

CREATIVITY

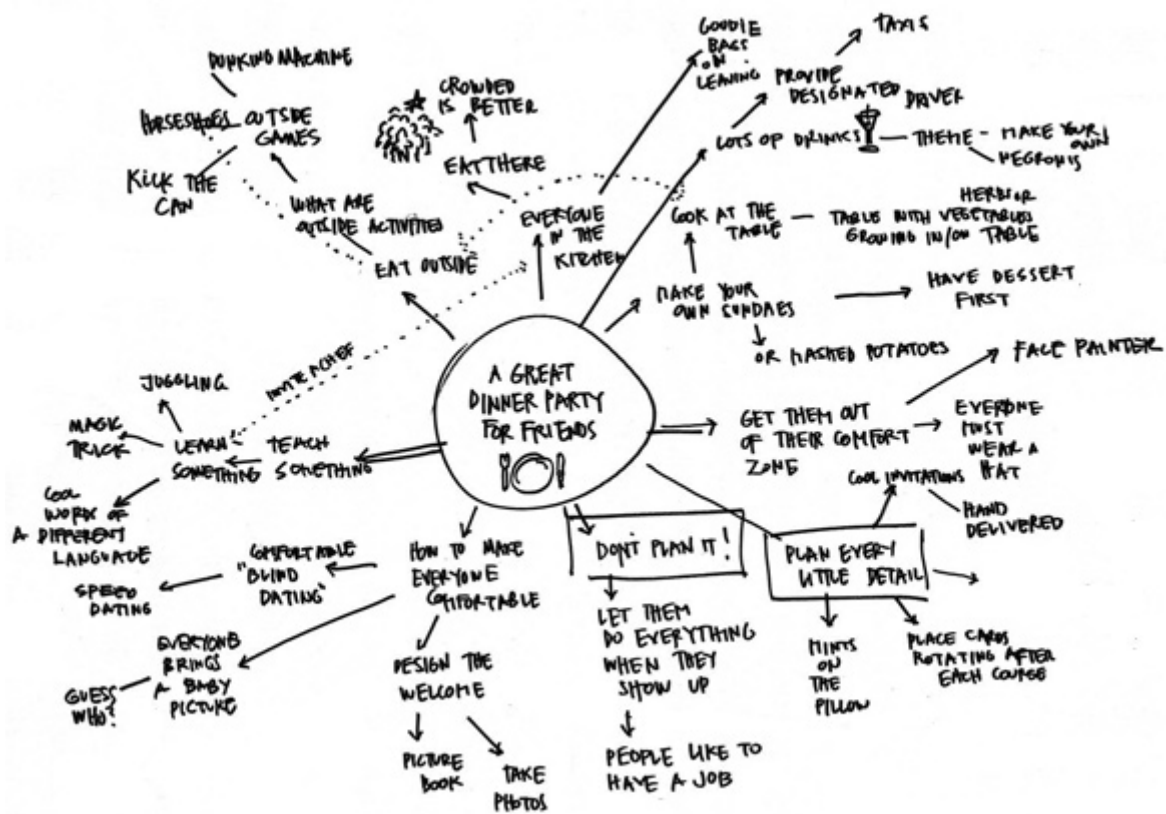
Three Creativity Challenges from IDEO's Leaders

by [Tom Kelley and David Kelley](#)

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People often ask us how they can become more creative. Through our work at the global design and innovation firm IDEO and David's work at Stanford University's d.school, we've helped thousands of executives and students develop breakthrough ideas and products, from Apple's first computer mouse to next-generation surgical tools for Medtronic to fresh brand strategies for the North Face in China. This 2012 HBR article outlines some of the approaches we use, as does our new book, *Creative Confidence: Unleashing the Creative Potential Within Us All*. One of our top recommendations? Practice being creative. The more you do it, the easier it gets.

Of course, exercising your mind can sometimes feel more daunting than exercising your muscles. So we've developed ten creativity challenges to jump-start your practice. Some you can do by yourself; some require a team. Some seem incredibly simple; others you might find more challenging. Three are presented below; we hope you'll try at least one.



CREATIVITY CHALLENGE #1: PUSH YOURSELF TO THINK DIVERGENTLY

Mindmaps are a powerful way to overcome fear of the blank page, look for patterns, explore a subject, come up with truly innovative ideas, record their evolution so you can trace back in search of new insights, and communicate your thought processes to others. While lists help you capture the thoughts you already have, mindmaps help to generate wildly new ones. They are extremely versatile, and we use them all the time, not only at work but also at home, for example, to come up with dinner party ideas. (See illustration.)

TOOL: Mindmap

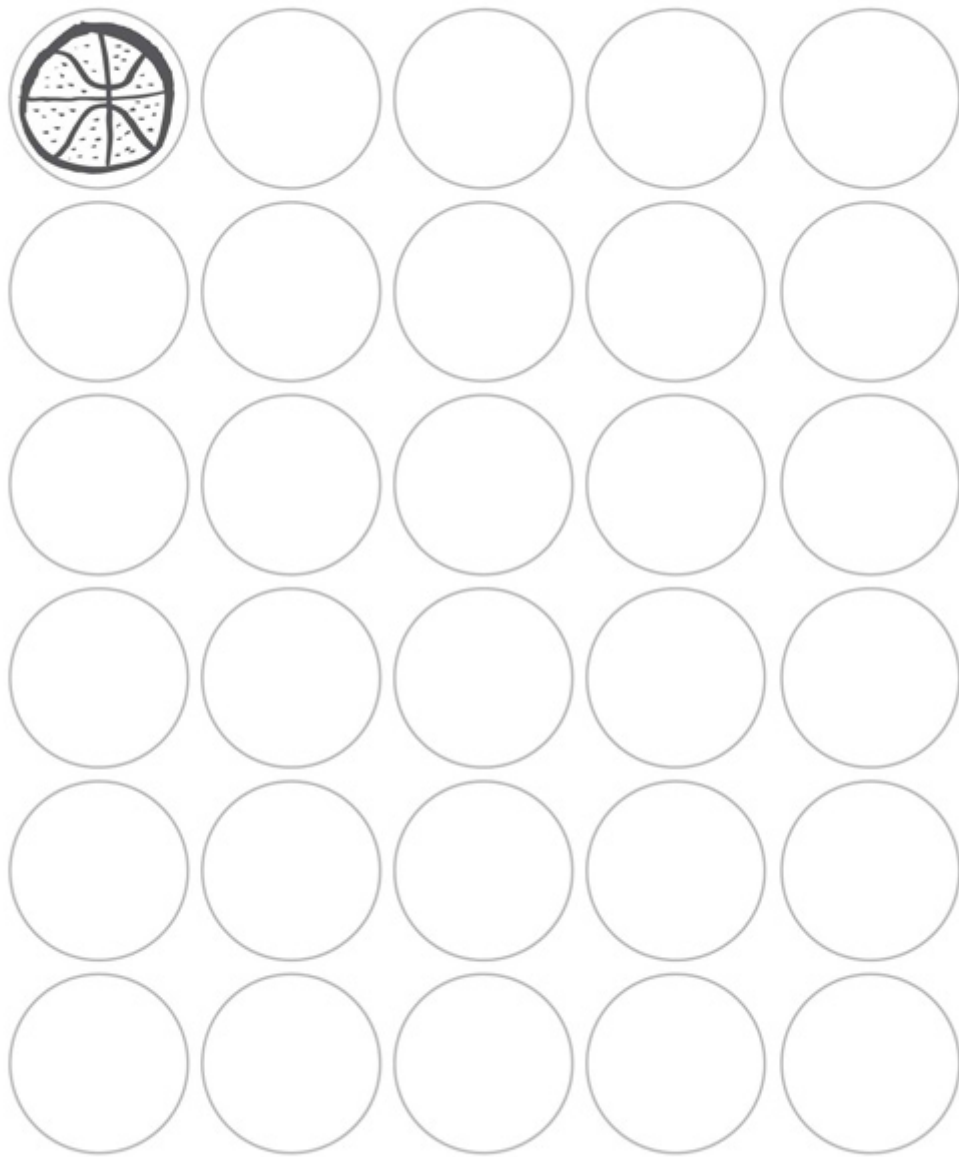
PARTICIPANTS: Usually a solo activity

TIME: 15-60 minutes

SUPPLIES: Paper (the bigger the better) and pen

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. On a large blank piece of paper, write your central topic or challenge in the middle of the paper and circle it.
2. Ask yourself, “What else can I add to the map that is related to this theme?” Write down ideas, branching out from the center, and don’t worry if they feel clichéd or obvious. That happens to everyone.
3. Use each connection to spur new ideas. If you think one of your ideas will lead to a whole new cluster, draw a quick rectangle or oval around it to emphasize that it’s a hub.
4. Keep going. As the map progresses, your mind will open up, and you’ll likely discover some wild, unpredictable, dissociative ideas .
5. You are done when the page fills or the ideas dwindle. If you’re feeling warmed up but not finished, try to reframe the central topic and do another mindmap to get a fresh perspective. If you feel you’ve done enough, think about which ideas you would like to move forward with.



CREATIVITY CHALLENGE #2: JUMP-START AN IDEATION SESSION

We learned this 30 Circles exercise from David's mentor, Bob McKim. It's a great warm-up and also highlights the balance between fluency (the speed and quantity of ideas) and flexibility (how different or divergent they are).

TOOL: 30 Circles

PARTICIPANTS: Solo or groups of any size

TIME: 3 minutes, plus discussion

SUPPLIES: Pen and a piece of paper (per person) with 30 blank circles on it of approximately the same size.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Give each participant one 30 Circles sheet of paper (see example) and something to draw with.
2. Ask them to turn as many of the blank circles as possible into recognizable objects in three minutes.
3. Compare results. Look for the quantity or fluency of ideas. Ask how many people filled in ten, 15, 20, or more circles? (Most people don't finish.) Next, look for diversity or flexibility in ideas. Are the ideas derivative (a basketball, a baseball, a volleyball) or distinct (a planet, a cookie, a happy face)? If people were drawing their own circles, did anyone "break the rules" and combine two or more (a snowman or a traffic light)? Were the rules explicit, or just assumed?



CREATIVITY CHALLENGE #3: LEARN FROM OBSERVING HUMAN BEHAVIOR

You've gone into the field in search of knowledge, meeting people on their home turf, watching and listening intently. Now synthesize all that data by creating an "empathy map".

TOOL: Empathy Map

PARTICIPANTS: Solo or groups of two to eight people

TIME: 30-90 minutes

SUPPLIES: Whiteboard or large flip chart, Post-its, and pens

INSTRUCTIONS: