

Ideas At Work! – Priming the creativity pump

By Bob 'Idea Man' Hooey

Ever notice how some people seem to be more creative, innovative or just plain 'lucky' at discovering solutions or having brainwaves or ideas strike, just when they need them? Ever wonder how they do it, or if they were born that way? Wish you could be creative? You can!

There is a secret, '*actually a process*', which will allow you to access your '*diminished*' creative spark and start a flow of good ideas from which the great, innovative, break-through ones might be found. To put it simply, you need to '*prime the pump*' by being aware of what is happening.

I went camping last August. Lovely place in Northern Alberta nestled beside a clear, cool lake with lots of trees and natural surroundings. Very rustic, and just what I was looking for in my quest to take a mental break from two projects I was working on at the moment.

When I say rustic, I mean rustic; **no** showers, quaint out-houses, and a fire pit where all that were provided. Water was available via a pump located by the lake that was connected to a well dug 100 or so feet into the ground. It took a lot of pumping, lots of noise, action and sweat until a noise was heard coming deep from the earth. Water would gush out. Once flowing, it was easy to maintain the flow while you filled your water container.

Our minds are like that, deeper than we would expect. Often the best ideas are located way down in our subconscious, waiting to be pumped to the surface.

Using your mental muscles is like priming the pump and that is what starts the water or ideas flowing. Being curious about what is happening around you, reading outside your field, asking questions,

'*mining*' or digging into ideas that interest you – all prime the pump and feed the reservoir from which the break-through, innovative ideas you seek come from.

Creativity seems easy to some, and it can be if you are systematic at working your brain. Feed your brain the ideas, the challenges, the opportunities, and lots of facts, background, and other information and see what bubbles to the surface.

But how do you apply this at work? Take a note from some of the other creative people who share in the global market. Perhaps they can teach you something that would be of benefit?

General Electric, under Jack Welch, for example was famous for *borrowing* ideas from other sources. They were openly researching ideas that could be transferred to their operations and looked at their suppliers, competitors, their various divisions, and other companies in the market for inspiration.

If they saw something that was working, they asked, "**Would this work for us to make us more efficient or more competitive?**" If the answer was 'yes', they would apply it.

According to their own history they learned about productivity from Lighting; quick response asset management from Appliances; effectiveness from GE Capital; bullet train cost reduction techniques from Aircraft engines; global accounting management from Accounting. Wal-Mart taught them direct customer feed back – quick market intelligence. They [GE] learned new product introduction from Toshiba, Chrysler, HP, Toyota, and Yokagaw. Ford and Xerox shared insight on launching quality initiatives.

“What have you learned from your competitors, suppliers or even your own personnel lately?”

Wal-Mart’s success is not product specific. Sam Walton looked to others for ideas and was able to apply innovation in his various processes for doing business.

Sam looked for innovation in supplier relationships, distribution, location and pricing. This allowed him to maintain a competitive advantage in supplying his customers what they wanted, at a price they could afford.

General Motors was the first automobile manufacturer to introduce color to the product mix, which has had some long lasting benefit for that industry and for us as consumers. But did you know they also invented consumer credit, which allowed people who’d never owned a car to be able to purchase one. (*Gee, only 2,393 more payments and it’s mine.* ☺)

3M, famous for inventing the post it note (and their champion had to fight to get them introduced as there was no demand at the time, or so the ‘experts’ said) has a 30/4 rule in place to encourage its employees to explore new ideas and processes. Simply said, 30% of their sales need to come from products that are less than 4 years old.

Keeps them fresh, and keeps them priming the creativity pumps.

George **Westinghouse** ran into ‘conventional wisdom’ when he suggested to a few railroad executives that a train could be stopped by using wind. His imagination was virtually unstoppable. Westinghouse Air Brakes soon became conventional equipment on North American trains, and trucks too.

George de Mestral noticed the burrs he was brushing out of his wool pants and his dog’s coat.

He became curious about the tenacity of the burrs. A little observation under a microscope revealed hundreds of tiny hooks snagged in mats of wool and fur. Years later, he made a connection, and the invention of **Velcro™ fasteners** was born. Einstein would have been proud. Albert Einstein on creativity, once said, “*To raise new questions, new possibilities, to regard old problems from a new angle, requires creative imagination.* “

Three challenges emerge to priming your creativity pump:

- Think things out fresh... be unconventional
- Destroy the old, and then create new.
- Tap your imagination. Consider new ideas, ask new questions, raise new possibilities.

Ole was in love and engaged to be married. One summer he rowed his fiancée across the lake to a little island for a romantic afternoon picnic. They had forgotten the dessert. Ole rowed back, and returned with the dessert. About midpoint, tired, beat, and sweating under the sun and humidity, he stopped to catch his breath. Although the ice cream was melting, his creative processes were engaged. He said, ‘*There must be an easier way to do this?*’

This prompted the invention of the first portable outboard motor in 1906, with a commercially successful version in 1909. **Ole Evinrude** got his patent in 1910, and went on to dominate the market for decades. (And I think his romantic outings got better results too!)

Creativity can strike when you least expect it. **Keep priming the creativity pump** and keep your eyes open. You might just surprise yourself and be revealed as a creative thinker!

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Bob ‘Idea Man’ Hooey is a sought after productivity strategist, creativity catalyst and idea farmer, who regularly writes for North American consumer, association and trade journals, on-line magazines and company intranets. He is the author of ten success books, a mini-book series, four success systems and an e-book series. Bob was the 48th person in the history of Toastmasters International to earn their coveted professional level Accredited Speaker designation. Bob is a motivational, business and association keynote conference speaker and executive leadership trainer and coach. He is a professional member of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers and the International Federation for Professional Speakers. **Visit his website for additional leadership, business and career development articles like this one:** <http://www.ebusinesssuccess.biz>