

Creative Problem Solving 101

Don't despair if the same frustrating problems shackle you at work time and time again. Perhaps you're bored with your job or concerned because the competition is passing your company by. Be aware that you can solve these problems with creativity.



Whether you realize it, you already have creative ability. "Ninety-eight percent of people are creative, but our socialization process causes them to put it on the back burner. The fastest way to tap into your creativity is to learn how to use creative problem-solving techniques," says James M. Higgins, author of *101 Creative Problem-Solving Techniques*.

Two of his favorite techniques—one for individuals, the other for groups—may work for you.

Mind Mapping

Mind mapping can help individuals brainstorm solutions to a problem; plan a meeting, party or vacation; organize daily work duties; compose a speech; and take notes at a staff meeting.

An Englishman named Tony Buzan originated the technique, which starts with a core idea and works outward instead of from lists or outlines. The idea resembles streets radiating from the center of a city.

"What makes mind mapping work," says Mr. Higgins, "is that it mirrors the way the brain thinks, from a central idea out, with connections made between thoughts."

How to Mind Map

Draw a small circle in the center of a large piece of unlined paper, and in it write a word or draw a picture representing your main topic. This is like the center of your city. Radiating from the circle, draw lines representing your topic's different facets. These are like your city's main streets.

On each line print only key words rather than complete sentences. Connect smaller lines to the main ones to represent sub-categories, ideas, items, or names. These are like your city's side streets. Whenever you think of a new idea, simply add a line where needed.

To spark more creativity and add organization, use different-colored ink for different categories, or draw symbols next to similar or interrelated items.

Besides awakening your creativity, mind mapping allows you to see the total picture on one page.

Storyboarding

With storyboarding, a group can come up with a multitude of creative ideas quickly while viewing them in an organized fashion.

To use storyboarding in a group setting, encourage people to call out their ideas no matter how off-the-wall or outrageous they sound—and allow no negative comments. One person's zany idea can spark creative ones from other group members. Later on you can decide which ideas to use.

QUICK TIP!

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As people express ideas, someone should write them on separate 4-by-6-inch sticky notes, which will be placed on a wall so everyone can see the ideas together. Put the notes under appropriate headings, and move them around as needed.

Begin with these three headings: Topic, Purpose, and Miscellaneous. When several miscellaneous ideas have the same line of thought, group them under a new heading.

When dealing with a complex project, create four separate storyboards: one each for planning, ideas, organization, and communication.

Balance Your Brain

Mind mapping and storyboarding use both the brain's creative right side and its linear left side. "This is important," says Mr. Higgins, "because you want a balanced brain so you can take your creativity and do something with it."

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This Month's Webinar

Innovative Decision Making: Problem Solving

Presented by: Jamie Hansen

Some of the best business ideas and new products have resulted from innovative thinking. Why? The most creative people see options more than they see problems. Creative problem solving involves a mix of divergent and convergent thinking—our ability to both generate options and evaluate them to select the best one. Our capacity to be innovative also makes us more flexible, often able to work better with others and to contribute valuable new ideas to our work teams. Have you ever wanted to learn to be more of an “out of the box” thinker? Now you can! Join us for this experiential workshop and learn to: utilize multiple ways of thinking, frame problems as questions, use generative brainstorming, and suspend judgement in solving old problems in new ways.

[Log-in](#) any time this month to watch the webinar and ask the expert questions!