

Eight Ideas for Coming Up With New Ideas. Imitating Einstein, Churchill and Other Great Thinkers.

By Walter Burek

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The one thing that matters most in marketing communications for the Internet is coming up with new ideas. Yet so few of us are prolific at it. Oh sure, there are the lucky ones who were born with right-hemisphere brains and spew creativity like sheets off a printing press. But the rest of us, the 8 out of 10 who are left-brain dominant (fewer than 20% of all people, throughout history, have been right-brain dominant), don't have to be completely without luck. We just have to learn to mimic some of the thought patterns and techniques of those born to be inventive thinkers. Here's how..

1. SIMPLIFY.

Boil the problem down to its bone. Toss out all the details that aren't germane. Tseng Tsao, a 12th century philosopher said, "The nice thing about simplicity is its useful wisdom. It's wisdom you can get at." And Albert Einstein who was at least as smart as any Chinese philosopher said, "Everything should be as simple as possible but not simpler.

2. ESCHEW PERFECTION.

Winston Churchill said that "perfection is paralysis." Looking for perfection and executional detail while you're still looking for an idea is like counting the chickens before the eggs have hatched. Incidentally, Churchill could have become the greatest of all British copywriters. He had a portfolio full of great lines like "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat " and "The action of Russia is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma."

3. STAY OUT OF JAIL.

Edward DeBono, the Cambridge educator and thinker, talks about the "concept prison." That's where you get locked up when you believe you have to do things the way they've always been done. Try attacking the problem obliquely. Allow yourself to color outside the lines. Try to think more playfully, less seriously. Be more serendipitous.

4. THINK RIGHT ABOUT "THE RIGHT ANSWER."

No two ways about it, there's always more than one way to solve a problem. And as DeBono will tell

you, "The purpose of thinking is not to be right but to be effective. Being right means being right all the time. Being effective means being right only at the end."

5. FURNISH THE UPSTAIRS ROOM.

The legendary ad man, James Webb Young, believed that in advertising, "an idea results from a new combination of specific knowledge about products, and people with general knowledge about life and events." That requires more than reading business memos, trade journals and The New York Times. It means doing things like getting out to the movies and theater often. Visiting museums. Reading books on odd subjects just for the fun of it. Re-reading classic novels. Listening to music, from classical to country to hip-hop. Do all of it or as much as you can. David Ogilvy encouraged his employees to be "relentlessly curious" about all knowledge that crossed their paths, so that they might "possess a well-furnished mind."

6. COLLECT WORDS.

Words are ideas, too. The semanticist, S.I. Hayakawa, in his Language in Thought and Action referred to words as being symbols of ideas and, thus, "we can collect ideas by collecting words." James Webb Young, writing on this subject said, "The fellow who said he tried reading the dictionary, but couldn't get the hang of the story, simply missed the point: namely, that it is a collection of short stories."

7. SAY NO TO "YES, BUT..."

Coming up with a new idea is almost always only half the battle. Because just as sure as you are that your idea is different and unexpected, you can count on somebody being there to offer the comfort and safety of "yes, but-land." Don't go there. Resist. Build a strategy and fight. And keep fighting. Remember the words of wise, old Anonymous: "Every great oak was once a nut that stood its ground."

8. HAVE FUN.

Even though, at one time or another, you have probably blamed it for everything from your bad habits and insomnia to your kid's need for braces, you still have to admit that marketing communications is the toy department of the business world. Enjoy.

Walter is a professional advertising copywriter who writes, edits and publishes "Words @ Work", a FREE bimonthly newsletter of advice and information about writing that works. To view his award-winning portfolio and to subscribe visit <http://www.walterburek.com>. You may also subscribe to Words@Work by mail to: WordsAtWork@comcast.net

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