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## Focus on Innovation

Focus on Innovation is a monthly electronic newsletter designed to provoke thoughts and ideas on how to bring innovation to life within the organizations in which we work.

### For Those on the Run

How often have we been told "Why don't you sleep on it?" when stuck with what appeared to be an unsolvable problem. Research has shown that getting away from a problem and letting the subconscious mind work on it allows illumination to come through. Unfortunately we don't always have a chance to "sleep on it" at work. Read on to discover some ways you can tap into your subconscious, leveraging the incubation stage, to generate creative ideas.

### Incubation Stage - Not Just For Hatching Chickens

*"Incubation - quieting the inner dialogue and just resting in your soul" - Deepak Chopra*

Many psychologists believe there's a subconscious mind that works on any problem we're trying to solve. The incubation stage is that time when we don't actively think about the problem but instead allow the subconscious to take over. The seeming paradox of the overnight effect is actually simply explained; when we achieve that state of relaxed concentration, our mind has time to retreat from the constraints of the rules. It gives us a chance to explore ways to solve a problem that might have seemed undoable. When we allow ourselves to shift into quieter levels of consciousness, the left brain relaxes its grip allowing the right to be heard. Below are some strategies that can be used to get to this state purposefully in order to create breakthrough ideas.

#### Engage in Subconscious Brainstorming

1. Consciously think of the situation, problem or opportunity on which you want your subconscious to work on.
2. Consciously tell your subconscious that you want it to brainstorm ideas for the situation you have defined.
3. Stop consciously working on the problem, take a break, go for a walk, etc. allowing your subconscious brainstorming time to develop ideas.
4. When you return tell you subconscious that you are ready for its ideas.
5. Write down as quickly as you can the ideas, no matter how foolish they are. Write whatever comes to your mind; **DO NOT LIFT THE PEN FROM THE PAPER FOR 2-4 MINUTES**. This technique will not work if you start consciously thinking about and judging the ideas.
6. Consciously review your subconscious idea list selecting the ideas of value.

(Adapted from article, "What was the most important lessons learned in 2005" by Chuck Frey found at [www.innovationtools.com](http://www.innovationtools.com))

### **Dream Incubation**

Dream incubation is learning to plant a seed for a specific dream topic to occur. While somewhat similar to lucid dreaming in that problems can be solved, dream incubation is simply focusing attention on a specific issue when going to sleep. Several inventors, writers, artists and scientists have solved problems in their dreams. For example, Kekule, the German chemist who discovered the structure of the benzene molecule, had worked endlessly to figure it out. Then, in a dream, he saw snakes forming circles with their tails in their mouths. When he awoke, he realized that the benzene molecule, unlike all other known organic compounds, had a circular structure rather than a linear one. Golfer, Jack Nicklaus found a new way to hold his golf club in a dream, which he credits as significantly improving his golf game.

To truly take advantage of dream incubation, keep a dream journal to jot down your dreams as soon as you wake up. Sometimes our brains can suggest ideas to us in a subtle way.

### **Protect Yourself and Others from Distractions**

In a study conducted by Teresa Amabile (head of the Entrepreneurial Management Unit at Harvard Business School), she found "in our diary study, people often thought they were most creative when they were working under severe deadline pressure. But the 12,000 aggregate days that we studied showed just the opposite: People were the least creative when they were fighting the clock. In fact, we found a kind of time-pressure hangover -- when people were working under great pressure, their creativity went down not only on that day but the next two days as well. Time pressure stifles creativity because people can't deeply engage with the problem. Creativity requires an incubation period; people need time to soak in a problem and let the ideas bubble up." Amabile suggests that it is the distractions, not the deadline pressures that rob people of the time to make creative breakthroughs. People must be protected from distractions, and they must know that the work is important and that everyone is committed to it. Make incubation time sacred giving people at least one morning a week distraction free.

A variation of this idea is to institute a 'one week later' policy - to get the most out of your brainstorming efforts, come back to your brainstorming one week later to see what new ideas you have thought of. This can also work in groups where you either implement regular brainstorming sessions or to have a follow up session one week after a brainstorming session.

### **Take a Quick 'Pregnant Pause'**

The quick 'pregnant pause' can be used under any circumstances to restart your creative momentum. Whenever you are stumped by something that needs an immediate solution, just stop and go into a "mindless" state for a moment. You can do this by staring at a neutral background like a white wall, the ceiling, or out the window, allowing your eyes to softly defocus. After experiencing this mild trance for a minute or so, you will likely have some fresh insights when you go back to conscious thinking.

### **Create opportunities for 'Mental Meandering':**

- Engage in routine, 'mindless' activities such as cutting the grass, cleaning the house, etc.
- Meditate and/or practice self-hypnosis
- Take a drive in your car without the radio on
- Play often and exercise regularly (sports, board games, puzzles)
- Go for a walk (ideally get out into nature taking a walk through the woods)

If you let it the subconscious will eventually reward you by popping an idea into your conscious mind some

time later. Unfortunately, it is not very predictable therefore we need to be able to capture these ideas when they come by making it a habit of carrying a pen and paper (or a hand held device) with you at all times.

### What's the Bottom line

Creativity requires an incubation period; we need to put ourselves in the right frame of mind before the conscious self can open to the unconscious and allow ideas to bubble up.



**Please feel free to pass this newsletter on to others.**

**If you would like more information about the ideas and topics listed in this issue, contact Judy Laws, Ph.D. at [jlaws@foursightconsulting.com](mailto:jlaws@foursightconsulting.com).**

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