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problem solving.



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BY **STEPHANIE VOZZA**
3 MINUTE READ

Everything really comes down to solving problems. To be successful and a leader in your field, you not only have to come up with good solutions; you need to be innovative. And that can feel like waiting for lightning to strike.



Tina Seelig PHOTO: VIA TWITTER

Tina Seelig, author of *Insight Out: Get Ideas Out of Your Head And Into the World*, has been teaching classes on creativity and innovation at Stanford University School of Engineering for 16 years, and she says most people don't have a clear understanding of what those things really are.

"Imagination is envisioning things that don't exist," says Seelig. "Creativity is applying imagination to address a challenge. Innovation is applying creativity to generate unique solutions. And entrepreneurship is applying innovations, scaling the ideas, by inspiring others' imagination."

Once you understand this framework, you can put it into action, she says, and the way to innovate is to look at situations from a fresh perspective.

Creativity is applying imagination to address a challenge. Innovation is applying creativity to generate unique solutions.

Reframing a problem helps you see it as an opportunity, and Seelig offers three techniques for finding innovative solutions:

1. RETHINK THE QUESTION

Start by questioning the question you're asking in the first place, says Seelig. "Your answer is baked into your question," she says.

Before you start brainstorming, Seelig suggests you start "frame-storming": brainstorming around the question you will pose to find solutions. For example, if you're asking, "How should we plan a birthday party for David?" you're assuming it's a party. If you change your question to, "How can we make David's day memorable?" or "How can we make David's day special?" you will find different sets of solutions.

"Refocusing the question changes our lens," says Seelig. Memorable is different than special—memorable might involve a prank, for example. Once you reframe the questions, you might decide to select the best or address them all. Each new question opens up your ability to generate new ideas.

2. BRAINSTORM BAD IDEAS

When an individual or group is tasked with being creative, often there's pressure to only come up with good ideas. Seelig likes to challenge teams to only think of bad ideas.

"Stupid or ridiculous ideas open up the frame by allowing you to push past obvious solutions," she says. "There is no pressure to come up with 'good' ideas. Then, those terrible ideas can be re-evaluated, often turning them into something unique and brilliant."



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Once you have a list of bad ideas, brainstorm how they can become good ideas. In one of Seelig's classes, a bad idea was selling bikinis in Antarctica. A group that was tasked with making this idea a good one came up with the idea to take people

3. UNPACK YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

Another way to reframe a problem is to challenge its perceived limitations or rules. Ask, "What are all of the assumptions of the industry?" Make a list and turn them upside down by thinking about what would happen if you did the opposite.

Seelig says this is a hard exercise, because a lot of our assumptions are deeply ingrained. "Cirque du Soleil challenged assumptions about what a circus is. ead of cheap entertainment for kids, they turned it into a high-end event for adults that competes with the theatre or opera," she says. "In addition, Southwest challenged the assumption that airlines had to have fixed seat assignments. This opened the possibility of having riders line up before each flight—a radically different approach to seating."

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09-08-15 | HIT THE GROUND RUNNING

Three Ways To Reframe A Problem To Find An Innovative Solution



[PHOTO: FLICKR USER D_PHAM]



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Once you have a list of bad ideas, brainstorm how they can become good ideas. In one of Seelig's classes, a bad idea was selling bikinis in Antarctica. A group that was tasked with making this idea a good one came up with the idea to take people who want to get into shape on a trip to Antarctica. By the end of the hard journey, they would be able to fit into their bikinis. Their slogan was "Bikini or Die."

"Selling bikinis in Antarctica sounds like a really bad idea. But within five seconds, when asked to look at it differently, the team came up with a way to transform it into a really interesting idea," she says.

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