

10 Ways to Spark Creativity in the Workplace



IMAGE: MASHABLE COMPOSITE

Creativity isn't just for "creatives." Rather, it's a mental tool prized by employers across all fields. Many believe it's the key to business success, even if the word itself has become overused and blasé.

If you've been feeling uninspired recently, never fear: Research shows that creativity can be learned, just like any other skill. *Everyone* has this potential, but not everyone takes the time and effort to transform it from a potential into a strength.

You can't force yourself to be creative on demand, but you can try your hardest to coax it out of yourself and your colleagues. Check out these tips to spark creativity in the workplace.

1. Have a hobby —any hobby

You shouldn't expect to churn out good ideas if you've stopped growing the organ that comes up with them. Across all departments, exercise, art, music and other outside hobbies can vastly improve your creative abilities. You'll also carry over that creative energy to your work, which impacts the way you approach problem solving and ideation.

Investing in creative after-work activities with your team is also a solid idea. Go out for a pick-up game, barre yoga, or wine and painting, for example.

Alternatively, have everyone stay in and create together. Work with whatever medium gives you the most clarity: On a whiteboard or wide swaths of blank paper, with clay or even Legos.

You could also turn these sessions into a weekly creative hour on a lax day of the week, where your team can problem-solve using these mediums. And rather than tackling work-related issues, try some crazy prompts to blow off steam — the creative way.

2. Set aside time to find inspiration and be creative

It's frighteningly easy to get caught up in the same daily routine. Exposing yourself to plentiful outside experiences for inspiration is critical for forming new ideas — and avoiding the same old ones. Browse thought leaders' online work, read a novel, free draw, talk to a friend or step outside.

Do this at the start or end of your day, preferably in distraction-free solitude, when you have the time and energy to digest all these components and turn them into connections.

You should also enforce a weekly creative block. If you set aside two hours every Tuesday at 3 p.m., you'll have at least eight hours per month for both new and long-standing creative work projects.

3. Be OK with failure in a fail-happy environment

Whether you're in a position of power or not, cultivate an office culture that rewards creative risk-taking.

Human nature regularly balks at the most innovative ideas proposed. But it's critical that brainstorming and discussions take place in a feeling of confidence, not fear of ridicule or rejection.

Plus, the sooner you embrace the fact that not every idea will be successful, the more wantonly you can produce ideas.

4. Have something to write on

Something magical happens when you put pen to paper.

Writing down an idea can help grow it into something substantial, whether that idea takes the form of a quick drawing, a color or the perfect adjective. This can be vital to the creative process, especially for visual work. If an idea comes to you, physically sketching it out can feel more substantial than simply pulling out your phone and putting it into [Evernote](#).

Also consider mind-mapping, which helps you form connections among ideas.

5. Keep a running idea file

As you find interesting ideas, throw them into a text file. You can review this every couple of weeks and see if anything catches your eye.

Use Google Docs, iCloud, or even index cards or Post-Its you can search through and cross-index.

6. Brainstorm the smart way

Firstly, team meetings *don't* have to take place in an office environment. Go to a nearby park, art installation or café. You'll bond with your team and feel more comfortable spurting off-the-wall ideas.

Secondly, instead of getting bogged down with trivial details, just get the big ideas out there first, even if you can't fully expound on them. Forget the self-consciousness, since you never know what direction the conversation will take from there.

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Finally, it's enticing to research old methods before a meeting to avoid repeating used or unsuccessful ones, but it can be extremely powerful to start a new concept with a clean slate. Reference past examples after, not before, a brainstorm. Afterward you can refamiliarize yourself with the old ones to glean out any useful information that might be lurking there.

7. Foster interdepartmental interaction

With some restraint, putting apples and oranges together can be extremely beneficial when trying to conjure new ideas and opening up the confines of a job description helps both sides. Who's to say the product team can't contribute to editorial?

Particularly for start-ups, giving *everyone* the chance to consider and respond to questions and prompts will generate more ideas overall. Set up an online whiteboard or internal site for both your team and the entire staff, giving all parties a better sense of the company culture and building intra-company strength.

A healthy sense of competition, work-related or not, can also elevate office creativity to the next level, since challenging situations often elicit the most novel ideas. Winning is also a powerful incentive.

But be reasonable: Ill will is the last thing you're trying to spark.

8. Provide desk options and consider "hot desking"

There's been a hefty amount of debate over open and closed office layouts. Why not offer both? This would allow someone to choose the most appropriate environment for the work at hand, whether that's a quieter desk for high concentration or a larger space with more ambient noise for collaboration.

This also introduces the "hot desk" concept, where desks don't belong permanently to a particular person, but are open to everyone. People will naturally migrate to where they feel most productive.

If employees are doing their best work this way, it shouldn't matter where they are in the office.

9. Inject some color

Google doesn't have colorful, fanciful offices just for the sake of being quirky.

You don't have to take it all the way to in-office basketball courts, but having a vibrant space for creative work might help — perhaps with blue and green hues, dimmer lighting and ambient noise, all of which are shown to improve creative performance.

Or bring something inspiring to your desk, whether that's a framed photograph, a potted plant or a Chewbacca figurine. Infusing your personality into your workspace brightens the office and promotes conversation — just don't be an eyesore.

10. Ditch the formal dress code

There's no harm in letting your employees' dress code mirror the type of creativity you'd like to see them produce.

Allowing employees to extend their innate creativity from their closet at home to their desk at work is a good thing, as long as your clothing doesn't undermine your company's image, such as by not dressing properly for a client meeting.

How do you spark creativity at your office? Tell us in the comments.