

Honing Your Inventive Skills

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I suppose everyone goes through periods of inventiveness. Sometimes you feel innovative and sometimes you don't. No matter where I am at, I always find myself looking around for a problem to solve. The bad thing about doing this is it makes you focus on the negative things in the world around you. The good thing about it is it provides stimulus for potential new products and solutions. So whether I am home, in a restaurant, a public restroom, a theater, or a grocery store, I always look for things that could be improved. One of those places and times that I find myself thinking of new ideas is the car. Perhaps daydreaming while driving isn't the safest thing to do, but at times I will use my driving time as a time to think of new possible products and possible new patents that could be obtained from the creation of those products.

The first thing I do is to turn off the radio and look around as I drive. I spot things along the way that are problems in my mind. It may be the timing of stop lights, unsightly block walls or graffiti, an overhead power line, the wasted space on vehicles that could be advertisement, road signs, traffic barriers, the layout of roadway ramps, the position of "car pool" lanes, or the pot holes in the roads. But I pick something and then try to think of solutions which would improve upon the item which drew my attention. And it doesn't have to be while you are driving. It can be tasks you do frequently such as cutting the grass or cleaning the bathroom. There seems to be an endless number of problems which could yield new products and solutions. I am sometimes amazed as to the 1000's of potential products that are just waiting to be created by someone. I attempt to document some of my key ideas later which also is a good way to stimulate even more ideas.

I do this mental exercise all the time and I refer to it as "Brainstorming with Myself." One of the key things to generating lots of ideas is not to completely go down one thought path to far. Think of it as a tree. Let's pretend we have just walked into a public restroom at Joe's Garage on Route 66. The first thing that comes out our mouths is a phrase such as "Gross." So public restrooms and in general restrooms get dirty and are hard to keep clean. So that is the base of our tree. Now everything in that restroom that is hard to keep clean is a major tree branch. The stools, the urinals, the sinks, the floor, the towel dispensers, the faucets, the door handles, the mirrors etc. Now pick one of those things and briefly think of what is wrong with the implementation. Why are we doing this? Well information gathering is the first part of effective problem solving. The more information we gather the better possible solutions we can formulate later. If we pick the floor, for example, we might observe what it is made of. Is it tile? If so, the first thing that might pop in your mind is the question - Why would anyone put down a surface with grout lines that are going to be difficult to keep clean? Is there a better surface for bathroom floors? Or you may look at the faucets and ask why are there so many intricate crevices and small openings which are going to be difficult to keep clean. Could you design a faucet that requires less maintenance? For any one problem, such as a dirty restroom, you should literally be able to spend hours thinking of things that are wrong with it and products which could improve it.

So as we think of these different major items, we are filling in the branches of our tree. And along the way of doing this sort of brainstorming daily there may be one thing that sticks in your mind that would be a great new product. This is the end of our branches - the leaves of our brainstorming tree. The more you practice dissecting the world around you, the better you will find you are getting at coming up with new ideas. Try it. I think you will be pleasantly surprised how creative most people are when they practice at it.