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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.

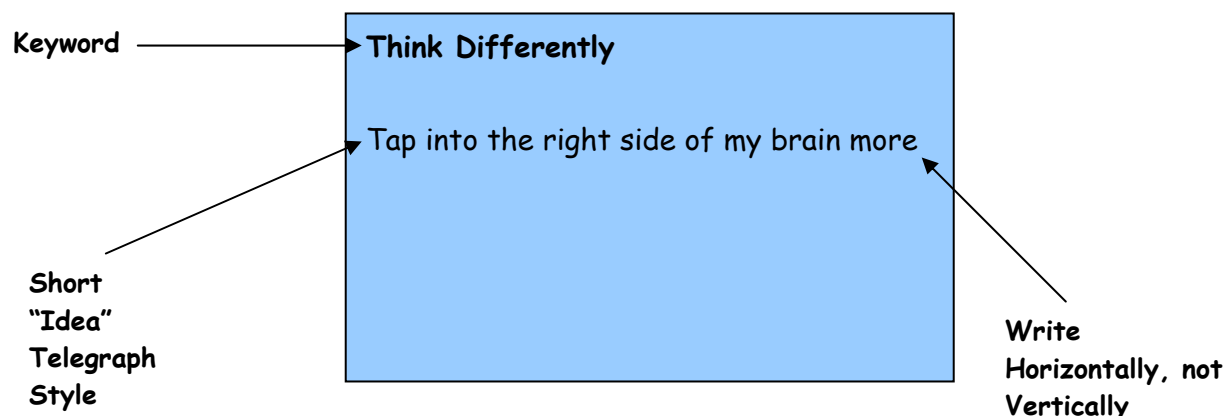
### For Those on the Run

Looking for a technique to capture your ideas as they occur and not lose them? Find out how using a simple piece of paper called the "blue slip" can be an effective technique to collect your ideas.

### The Power of Blue Slips

Blue slips, a tool for generating ideas, originated with Stanford University's C.C. Crawford in the 1920's but was adapted for business use in 1994 by Rolf Smith and his colleagues at Hoechst Celanese Corporation's Office of Innovation. The power of blue slips lies in capturing each idea on a separate slip so that you can play with it, shuffle it around with other ideas, make connections to it, or pull it out of your pocket and show someone; not something you can easily do with a notebook or notepad.

**What is a Blue Slip?** A blue slip is a small blue piece of paper, unlined, that can fit into your shirt pocket - smaller than a 3X5 card. The size of the Blue Slip is important - they're just large enough to handle a single idea burst, yet they're too small to write complete sentences or long paragraphs on them. The fact that blue slips are unlined is a creativity booster - you're not forced to a particular size of writing. You may be asking *why are blue slips blue?* Empirically, they consistently lead to more ideas than writing on white paper or any other coloured paper. When they are scattered across the desk with other papers, you can easily identify them. They're distinctive enough that any time you see them they remind you of ideas and thinking. Here is an example of a blue slip:



**How to make Blue Slips?** Just cut a standard 8 ½ X 11 sheet of light blue paper into eight equal pieces. To use them, hold blue slips horizontally and write a keyword in the upper left corner. This makes it easier to identify and process the slips. Below the keyword, write an idea or thought - only one per blue slip. You can go to almost any copy center and have them cut a ream of blue paper up into four thousand blue slips - enough for you to generate ideas for a long time!

### Blue Slip Applications:

- **Blue Slip Daily.** Develop the habit of scribbling down ideas and thoughts. Use Blue Slips to collect your ideas throughout the day. Have them with you at all times. Remember your best ideas typically come when you are not really thinking about anything, i.e. while performing manual labour, after waking up at night, while showering or shaving, etc. At the end of the day, try and sit down and sort through your blue slips putting them into three stacks - *stack one* includes ideas that can be converted quickly to actions; once these ideas are acted upon the blue slips can be tossed out, *stack two* are interesting ideas that you don't know what to do with but are worth holding onto and giving further thought towards, and *stack three* includes ideas that are interesting but are more long range ideas; put these in your basket to be acted on later.
- **Use Blue Slips to generate ideas.** First clarify the problem for your team or group. Then ask participants to write as many ideas as they can (one per Blue Slip) until time is called. To sort the Blue Slips, put similar ideas together using the keywords to group them into categories. Within these categories, main ideas are then clustered. Each main idea can have several similar ideas grouped with it. Then type a summary, distinguishing the main ideas with bullets and spacing to make the output easier to read,
- **As a Meeting Energizer.** In a meeting where the energy level is low; use blue slips to ask a few questions. Then call a quick break, check the comments, and plan how to re-energize the group.
- **Use Blue Slips to create rapport.** When a team, family member or client asks you a question or says something you find interesting, pull out a Blue Slip and write it down saying "Wow! What a powerful thought." Alternatively, put their name on it asking if you can give credit them for the great idea. You have just sent them a very strong message that you thought what they said was important.

### What's the Bottom line

Rolf Smith was once asked "But what do I do with all these blue slips?" to which he responded "They aren't blue slips anymore - they're ideas!" Carry Blue Slips with you to capture your ideas as they occur and act on them later.

**Adapted from:** Rolf Smith's book, *The 7 Levels of Change: Different Thinking for Different Results*. Irving, Texas: Tapestry Press, 2002 and, The Office of Innovation, *The Creativity Handbook*. Hoechst Celanese Corporation, 1994.



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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