



INNOVATIONS

Don't be a creativity killer! How to enhance your own and others' creativity

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- We've tried that!
- It won't work here.
- I'll look silly.
- Sounds interesting, but...

Killer phrases. They stifle creativity and innovation. All of us have a few pet killers that we use to assassinate the ideas of those who work for us; and even more frequently, we use killer phrases to attack our own inventive urgings.

What do you say when confronted with novel ideas—"let's appoint a committee to study this," "be sensible," "we can't afford it," "be realistic," "we've already got enough to do," "are you *crazy*?" Being aware of your own killer phrases is a good first step towards creativity. Creating an atmosphere that welcomes creativity and frequently practicing creativity techniques are two additional steps that will move you closer to being a practicing innovator.

It's hard to change old habits and learn new techniques. Why bother to be creative? Creativity helps us to deal with problems that have no easy answer, to cope with rapid changes that occur in the workplace and in society, and to examine customary ideas and methods from a fresh perspective. Additionally, within an organization creativity techniques involve everyone in problem-solving, resulting in better communication, understanding, and morale.

Fostering a creative atmosphere

A manager who wants to promote innovation should allow risk-taking. To get dazzling success, a manager must be able to live with some failures and must protect staff members from the resulting flak. A manager should expect creativity and give staff enough information, responsibility and re-

sources to perform the assigned task. Creativity thrives in a climate that is unstructured, that encourages humor, fun, and fantasy.

A completely unstructured workplace is impossible in most organizations, but managers can make sure that workers engaged in a creative endeavor have time away from the daily routine, and have a location where they can work without interruption. All levels of staff should be involved in the generation, evaluation, and implementation of ideas. People who regularly work together will become less and less creative as a team after a few years unless some outside stimulation is provided. Within the library cross-fertilization of ideas can come from job rotation or exchange, from the use of staff from outside the job unit on problem-solving committees, and from the liberal use of all continuing education opportunities. Bringing in resource people from other libraries, from the community, or from other professions can also lead to innovative insights.¹

To enhance your own creativity, it is necessary to follow some of the same guidelines—set aside time from normal tasks to muse, ponder, or dream. You can shelter your own creativity by not being afraid to refuse to accept the problem as given, to seem inconsistent or intuitive, or to listen for the bizarre. Drawing sketches that represent problems or solutions can provide outside stimulation of your creative processes by involving the non-verbal right side of your brain. An idea box into which you toss interesting thoughts, clippings, cartoons, and so on

¹For additional information on fostering creativity in the workplace, see Carl H. Losse and Arlyle Mansfield Losse, "Creative Thinking in Decision Making: A Bibliography," *C&RL* 48 (July 1987):297-301.

can yield inspiration when you're in the middle of problem-solving. When working intently on a problem, take time-outs for exercise or leisure activities to let your subconscious work on the problem for a while.

Practicing creativity techniques

Learning about creativity techniques and frequently practicing them is the best way you and your staff can maintain an innovative edge. Everyone has participated in some meeting or workshop in which the group "brainstormed." But brainstorming is just one component of creative problem solving, and many people who brainstorm don't know the right way to do it. Alex Osborn coined the term brainstorming and developed its basic rules:

- 1) No criticism of ideas is allowed.
- 2) The wilder or more unusual the idea the better.
- 3) Quantity of ideas is stressed.
- 4) Modification and combination of ideas is encouraged.²

Allowing criticism during idea generation is like trying to drive a car with the brakes on. Wild ideas, creative analogies, and the combination of disparate thoughts can help overcome those perceptual, emotional and cultural blocks that keep the group from going beyond the habitual.³ An effective group leader gives the group the problem in advance of the session to provide time for the incubation of ideas, strictly enforces the rules of brainstorming, and pushes the groups beyond the obvious by requiring more solutions after the group feels it has gone dry.

Other useful idea-generating techniques include individual brainstorming, brainwriting, and excursion or synectics methods. Brainstorming on an individual basis will lack the synergistic vitality that group work provides, and as an individual you must exercise care not to criticize yourself. Checklists such as Osborn's that ask questions such as, "Can I put to other uses, adapt, modify, minify, substitute, rearrange, reverse, or combine?" can help spur individual as well as group creativity.⁴

In brainwriting each person in a group writes three ideas on a sheet of paper that has been divided into twenty-one boxes and then places the sheet in the center of the table and takes another. As in brainstorming, the wilder the idea the better, and participants build upon the ideas of others.

²Alexander F. Osborn, *Applied Imagination: Principles and Procedures of Creative Problem-Solving*, 3d ed. rev. (New York: Scribner, 1963), 156.

³An enjoyable yet thought-provoking examination of the blocks to creative thought is by James L. Adams, *Conceptual Blockbusting, a Guide to Better Ideas*, 2d ed. (New York: Norton, 1980).

⁴Osborn, 175-76. John Haefel, *Creativity and Innovation* (New York: Reinhold, 1962), 167-68, summarizes several other checklists, as does Adams, 112-18.

Brainwriting can also be used by groups that are spread out geographically or that have difficulty meeting regularly. Brainwriting does not usually yield results that are as creative as brainstorming but is a good method to get more reticent group members to participate.⁵

The most creative ideas emerge from those techniques that require participants to take an "excursion" in a direction that has no relationship to the problem being considered. The synectics method developed by George M. Prince and William J.J. Gordon uses metaphor, fantasy and wishfulness to promote a free association of ideas that will eventually lead to useful analogies to the problem under consideration.⁶

Synectics also places the generation of ideas within a step-by-step framework. Unless brainstorming techniques are integrated into such a framework, the ideas they yield have little chance of being fully accepted and implemented. Sidney Parnes, a leader in creativity training, lists five steps in creative problem solving:

- 1) Discovering all the facts about a problem.
- 2) Clearly defining the problem.
- 3) Seeking solutions.
- 4) Evaluating solutions.
- 5) Designing a plan of implementation.

Within each of these steps the creative process is possible. For example, a group or an individual can brainstorm on what is the real problem, on solutions to the problem, on benefits and drawbacks to the proposed solution, on how to implement the solution, on how to evaluate the success of the solution, and so on.⁷

Learning about creativity and practicing creativity techniques both at home and at work can bring about a change in attitude that will help change killer phrases to "encouraging phrases." Examples of encouraging phrases are, "Interesting, tell me more" or "Let's follow this up and see where it leads." You can encourage and still express reservations: "Good idea, although I see a problem with the last part. Let's brainstorm on the best way to implement it." If you find those old killer phrases creeping back, turn them around to encourage creativity: "That's a weird idea!...But, you know, it just might work!"

Editor's Note: This article was taken from a workshop, "Creativity and Innovation in Reference Management," presented by the author and pub-

⁵For a discussion of brainwriting and other idea-generating techniques, see Horst Geschka, "Perspective on Using Various Creativity Techniques," in Stanley S. Gryskiewicz, et al., ed., *Selected Readings in Creativity*, vol.2 (Greensboro, N.C.: Center for Creative Leadership, [1983]).

⁶George M. Prince, *The Practice of Creativity: A Manual for Dynamic Group Problem-Solving* (New York: Collier, 1970).

⁷Sidney J. Parnes, "Creative Problem Solving," in Gryskiewicz, et al., vol. 2, 148-53.

A new approach to reference statistics

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Many reference librarians consider collecting reference desk statistics a waste of time. All too often they are right, in two ways. Time-consuming statistical procedures performed every hour of every day by reference professionals "waste" time by taking it away from patron service; and statistics systems designed without a sound scientific basis are a waste of anyone's time.

Before July 1986, the method of collecting reference desk statistics at Louisiana State University Libraries suffered from both of these common failings. Librarians and paraprofessionals assigned to the reference desk were expected to record every patron question with a tally mark on a statistics sheet which classified questions by hour of day and by type (information, reference, research, or card catalog). This system was a distraction at best, and positively hindered reference service during hours of peak usage. At such times, the desk staff found it practically impossible to record every single question; some left many questions unrecorded, while others set down large numbers of marks at random, simply to reflect how "busy" the shift had been.

To make matters worse, there was considerable variety in staff interpretations of the basic question categories (information, reference, research, card catalog). Also, the library administration wanted statistics kept on the types of patrons (faculty, students, etc.) served at the reference desk, which would have made statistics taking hopelessly cumbersome under the system in use at that time.

Toward the end of fiscal year 1985/86, sentiments were strongly in favor of a new approach to reference desk statistics. The ideal system would collect statistics by both question type and patron type in a more scientific and statistically sound manner while freeing the desk staff to concentrate on the information needs of patrons.

The new approach

Reference Services Division head Jane P. Kleiner became interested in sampling reference desk statistics when she served as ACRL liaison to the Public Library Development Task Force. After Douglas L. Zweizig (author of *Output Measures for Public Libraries*) spoke to the LSU Libraries

staff about output measures and the successes other college and university libraries have had with statistical sampling, it was decided that the LSU Libraries Reference Services Division should try a similar approach. Rather than attempt to record every question asked during approximately 4,000 hours of service throughout the year, a small number of selected hours would be designated as statistics sessions, and statistics would be recorded only during those hours. The exact number and distri-

Recruitment open for editor of *Rare Books & Manuscripts Librarianship*

ACRL's newest journal, *Rare Books & Manuscripts Librarianship*, will require a new editor to serve on a volunteer basis when Ann Gwyn completes her term of service. The incoming editor will assume full editorship in July 1988.

Besides ACRL membership, candidates should have a background of service in academic or research librarianship, as well as experience and expertise in special collections librarianship; experience in research, editing, and bibliographical activities; a concern with publication as a means of professional communication; and an ability to analyze manuscripts for content, research methods, form, structure, or style.

Together with the editorial board, the editor is charged with encouraging research and writing that may be appropriate for the journal, soliciting topics and suggesting them to appropriate authors, and editing and refereeing manuscripts.

Persons wishing to be considered for the editorship should communicate their interest, accompanied by a statement of qualifications and names of references, by *April 1, 1988*, to Ruth J. Person, Dean, College of Library Science, Clarion University, Clarion, PA 16214; (814) 226-2271.