SCORE

The Three

Cs Of

Innovative Thinking

How To Think Creatively

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The Three Cs of Innovative Thinking

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Using a real-world example, Lon Safko tells you how to use the three Cs Of Innovative Thinking (collect, calculate, and communicate) to think more creatively and innovatively.

Innovative Thinking is very popular right now—and for good reason. Corporate America is beginning to realize the importance of Innovative Thinking and how it allows us to be leaders in world technology by being more creative and competitive.

In one industry alone, innovative thinking is what enabled companies such as Honda, Toyota, and Nissan to take huge market share from industry leaders such as General Motors and Ford, who

somehow lost their capability to innovate (while most U.S. automobiles were made by hand, the Japanese employed robots).

While U.S. autos were getting 16 miles per gallon (MPG), the Japanese autos were getting as high as 30 MPG. Their cars were efficient, inexpensive, and reliable. Even today the Japanese continue to surprise us with innovation, such as automobiles which parallel parks themselves.

Innovative Thinking is about more than retaining or growing market share; it's about creating new products and services, discovering new markets for existing products and services, and improving existing products and services, which all result in greater revenues.

Innovative Thinking isn't limited to the tangible; it can be applied to systemic issues, human resources, product delivery, market channels, sales, marketing, public relations, finance, ecommerce, web design,

and even advertising.

As an example, in 1898 Joshua Lionel Cowen came up with an idea for a decorative lighting fixture for potted plants. It was a metal tube with a light bulb at the end and a dry cell battery that could run the light bulb for up to 30 days. Conrad Hubert, who worked for Cowen's company, Eveready, came up with the idea of turning the poorly selling plant light into the world's first flashlight. He began selling the batteries and the flashlight, together and as separate items. This shows Cowen's ability to innovate and re-innovate.

Recognize Joshua's middle name? Joshua became a multimillionaire in 1900 when he was trying to invent a store window display that incorporated a battery-powered toy car that traveled on a circular track. People wanted to buy the display more than the actual merchandise he was trying to sell. Cowen then started a company called Lionel Model Trains.

We are all born Innovative Thinkers. Just ask any child caught with his hand in a cookie jar. Innovative

Thinking is present in us all, but during the course of our formative years, we are taught to suppress our individualism, our creativity, and our innovation. Our society believes that if we "fit in" and conform we will be happier in life. We are taught from an early age to always "color inside of the lines." As a result, we lose our ability to express our creativity and innovation as adults.

The good news is that there’s hope. Innovation is like any other skill, whether it’s riding a bike, playing the piano, or just being a good speller; it’s a learned behavior. In this article, I will show you the psychological and physiological obstacles to Innovative Thinking, and most importantly, I will offer a technique to help you become more proficient at Innovative Thinking.

Physiological Barriers to Innovative Thinking

Physiological barriers are one reason we aren’t always as innovative as we want to be. Physiological barriers include perceptual, emotional, cultural, and environmental elements. These barriers restrict our

ability for our left brain (analytical)/right brain (creative) and conscious/subconscious to properly collect the information

The Three Cs of Innovative Thinking

You can overcome these barriers by using the three Cs of Innovative Thinking: collect, calculate, and communicate. The three Cs enable you to follow this step-by-step process to think more creatively and innovatively.

Let's take a closer look at the three Cs and see how they actually will work for you. To better understand how the three Cs work, I'll share the story of a challenge I was faced with and how I used the three Cs to overcome the challenge.

The Challenge

The Port of San Diego's marketing and public relations department asked me to help improve its public image and to try to garner more support from the community for its public works initiatives.

There were no budget or staff resources. Somehow,

I had to get the message out to the public, but didn't know how that could be done without any resources. I started by putting the three Cs to work.

Collect

The first C stands for *Collect*, which is where the subconscious collects information that might be required to solve your particular problem or come up with that next great invention.

We are "collecting" information, concepts, data, images, and ideas at an astounding rate. Right now, as you read this article, your subconscious is gathering so much information that if your conscious realized it all, you would be completely overwhelmed.

It is our subconscious' job to gather all this information, prioritize it, remember a very small amount, discard a massive amount of useless data, and alert us if any of this information could be threatening (for example, if the sound in another room is a fire alarm). You are subconsciously

collecting the necessary information that will be saved for later use when creating your innovative solution.

As an example, when working with the Port of San Diego on a project from them, the collection step involved making a list of all of the resources available.

The one resource I did have was a web site, albeit a web site that was only getting 2400 visitors each month. But who were those visitors? I asked IT to run me a set of server reports to get statistics about our web pages.

What the report told me was that the Port of San Diego had web visitors from the military (from the Navy and Marine presence in the area), academia (from local universities), and foreign companies such as Volkswagen (every Volkswagen in the U.S. comes through the port of San Diego).

The report also told me that the majority of activity was from 8:00 AM until 5:00 PM, Monday though

Friday, as you would expect. Business people were looking at the Port's web site.

Sometimes what you're looking for isn't what you see; it's often what's missing. What was missing here was evening traffic, weekend traffic, primary and secondary schools, and home users. We weren't getting to the families! Families were a huge segment of our demographic. The Port has 16 parks along the San Diego harbor, free concerts, aircraft carriers, Navy Seals, fireworks, and parachute jumpers, but we didn't have the attention of the families, kids, and teachers.

It became apparent that the first and easiest phase of the collection process was to get the kids (because parents, families, and teachers will follow). This process also showed me that the only thing I had to work with was the Internet.
Now that I had some of the basics, I needed to delve deeper into the collection phase—to tap my subconscious for answers.

But how do you utilize the power of your

subconscious to gather the necessary information for the collection phase? The way we encourage and organize our subconscious is by using the technique of the five Ws.

The five Ws—Who, What, Where, When, and Why (and also How)—were developed to help a cub reporter cover all the basics of a news story. We can also use the five Ws to collect everything we might need to know about solving our particular challenge.

This process begins by using a pad and pencil or the dry erase board (my favorite). Start by listing each of the five Ws (and the H). Then write down everything you can think of for that category that is related to your challenge.

A Simple Example First

Let's start with a simple example, first.

Let's start with a tangled garden hose. I am sure you know what I am talking about. Every time you go to use your garden hose, it's all tangled into knots. You twist it and untwist it, but it's snarled up!

Here are the 5 W's:

The challenge: To stop a garden hose from continuously tangling and knotting up when you're trying to use it.

The "Who": Who does the problem affect?

Question: Beside myself, are there any others that are affected and does that require any additional consideration?

Answer: Mostly me. No additional consideration necessary.

The "What": Determine and identify exactly what the problem is.

Question: What do we use to store a garden hose on and what causes the tangles it makes when you try to use it**.**

Answer: We all use basically the same type of storage system, a hose holder, hanger, or caddie. And, the problem occurs when we retrieve and use the hose.

The "Where": Where does the problem occur.

Answer: Where are other possible solutions that might either help, cause it not to happen. Or, determine if you have to create the solution from scratch yourself?

Question: Where exactly does the hose beginning to knot.

Answer: It happens at the hose holder. There are many storage solutions available at your home improvement store ranging from $2 for a typical hose hanger to $30 and up for the crank, store, and wheel your hose around product. You could develop, create, design, and build a new solution on your own, but

that's a different type of solution for my other book. Locating all the possible existing solutions is easy, go to your closest home improvement store's garden center and walk the isles.

Hint: The solution isn't here. That's why it's still a problem. Almost always, you have to look into a different industry to find your solution. If your industry had an answer, you would have already known about it.

The "Why" Question: Why does the problem occur?

Answer: Every storage solution available today requires that you wrap or spin the hose around the holder. This causes the hose to twist on its radius. When you take it off the holder, the hose wants to twist back again and causing it to tangle and knot.

The "How" Question: How do I fix it? The "How" has to be 'How can I find a solution that is cost effective?' Many solutions can be prohibitively expensive, technically impossible, too difficult, untimely, immoral, illegal, or maybe all of the above.

Answer: How can I stop the twisting of the hose?

The Problem Solved!

Grant it, it doesn't look quite as attractive as 'wrapping and twisting' the hose around the holder, but it won't snarl up on you so it's worth the trade off.When we looked at the above problem, it became obvious that storing the hose wasn't the problem.

There are a lot of storage devices available. The problem was how we used the storage device. When we looked at the 'Why', we saw that twisting the

hose on its radius caused the problem. Like most problems; if it happens when you do something, then stop doing that something. By simply not twisting the hose, we find that we can instead ‘drape’ the hose of the hanger. The hose gets organized and stored, it doesn’t get twisted so it won’t snarl up when you go to use it.

The cool thing about Collection part of the process is that when you go through the 5’W’s you can often identify the solution immediately; however, sometimes it can take months to see (or hear) the solution from your subconscious. This is because your subconscious is still in the process of Collecting more and more data necessary to solve your problem.

The Port Of San Diego

Now, let’s get back to the Port of San Diego and look at the problems and the amazing results discovered.

The Challenge: How do we get more people, families, kids, and teachers to pay attention to the efforts of the Port and specifically, drive them to our

web site, with nearly no human resources and nearly no financial resources.

The "Who": Who does the problem affect? As mentioned above, it affects children, parents, and teachers. We weren't reaching them.

The "What": Determine and identify exactly what is causing the challenge. The problem is marketing to children and parents with no budget.

The "Where": Where exactly does the problem happen? Where does the solution need to be applied? As we determined above, we have no budget to work with. So it has to be cheap or free.

The "When": When does this problem occur? Specifically, when does it happen? This is 24/7/365. It has to be a marketing and public relations solution that is always available—especially nights and weekends.

The "Why": Why does the problem occur? Why is it happening? We aren't reaching our complete demographic, kids, parents, and teachers are a huge influential market segment.

The "How": How do I fix it? The question has to be, "How can I find a solution that is cost effective?"
Let’s look for the solution.

Defining the Solution

AT 10:00 AM on a Wednesday, with a dry erase board and the information above, I began listing the facts about the monumental challenge I was faced with.

"Who": Kids. What do kids like to do? Kids like to play. It's their job.

"What": What do kids like to play with? Kids like to play with toys. Both girls and boys like to role-play with toys.

"Where": What is my only marketing medium? The Internet.

"When": What is the effectiveness of this distribution method? The Internet is available 24/7/365 everywhere. Nearly everyone has access at their work, home, and schools.

"How": How do kids interact with the Internet? They interact very well at first, but only for short periods. Kids are tactile. Music, pictures, and videos keep them interested for only about 20 minutes.

"Why": What is the only thing connected to the Internet/computer that creates something tangible? It has to be tangible to be successful with kids. Your printer is the only thing that provides something tangible once the computer is turned off.

The cool thing about the collection part of the process is that as you go through the five W's you can often identify the solution immediately. However, sometimes it can take months to see (or hear) the solution from your subconscious because your subconscious is still in the process of collecting more and more data necessary to solve your challenge. When you get stumped and frustrated and can't seem to solve a problem, it only means you haven't

collected enough information to sufficiently calculate the solution.

Compute

The second C is *Compute*, which is where your subconscious analyzes all the information you have collected, sorts out information related to your innovative solution, and saves it. The subconscious takes anything that might be related to your solution and begins to fit the pieces together. This part of the process and the time it takes to calculate your solution will be based on how much you practice. As with any skill, the more you practice, the better you will become and the faster the solutions will present themselves to you. The second C can be instantaneous or in some cases it can take months.

The best way to get more proficient at the compute part of the process is to keep using the three Cs method to take on challenges. Start with small ones and then add more complex challenges. The more you practice the three C's the better you will

become at all three steps. Collection can often be done in your head, and the compute and communication time can be as short as instantaneous as in this example.

Communicate

The third and final C is *communicante*. This is where the right (creative) side of your brain communicates the answers and solutions to the left (conscious, analytical) side of your brain for realization and application. This is the biggest area of improvement we all can make to increase our capacity for Innovative Thinking.

The most important part of the communicate portion of the process is to provide yourself with an environment in which you can actually hear the answers. This is the part we have the most control over but are most likely to ignore. We have to provide ourselves with "quiet time." For many of us, this is the time we come up with our best ideas. It’s the time we have the fewest number of interruptions. For many of us, it’s at night when we

are asleep. For others, it’s when we are taking a shower or exercising.

Our subconscious has very little to do. The limited amount of information it’s collecting is generally not life-threatening. When you’re in the shower, the most you have to remember is "lather, rinse, and repeat." This is when your subconscious can pass the calculated solutions to your conscious because you aren’t being distracted. I call this part of the communicate step Stop, Look, and Listen.

Just by having quiet time, your subconscious gets the opportunity to communicate your solution to your conscious mind for realization. In this example, the quiet time was achieved by just closing my door, turning off my phone, and going through the three Cs process. As I completed the first step of collecting all the known information, the compute phase unfolded in a rapid succession of steps that spontaneously lead to this logical conclusion.

The Solution

After going through the 3 C's, I finally had my solution: Create paper models of airplanes, cars, and buildings that kids could download, build, and play with!

Even though I had come up with the idea of distributing paper models over the Internet years earlier, I never thought of using them as educational and specialty advertising items to promote a business.

The next step was to create the Port Activity Center, in which kids, parents, and teachers could download a United Airlines Boeing 737, a British Airways Boeing 747, the Star of India sailing ship, the Point Loma Lighthouse, or the San Diego Spanish Mission, all for free. With just scissors and glue, they could re-create a famous educational landmark or build a toy.

After implementing this change on the web site, traffic shot up from 2,400 visitors per month to more than 350,000 per month. The improved web site boosted the public image of the ports and improved

their relationships with other city and state This concept eventually became a company I have been running since 1999.

This lead to a company I founded to with the purpose of delivering “Three-dimensional-Internet-Advertising” for which I now hold three, U.S. Patents.

The company has generated more than $1m to date delivering corporate specialty advertising products in the form of downloadable toys and replicas of their products and educational school projects for kids and families.

The corporate specialty division creates paper models such as a pdf file that can be downloaded from the United Airlines web site that when printed from a standard 8 /1/2” x 11” printer, an hour of your time, a pair of scissors and some glue, builds into a three-dimensional 8 1/2” x 11” wingspan Boeing 727 that looks exactly like an United aircraft.

They are great projects to build with your kids and turn into an advertising piece for the sponsor.

There is no manufacturing (the customer does that), no shipping, the Internet does that, and can be fulfilled anywhere in the world, instantly at any time!

The educational division provides models of the 21 California Missions, the White House, the Alamo, North Church, Dealy Plaza, DNA, the pyramids, a Mayan temple, even the solar system. more that 100 products in all.

The kits come with the complete history necessary to write the report and an hour later, you kid has an “A” for under $10, delivered right to your home, on a Sunday night! And, if you are a parent, you know why the Sunday night comment is so important.

The company has no offices, warehouse, printshop, or employees. It 100% virtual and the profit margins

are nearly 100%.

To see these products, please go to: www.PaperModelsOnLine.com.

NOTE

If you want your very own paper models and experience this Innovative idea, go to www.PaperModelsOnLine.com and look for “Free Models”.

Summary

First, identify your problem or define what you’re trying to create so your subconscious can constantly collect the information necessary to solve your challenge. Perform the five Ws to be sure you completely understand what it is you’re trying to solve and to ensure that you are collecting everything that might apply.

Second, allow ample time for your subconscious to continue to subconsciously collect enough

information to compute your solution. This can be instantaneous or even take weeks. The more you practice, the quicker the answers come.

Third, and finally, give yourself some quiet time. Turn off your car radio, keep the TV off, get into the shower, or go for a walk. Watch how your subconscious mind will communicate your next great idea. Practice the three Cs and you will become an amazing Innovative Thinker!

For more information on Innovative Thinking, be sure to check out www.LonSafko.com.