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## How to Generate New Ideas

By Jenni Murphy-Scanlon

Ever wondered how some people manage to always come up with different or creative ideas, while you seem to keep coming back to the same old ones? There's a saying amongst training and development professionals that "There's no such thing as a new idea". In the training field it means that however you put together a learning experience, all the parts of it will have been done before, by someone else. And that's the whole point. It's not about coming up with something entirely new, but rather using existing ideas in a new context, arrangement or setting.

Here's three ways that I find useful to generate 'new' ideas.

**Read a magazine that is of no interest to you.** "What"? I can hear you saying. "Why would I do that?" To get different ideas of course! Next time you are at the doctor's, dentist, cafe or somewhere else you read magazines, select one you would never normally read and pick 2 - 3 significant articles to read. After each article ask yourself:  
What are the key messages here? and  
How could I apply that to my life/organisation/client?  
I changed a key business strategy this year, and the idea originally came from exactly this activity (and was reinforced by some other events I was then open to noticing). I had stopped at a cafe, and before I read a magazine that I was interested in, I forced myself to read 2 articles from a skateboarding/snowboarding magazine (I have no interest at all in these sports). The way in which a young man had used his success overseas to develop opportunities in NZ inspired me to design a new strategy for my business. But even if I hadn't directly used this information, it opened my mind to a different approach.

**Figure out key trends in another industry, profession or country and apply them to your own.** You can do this by either talking to friends and colleagues, finding information on the web or at the library or going as a visitor or guest to a different profession's meeting or conference. What are businesses doing in that profession, industry or country and can that offer any ideas to you? Even if no ideas are apparent at the time, doing this regularly gives you a fount of ideas to draw on when needed. I was helping a client a few months ago to revise their recruitment strategy after they had failed to get any suitable candidates for a key vacancy. They were stuck in how they had always managed this process. A number of improvements I recommended came from my knowledge of how other industries successfully attract good candidates.



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**'I spy and apply'** . This is a creative brain game for when you are sitting in a queue of traffic or waiting at your children's sports practice. I invented this based on the old 'I spy' game. Pick an object you can see actually, or on a billboard or poster. Answer this question: A (tree, car, gift shop or whatever) could improve my business/division/client by \_\_\_\_\_? For example, I might answer that a tree could improve my business by providing a shady place to work outside in summer, or by providing a great photo backdrop for a new-look on my web and e-mail. It doesn't matter what you choose - make it fun and it doesn't have to be sensible. Don't worry if it seems hard at first because you get better at this the more you do it. Now find something else and repeat. Keep repeating until the traffic moves or the sports are finished! When you get really good change the questions eg A (object) could ruin my business/division/client by \_\_\_\_\_? or A (object) could grow my brand/reputation by \_\_\_\_\_?

Doing all these three activities regularly is sure to develop your ability to generate ideas and improve your strategic thinking.



Jenni is the Principal Advisor at Strategies Direct Ltd. She helps professionals, managers and business owners to think strategically and maximise career and business opportunities.

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