you can provide creative solutions your customers love, you will always be in demand.

You are creative in business when you conceive and implement new or significantly improved products, services, experiences or processes that create value for your customers. The key to success is to focus on learning about your customers and prospects. The more you understand their pain points and unmet needs, the better your chances of creating winning solutions.

An Adobe study in 2014 found that companies that embrace creativity outperform rivals in revenue growth, market share and talent acquisition. Additionally, creative companies get products to market faster, enjoy a price premium from buyers, have more people who speak on their behalf, and disrupt their traditional markets with new ideas and approaches.

THE SURPRISING CONNECTION BETWEEN RESILIENCE, GRATITUDE AND CREATIVITY

Deepak Chopra says, "The best use of imagination is creativity. The worst use of imagination is anxiety."

It's hard not to worry when the world seems to be falling apart, so my advice is to attend to your well-being, to optimize your body, mind and spirit. Make it a habit to be grateful for at least five things every day. When you face a setback with an attitude of gratitude, it does not mean you deny the situation. It means calling forth your creative powers to transform your crisis into an opportunity. Gratitude is the antidote to anxiety and fear, allowing feelings of grace, well-being and optimism to flow, thus making us more resilient.

Creativity has the power to heal and nurture the soul. When we are completely absorbed in an activity we find enjoyable, we open our awareness to new perceptions and new perspectives. When we experience positive emotions, we enhance our ability to solve problems and come up with creative solutions.

HOW TO INSPIRE CREATIVITY IN YOUR BUSINESS

Creativity requires a beginner's mind, curiosity and an openness to exploring different perspectives. Creativity by definition is about creating something novel; therefore you can't tell in advance if it will work out, so it's best to treat it as an experiment.

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—DEEPAK CHOPRA

Carve out time for creative explorations on your own and with your team. Create an idea-friendly atmosphere by establishing rules of engagement for creative conversations. Make it safe for people to express their ideas freely without fear of ridicule. Get comfortable with uncertainty, and be willing to see your experiments fail. Your experiments are opportunities to learn. You can manage risk by limiting the scope of the project and focusing on creating solutions on the basis of what you understand about your customers' needs and desires.

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT FOR CREATIVE CONVERSATIONS

Be curious

Encourage each person's contribution

Build on ideas from others

Suspend premature judgment

Ask plenty of open-ended questions

Listen for connections between ideas

Explore underlying assumptions and beliefs

Encourage diverse perspectives

Create a shared understanding

Don't be sarcastic

Play with ideas

Make your partner look good

Play so that the whole team wins

Say thank you

Celebrate mistakes (or at least learn from them)

HOW TO MANAGE THE CREATIVE PROCESS



- 1. DISCOVER YOUR OPPORTUNITY:** Learn what you can about your customers' pain points, needs and desires. Gather data you have about your market, including analytics, economic data and data about trends and technology.
- 2. DEFINE YOUR OPPORTUNITY:** Make sense of your research by looking for patterns, themes and insights. Write a list of clear opportunity statements, and identify the problems to be solved, e.g., "our customer needs a better way to ___ because ___." Reframe problem areas as opportunities by writing another list of questions starting with "how might we." Choose a project scope that feels actionable and interesting. For example: "How might we help people make healthful food choices?" A broader scope would be "help people look and feel great." A narrower one would be "help people plan weekly shopping online."
- 3. REST:** Disconnect from all your devices. Go for a walk to refresh your brain and let new ideas bubble up.
- 4. EXPLORE IDEAS:** Generate multiple solutions (see brainstorming tips below). Provide everyone with a summary, and encourage them to build on the ideas from your session. Provide a space online for adding and sharing ideas. When this is done, decide when to meet next to debate and evaluate your ideas.
- 5. EVALUATE:** Evaluate your ideas from a variety of angles, such as how easy it would be to implement, how it would affect your place in the market and how likely it would be to succeed. Challenge your assumptions. Choose the ideas that best meet all your criteria, and pick one to three for further development, depending on how complex your solutions are.

- 6. MAKE THINGS:** Create a model or a mock-up to illustrate your ideas and give your target something to react to positively or negatively.
- 7. TEST:** Validate your ideas and your conclusions with your target group. This is the best way to mitigate risk. What questions do you need to ask? Be sure to listen to feedback without getting defensive, and look for ways to make your idea better.
- 8. REFINE YOUR IDEAS:** Depending on the outcome of your test, you may have to repeat steps 1–6 before you find a winning solution.
- 9. DELIVER:** Turn your ideas into action. Formulate an action plan to launch your innovation. Who is going to do what and by when? How will you measure success?
- 10. SCALE:** Look for ways you can improve, innovate and scale up.

BRAINSTORMING TIPS

Make sure everyone understands the rules of engagement
Make sure everyone participates
Record all ideas on a board and make them visible
Focus on what is wanted
Ask questions to spark creativity

BUILD ON IDEAS USING IDEA BOOSTERS

Tell me more ...
Yes, what if ...
What I like about this is ...
Let's play with this ...
Let's explore this some more ...

WATCH OUT FOR IDEA BUSTERS

(the time to challenge ideas is during the evaluation phase)

Yes, but...
Are you serious?
We've never done it that way
It's not in the budget
It'll never work

AVOID THESE BRAINSTORMING TRAPS

1. Lack of preparation. You can't just call a meeting and ask people to brainstorm on the spot.
2. Lack of focus. Proceeding with a poorly defined topic.
3. Judging every idea as it is put forward.
4. Letting a few participants dominate the discussion.
5. Lack of structure. Creativity without structure produces a formless mess.
6. Fear of being wrong or stupid.
7. No follow-through. Brainstorming is a waste of time if no action is taken.

PARTING ADVICE

Creativity is your most important asset in creating a better world. Maintain a positive attitude and an optimistic outlook even in the face of adversity. Look for opportunities to create amazing experiences for your customers, and find ways to give them what they most need. They will thank you.



These HP Printables are brought to you by Linda Naiman, founder of Creativity at Work. She helps leaders and their teams develop creativity, innovation and collaborative leadership capabilities through coaching, training and consulting. Her practice is informed by her background as an artist and designer, and her clients range from global companies to solopreneurs. Additional Idea-Generation Tools at CreativityAtWork.com

ADDITIONAL IDEA-GENERATION TOOLS

Brainwriting

creativityatwork.com/2011/01/10/brainwriting/

Question-storming

<https://wp.me/p7E4uX-3Ea>

Idea-generation technique for new-product development

<https://wp.me/p7E4uX-19>

TWELVE QUESTIONS TO SPARK CREATIVITY

Embrace a mindset of curiosity. Ask these questions throughout your creative process and whenever you are problem-solving.

1. What is the current situation? The opportunity? Identify pain points.

2. Who is involved? What do you need to understand about your customer/target market/users?

3. Why is it happening? Ask why five times to get to the root cause.

4. How might we rearticulate problem areas as opportunities?

5. What if? Imagine possibilities from different perspectives.

6. What else? Don't stop at your first few ideas. Go beyond the obvious solutions.

7. Is this the best we can do? Aim higher.

8. Why not? What assumptions should you be challenging? Where might you be blind to new opportunities?

9. What wows? Review your options and choose winning ideas on the basis of what will appeal to your target group.

10. What do you think? Invite participation.

11. How will this work? Make a business case for your ideas, and test them with your target group to get their feedback.

12. What's next? How might I use our existing know-how (competencies) to enter new markets and flourish in them?

CREATE A **VISION BOARD** OF YOUR IDEAL FUTURE

A vision board is a visual collage of your aspirations, dreams or goals. Imagine the ideal future direction of your company by creating a vision board. This is a fun and inspiring exercise to do on your own, with your team or with trusted friends.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. *Make a list of your heartfelt aspirations, or pick out the most important ones from the previous exercise.*
2. *Collect pictures from magazines or the web that represent your goals or symbolize the future you want to create. They should also capture the right mood.*
3. *Make a collage from your images on a board or canvas or, if you are digitally inclined, on an app like Photoshop or Affinity. If you are meeting online, you can make a collage on a canvas such as Jamboard or Conceptboard. Include words that represent who you want to become and evoke the emotions you want to feel or the qualities you want to manifest—such as love, courage or gratitude.*
4. *Arrange your images in a way that is pleasing to the eye. You don't want your aspirations to look cluttered and chaotic.*
5. *Evoke the qualities you would experience if you had already realized your aspirations, such as gratitude and appreciation.*
6. *Place your vision board where you can see it often. Try printing it out to create a poster.*
7. *Finally, expand your inner radar to be on the lookout for clues, synchronicities and hunches (in the form of people, places and things) that lead you to your next steps.*

Take turns sharing your collage and telling your story. Once everyone has shared, discuss common themes, aspirations and what moved you. Share insights and observations; ask questions; and decide what's next.

ALTERNATIVE

Create two vision boards: one of your current reality, and a second one of your ideal future. Each person on your team creates a collage of how they see current reality regarding your business or project. Take turns sharing your collage with your team and telling your story. Once everyone has shared, ask questions; discuss perceptions; and share insights.

Compare current reality to your vision. Discuss the gaps and explore ways to close them. Spark a strategic creative conversation with your team using the questions in this booklet.

MY VISION BOARD

WEEK FIVE

QUOTES TO **INSPIRE CREATIVITY** IN YOUR BUSINESS

Print out and cut out these quote cards—you can keep one in your wallet/back-pocket, you can use them as conversation-starters by having a bowl full of them on your desk or in meeting rooms, or you could pin them up around your workspace to challenge yourself to think creatively when you hit a wall.

“CREATIVITY IS THE POWER TO REJECT THE PAST, TO CHANGE THE STATUS QUO AND TO SEEK NEW POTENTIAL. SIMPLY PUT, ASIDE FROM USING ONE’S IMAGINATION—PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANTLY—CREATIVITY IS THE POWER TO ACT.” —AI WEIWEI, CHINESE ARTIST AND ACTIVIST

“CREATIVITY INVOLVES TWO PROCESSES: THINKING, THEN PRODUCING... IF YOU HAVE IDEAS BUT DON’T ACT ON THEM, YOU ARE IMAGINATIVE BUT NOT CREATIVE.”—LINDA NAIMAN, CORPORATE ALCHEMIST

“WHEN WE ENGAGE IN WHAT WE ARE NATURALLY SUITED TO DO, OUR WORK TAKES ON THE QUALITY OF PLAY, AND IT IS PLAY THAT STIMULATES CREATIVITY.”

—LINDA NAIMAN, CORPORATE ALCHEMIST

“IT IS BETTER TO HAVE ENOUGH IDEAS FOR SOME OF THEM TO BE WRONG THAN TO BE ALWAYS RIGHT BY HAVING NO IDEAS AT ALL.” —EDWARD DE BONO, AUTHOR

“PLAY WIDENS THE HALLS. WORK WILL ALWAYS BE WITH US, AND MANY WORKS ARE WORTHY. BUT THE WORTHIEST WORKS OF ALL OFTEN REFLECT AN ARTFUL CREATIVITY THAT LOOKS MORE LIKE PLAY THAN WORK.” —JAMES OGILVY, LANDSCAPE DESIGNER

“THE DIFFICULTY LIES NOT SO MUCH IN DEVELOPING NEW IDEAS AS IN ESCAPING FROM OLD ONES.”

—JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES, BRITISH ECONOMIST

“THE THING WE FEAR MOST IN ORGANIZATIONS—FLUCTUATIONS, DISTURBANCES, IMBALANCES—ARE THE PRIMARY SOURCES OF CREATIVITY.”

—MEG WHEATLEY, MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT AND WRITER

“YOU CAN’T USE UP CREATIVITY. THE MORE YOU USE, THE MORE YOU HAVE.”

—MAYA ANGELOU, POET

“CREATIVITY IS ONE OF THE LAST REMAINING LEGAL WAYS OF GAINING AN UNFAIR ADVANTAGE OVER THE COMPETITION.”

—ED MCCABE, ADVERTISING EXECUTIVE

“VULNERABILITY IS THE BIRTHPLACE OF INNOVATION, CREATIVITY AND CHANGE.”

—BRENÉ BROWN, PROFESSOR AND AUTHOR