

Efficiency Kills Creativity: Here's How To Be Innovative Anyway

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You know you need to be creative to solve complex problems, to fuel innovation and to get ahead. But you're also in a hurry. There is too much on your plate and too little time. So you seek to be fast and focused. Unfortunately, an over-emphasis on efficiency tends to kill creativity.

In fact, you'll get better, more creative results if you focus less on efficiency.

A the messiness of "ah ha."

Creativity is the fuel for innovation. It is the raw ideas and the messy brilliance that turns into innovation—something new and different the market values and for which people will pay. In addition, creativity has a lot of different facets. It's not just about groups getting together in big rooms with colorful sticky notes and Sharpie markers. In fact, the creative process must include time for reflection and quiet—moments of rumination and time for ideas to be on our brains' back-burners.

We've all had the "ah ha" moment that comes in a flash of insight. In reality, the idea didn't come out of nowhere. It was the result of seeds planted in our brain over time and the power of our neuropathways to connect thoughts in new and surprising ways.

Connecting diverse ideas.

Creativity arises when we put unlike things together—when previously disconnected ideas are combined. This is why a solution may come from the person who just joined the project and doesn't have the constraints of those already deeply embedded in it. And this is why those with the most diverse networks often bring forth the unexpected ideas that help solve a problem in a new way.

The bottom line: we need experiences and time that allow for the connection of ideas. Creativity can't be rushed, planned, or managed. In fact, a study by Baylor University found leaders who focus too much on the bottom line actually compromise the performance of their teams.

For true effectiveness, reduce the pressure to be efficient, and take these actions instead:

Take time to reflect.

Because we're always connected, and always have devices in our hands, we've lost our in-between moments for reflection. Standing in line at the dry cleaner we can check our email, and during our commute we can be on a conference call (hands free) with our coworkers. Filling every minute of every day in the name of efficiency gets in the way of time when the brain can breathe, consider, and ponder. Resist the urge to be "on" every moment and allow for in-between times that give your brain time to reflect.

Connect with people unlike yourself.

Often, workdays are spent with people who think like you do—whether they are part of your company, your industry or your function. This is great for efficiency because shared thinking and similar worldviews help us to go fast. But to be more creative you should also be intentional about connecting with people who are less like you. Find people who do different work, spend their time in different places and think differently than you do. Their new ideas will spur your own thinking.

Seek unexpected experiences.

We tend to seek routine and get into predictable patterns of activity. From week-to-week, things go along in pretty much the same way. You can be more creative, however, by seeking experiences out of your norm. Take a different route to work, sign up for a class outside your comfort zone, or immerse yourself in a vacation to an unusual destination. Whether it's small changes like riding your bike instead of taking the subway, or bigger endeavors like going to a silent yoga retreat for spring break, unusual experiences will help you be more creative.

Express creativity outside of work.

It can be tough to call on your creativity at work if you rarely tap into your innovative spirit in other parts of your life. In addition, different expressions of creativity can build your creative muscle and actually make your brain more efficient according to a study in the *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*. For this reason, it's smart to express yourself through non-work pursuits. Whether you're developing a photo book of your vacation pictures, learning a new language or taking a dance class, these kinds of activities can keep your creativity fresh for outlets at work.

Find places that feed you.

Evolutionarily speaking, our ancestors have spent millennia in the wild surviving. Yet today, we show up to white collar jobs and sit in drab offices. Our brains are so terribly bored. Be sure you find places that stimulate you. Get away from your desk and work side-by-side with colleagues in your company's work café or have your meeting in the comfy space near the window rather than the standard conference room. In addition, go to the beach, sit in the park or find a forest path where you can take time away.

Get some sleep.

Resting is also critical to the creative process. New research published in *Trends in Creative Sciences Journal* suggests it boosts creative problem solving. Efficiency may dictate you stay up until all-hours getting the project done or rise at the crack of dawn to get ahead of your emails, but you'll compromise creativity. Sleep is good for the brain and helps cull thoughts and cement synapses. Rest well to think well.

Ultimately, a hurry-up, all-on, all-the-time focus on efficiency will undermine creativity. You'll go farther, faster—going slow to go fast—if you make time to reflect and connect with people outside your usual circle. Seek unexpected experiences and places and be sure to rest to be your most creative.