

innovation

a new idea, creative thoughts, new imaginations in form of device or method

Quick: What sounds more fun? Filling in spreadsheets with data for eight hours or coming up with new and exciting ideas? I'll go ahead and assume you went with option two.

The opportunity to innovate is something most of us want more of in our daily work lives. Yet often, we feel we can't be more creative at work because of factors beyond our control. Perhaps your company is risk-averse and likes to play it safe, perhaps your targets are intimidatingly aggressive, or perhaps the sheer size of your to-do list makes adding anything new feel impossible.

While a lot of these may be true, there are also some tips and tricks almost anyone can adopt to keep your innovation muscles strong and ready to go. And like any muscle group, the more you practice it, the stronger, better, and more unstoppable it becomes. Here are 8 things you can do on the job to make it easier to be more innovative every single day.

Flip Your Assumptions We all have things we do with our eyes shut. It's part of what makes us excel at our jobs, but also part of what blinds us to opportunities. Over the course of the day, identify all the tasks you do without thinking. Take a moment to talk about how you could do them differently. Sometimes it won't work (spell check might always be the best way to proofread your work). However, it will often lead you to find a new way of doing the same old thing.

Surround Yourself With Inspiration Whenever you see something from the big wide world that captures your attention, put it on display. It can be any discovery: an awesome ad in a magazine, an unusually arranged menu, or even a well-written email that made you laugh. The more provocative, the better! If you have space on a wall near you, eke out a spot where you can display what inspires you.

Get a Buddy Innovation rarely happens in a vacuum. Pick a colleague you feel comfortable with and make yourselves accountable to each other. Encourage him or her to keep trying new things, whether it's trying a new place for lunch, pitching an idea in an unorthodox manner, sharing articles that inspire, or just doing some old-fashioned brainstorming. It's better—and easier—together.

Pick Small Projects We often think that ideas must always be big, transformative, and game-changing. But often, it's lots of small, novel things that add up to make a huge difference. The benefits to small-scale innovation are huge. Not only do they happen quickly and (most often) without a lot of fuss, they also garner the interest and attention of both your team and organization; thus paving the way for bigger, meatier innovation projects to follow. Try changing lots of small things, like how you sign off your emails, how you reward yourself for good work, or how you kick off meetings.

Bring it to Life Stop talking and start building! Put your thoughts into words, your words into pictures, and your pictures into prototypes. When people can see your idea, they're less likely to forget it and much more likely to take it seriously and become involved in its development and bullet-proofing. Even a bad drawing is better than no drawing.

Get Out of the Office Make a habit of stepping outside even if it's just to walk around the block. As you stroll, make a point to notice things. If you need some discipline on your inspiration hunt, make a game of it and deliberately hunt for things that begin with the letter A on the first day, B the second, and so on. Your mind will start connecting dots between what you see and the problems you left back at the office. That's the beauty of our subconscious.

Fuel Up on Creativity For too many of us, checking our phone is the first thing we do each day. Feed your mind with creativity instead of diving into the email deluge (that can wait). Pick your favorite song, podcast, or blog to kick-start the morning. Whatever it is, make sure it fuels your imagination. You'll be amazed how much it will inspire your attitude and creativity throughout the day.

Ask Yourself "What Would My Hero Do?" When you're stumped with a problem you can't make any headway on, call in the big guns. Keep a list near your desk of some of your favorite creative forces. Then, when a problem strikes, consult your list and ask yourself what they might do to solve it. Considering how Willy Wonka would solve a packaging challenge, how Coco Chanel would tackle a communications issue, and how Salvador Dali would take on streamlining a supply chain can be very enlightening.

These tricks may seem trivial, but together they force you to see the world in a new way. And that's what innovation is all about - seeing opportunity where no one else can. The more you practice these, the more easily it will become your default way of thinking - and the more innovation will become part of your daily work.

As a final thought, remember that committing to innovation is a brave thing to do. Your actions will likely inspire others on your team to join. There will be days when it feels like too much to take on, but drum up your inner warrior and keep going. And remember that persistence beats resistance.