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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

In a culture obsessed with efficiency, daydreaming is often scoffed as a lazy habit or lack of discipline. Read this month's newsletter to discover how daydreaming can lead to creative insights.

Daydreaming - A Crucial Tool for Creativity

"So you see, imagination needs moodling - long idling, dawdling and puttering."

— Brenda Ueland

Although there have been many anecdotal stories of breakthroughs resulting from daydreams - Arthur Fry, for instance, came up with the idea of the post-it note while daydreaming during a church sermon; Einstein was notorious for his wandering mind - daydreaming itself is usually seen as a negative thing. There is now scientific evidence suggests that daydreaming is a crucial tool of creativity, a thought process that allows the brain to make new associations and connections. Instead of focusing on our immediate surroundings - such as the message of a church sermon - the daydreaming mind is free to engage in abstract thought and imaginative ramblings. This leads to imagining things that don't actually exist, like the sticky yellow bookmarks.

Daydreaming is when one's mind drifts from the task that it has been set to do. In this state we are still conscious unlike when we are dreaming in our sleep, but our mind is able to, in a way, drift into the depths of itself. The link of daydreaming to creativity stems from that idea that when our mind is in its sleep cycle, it wanders into the subconscious.

It is important to note that not all daydreams will inspire creative insights. "The point is that it's not enough just to daydream," says Jonathan Schooler, a psychologist from the University of California, Santa Barbara. "Letting your mind drift off is the easy part. The hard part is maintaining enough awareness so that event when you start to daydream you can interrupt yourself and notice a creative insight." Proper daydreaming - the kind of thinking that occurs when the mind is thinking to itself - is a crucial feature of the healthy human brain.

Hence, the reason why Fry and Einstein were great innovators wasn't because they were prolific daydreamers. It was because they were able to pay attention to their daydreams, and to detect those moments when their daydreams lead to a useful idea.

One of the simplest ways to foster creativity then, is to take our daydreams more seriously. When we are stuck on a particularly difficult problem, a good daydream isn't an escape - it may be the most productive thing we can do. If your every waking moment is filled up and scheduled to the max, your creative brain can become something of a passenger. Give yourself permission to let your mind wander, unchecked and uncontrolled by the conscious logical mind from time to time during the day. When you catch yourself trying to fill time with something, try stopping everything and stare out the window instead, allowing yourself to daydream.

So how do we daydream in a way that leads to creative insight? Here are some suggestions.

How to Daydream

1. Ensure that before you daydream, you are in homeostasis-in other words, you are relatively balanced. Go use the bathroom, and perhaps drink a glass of water before you start.
2. Pick a good time to daydream, such as that little stretch of time before you fall asleep. Logic seems to interfere less when you are too tired to care that your day dream is absolutely ridiculous.
3. Find a place where you will not be interrupted. The car (as long as you are not the driver) can be a good place to daydream if it is quiet enough and you are going for a long drive. Some other options include:
 - In your bedroom, as long as you don't live in the same room as someone else.
 - In the bathroom. Sound crazy? Try it; you may be pleasantly surprised.
 - In a home office, with a comfy chair.
4. Let your eyes do what they do. Most people likely close them to daydream, but some-if not tired- instead just have their eyes "zone out" and unfocused, or cross, or something like that.
5. Relax your mind. Listening to music can help tune out other distractions and also make the day dream even better, as music is full of emotion.
6. Imagine a real life situation and act it out in your mind. Act out the movements in your mind just as powerfully as if you were going to do it.
7. Imagine all the things that would make you happy and put it into a story. Keeping the story and characters consistent will make it more fun and easier when finding yourself in different surroundings.
8. Role modeling is another form of daydreaming which is very helpful. Get in connect with needs and goals and have a role model.
9. Imagine yourself three years from now in that position doing activities particular of that position. Try to think like them and act like your role model in your dream.
10. Imitate the qualities which you admire in them and set different circumstances and back grounds as your themes. How would he/she react to different problems e.g. war, conflict and in different situations like party, meeting, etc. This will enhance your problem solving ability and your ability to think from another person's point of view.
11. If you are going to daydream with your eyes open, don't stare at something that is a very simple object, such as a mirror or a box of tissues. Instead, find anything that takes focus to understand the real picture, such as a book would make a good example (where you're reading and all of a sudden your eyes keep trailing along the words but you're not following along).

What's the Bottom line

Daydreaming takes practice and persistence. The more you do it the better you will get at turning your daydreaming into creative insights.

Source: This newsletter was adapted from articles titled *Daydream Achievers* by Jonah Lehrer, *The Boston Globe* and *How to Daydream* by Wikihow.com.



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