

# **62 Tips for Getting Good Ideas When You Need Them**

**By  
Wally Bock**

Most people don't have problem getting good ideas. The problem comes in getting good, practical ideas when they need them. The following list of tips is culled from my speeches on creativity and innovation in business.

I've also included some book recommendations, as well as recommendations for a couple of general and practical books on creativity that I've placed at the end of the article.

Here's a short table of contents that shows the grouping of the 62 tips. A longer table of contents with all 62 tips begins on the next page.

Basics .....	4
Do what works for you.....	4
Do what works for other people.....	5
Related to Sleep.....	6
Use your senses. ....	7
Relax.....	8
Get in Rhythm .....	9
Play with the Idea.....	10
Use the Creativity Cycle .....	11
Capture Good Ideas When You Get Them .....	12
Ask Key Questions.....	14
Have an Idea Starter .....	15
Broaden the Top of the Funnel.....	16
Let Your Brain Go.....	16
Use two kinds of thinking .....	18
Get Tools .....	19
Good General and Practical Books on Creativity .....	20
Wally Bock.....	21

Wally Bock

[wally@threestarleadership.com](mailto:wally@threestarleadership.com) <http://blog.threestarleadership.com/>

## Longer Table of Contents

Use this as a guide to all the techniques.

Basics .....	4
Do what works for you.....	4
1. Have a ritual.....	4
2. Have a special place. ....	4
3. Have a special time.....	4
4. Use music. ....	5
5. Make it special and repeatable.....	5
Do what works for other people.....	5
6. Take a shower.....	5
7. Take a walk.....	5
8. Exercise. ....	5
9. Go for a drive.....	5
10. Do housework.....	5
Related to Sleep.....	6
11. Go to sleep. ....	6
12. Wake up.....	6
13. If you wake up with an idea, write it down. ....	6
Use your senses. ....	7
14. Look.....	7
15. Speak and listen.....	7
16. Feel. ....	7
Relax.....	8
17. Progressive Relaxation .....	8
18. Find a quiet place.....	8
19. Try meditation or prayer.....	8
20. Focus on something .....	8
21. Breathe deeply.....	8
Get in Rhythm .....	9
22. Music .....	9
23. Walking .....	9
24. Circadian Rhythms .....	9
25. Ultradian Rhythms.....	9
Play with the Idea .....	10
26. Faster/Slower .....	10
27. Upside/Downside.....	10
28. Toss it around. ....	10
29. Use Post-Its or index cards.....	10
Use the Creativity Cycle .....	11
30. Preparation.....	11
31. Incubation .....	11
32. Illumination .....	11
33. Verification.....	11

Wally Bock

[wally@threestarleadership.com](mailto:wally@threestarleadership.com) <http://blog.threestarleadership.com/>

Capture Good Ideas When You Get Them .....	12
34. Notepad.....	12
35. Tape Recorder.....	12
36. Notebook Computer .....	12
37. Have an idea file .....	12
38. Have a special idea notebook .....	12
39. Don't have an idea file. ....	13
40. Pocket notes .....	13
Ask Key Questions.....	14
41. What's the goal?.....	14
42. What do we do well already? .....	14
43. What people/process should we use? .....	14
44. What would be fun to try? .....	14
Have an Idea Starter .....	15
45. Whack Pack .....	15
46. Osborn List .....	15
47. Automated Lists.....	15
48. Your Own Idea Starters .....	15
Broaden the Top of the Funnel.....	16
49. Read a different magazine .....	16
50. Listen to a different radio station.....	16
51. Different Folks.....	16
Let Your Brain Go.....	16
52. A Connection-Making Engine.....	16
53. A fit brain is a creative brain. ....	17
54. Sleep .....	17
Use two kinds of thinking .....	18
55. Divergent Thinking.....	18
56. Convergent Thinking.....	18
57. Use them again and again .....	18
Get Tools .....	19
58. Idea Mapping .....	19
59. Brainstorming .....	19
60. Email, Discussion Groups, Social Media .....	19
61. Multi-Voting.....	19
62. Pre-Fab Problem Solving.....	19
Good General and Practical Books on Creativity .....	20
Wally Bock.....	21

## **Basics**

Most people believe that creativity is something you're born with. That's true. They believe that there are people who are creative and people who are not. That's not true.

The people we call creative are the ones who get lots of good ideas. They're the ones who get really good ideas that no one else thought of. They're also the ones who do the things you'll find in this article.

**If you want to be creative, do what creative people do.** If you do what creative people do, you'll get the results they get. It's that simple. And I know because I've trained hundreds of people in how to do it.

Here are a few suggestions about how to use this resource most effectively. Browse through it at your leisure. Make notes about things you want to try. Look at it when you need to get some good ideas. Use the tips.

Here's a little tidbit for you. This started out to be 50 tips for getting good ideas when you need them, but, hey, there were just too many good ideas about getting good ideas.

Now get going. A world of creativity awaits you.

## ***Do what works for you.***

If you know when you get good ideas use that same system to get more. Think back to when you've gotten good ideas in the past and then recreate the experience.

### **1. Have a ritual.**

Lots of "creative" people have special ritual they go through when they have to get an idea. Develop one for yourself by starting with what's already worked for you. Then consider the following.

### **2. Have a special place.**

It can be a special room, or a park, or just a chair, but having a place to go to will help you get more good ideas.

### **3. Have a special time.**

Maybe it's early morning or just before bedtime, maybe some other time. Having a special time that's good for creativity will help you get more good ideas.

Wally Bock

[wally@threestarleadership.com](mailto:wally@threestarleadership.com) <http://blog.threestarleadership.com/>

**4. Use music.**

Use music to help you get ideas. It can be a special music that gets you in the mood for generating ideas. Or it can be music that's known to help the thinking process. Check out the collections out there that use Mozart.

**5. Make it special and repeatable.**

When you develop a creative ritual, you want to do it the same way every time. Ernest Hemingway always wrote at a stand-up desk. And he didn't start writing until he had sharpened seven pencils.

***Do what works for other people.***

There are lots of ways that people get good ideas. Try some of the things that work for others. Here are some things that people in our workshops often come up with.

**6. Take a shower.**

My friend Robert Tucker likes to say that, "Anyone who has ever taken a shower has had a good idea."

**7. Take a walk**

**8. Exercise.**

**9. Go for a drive.**

**10. Do housework.**

### ***Related to Sleep***

Because of the way brain works sleep and creativity are related. Lots of folks find that they get good ideas around their sleep cycle.

#### **11. Go to sleep.**

If you often get good ideas just before you drift off to sleep, consider short naps as a way to increase your idea output.

#### **12. Wake up**

If you often get good ideas after you wake up, but before you're fully alert, try staying in that state a little longer and capture the ideas you get.

#### **13. If you wake up with an idea, write it down.**

If you get a good idea in the middle of the night, don't just go back to sleep. Capture it or, better yet, get up and develop it.

This is one of those ideas that works for a lot of people but has never worked for me. Years ago I worked at trying this out. I put a pad and pencil next to my bed. I went to sleep.

During the night I woke up with some wonderful ideas. Suffice it to say that I had the answer to world hunger and also world peace. I wrote them down.

In the morning I could hardly wait to see what I'd written. There, on the pad, were the words, "brown cow." I decided that technique was not one I'd be likely to use effectively.

***Use your senses.***

You'll do better at the creativity game if you bring all your senses into play.

**14. Look.**

Try drawing pictures or diagrams of your ideas.

**15. Speak and listen.**

Say your ideas out loud. Talk them through.

**16. Feel.**

Try acting out your ideas. Or, just get up and walk around while you're thinking.

## **Relax**

The best time to get ideas is when you're in a relaxed state. That's when your brain works best. Here are some of the standard ways to relax quickly. Not every method will work for you, but there should be something here you can use.

### **17. Progressive Relaxation**

Start at your toes. Tighten and relax each muscle. Work your way up the body.

### **18. Find a quiet place.**

Find a quiet place. If you can't do that, imagine that you're in a quiet, restful place. Most folks choose a beach or quiet spot in the woods for this.

### **19. Try meditation or prayer.**

Many people practice meditation and prayer. In addition to being good for the spirit, they can help you get more good ideas.

### **20. Focus on something.**

Pick a spot on the wall. Or the tip of a candle flame. Or one sound. Then concentrate on it. You'll begin to relax and the ideas will start to flow.

### **21. Breathe deeply.**

Take deep breaths from your diaphragm. Pay attention to your breathing. Try to make your breathing as regular as possible.

### ***Get in Rhythm***

Human beings are animals that are sensitive to rhythm. That's important when you're dancing, but it will also help you get more good ideas.

#### **22. Music**

Listen to the kind of relaxing music that will help get your brain in creative rhythm.

#### **23. Walking**

Rhythmic walking or any "automatic" and rhythmic exercise can help you get in a state where the ideas start to flow.

#### **24. Circadian Rhythms**

Circadian rhythms are the rhythms of the day. Figure out when you're most likely to be creative. Some folks are morning folks. Others are night owls. Then do work that calls for creative effort at the best time for you.

#### **25. Ultradian Rhythms**

Ultradian rhythms are the rhythms within the day. Most people have a natural work (or sleep) cycle of 90-120 minutes including some break time. Find out what your own natural cycle is, then schedule your work in blocks of that duration. And don't forget the breaks.

### ***Play with the Idea***

Once you get an idea or a list of ideas, you can improve on them by playing with them. One reason kids are so good at coming up with ideas is that they're always playing with them.

### **26. Faster/Slower**

Try making your idea go faster, or slower.

### **27. Upside/Downside**

Try changing the position of your idea. Turn it upside down. Lay it on its side. Send it far away. Bring it up close.

### **28. Toss it around.**

Toss the idea from one person to another. Some groups use a Koosh ball or a balloon for this. They toss the idea back and forth with everyone having to comment on the idea when they touch the ball or balloon.

### **29. Use Post-Its or index cards.**

Try putting your idea or ideas on index cards or post-its. Then move them around and see how they relate to other ideas or in different places.

### ***Use the Creativity Cycle***

Many years ago, Graham Wallas identified the cycle that most people go through when they get good ideas. Understanding it can help you get more and better ideas.

#### **30. Preparation**

The first stage is preparation. Here the idea is to get all the information you can. And to get information from a variety of sources.

#### **31. Incubation**

Let go. Sleep on it. Let your brain do its thing. Give it to a group to think about. This is the time for some of that relaxation.

#### **32. Illumination**

That sudden flash of insight. Make sure you capture your ideas as you get them. Then play with them to make them better.

#### **33. Verification**

Check it out. Try it out. Work with it. An idea by itself is nothing, this is where you put it into practice.

### ***Capture Good Ideas When You Get Them***

Everybody gets good ideas. But lots of people just let them go. The people we think of as "creative" usually have a way to capture the ideas they get. You should, too.

Circle this point. Highlight it. Mark it with a red marker. If there is one single thing that separates "creative" folks from other folks it's that the creative folks have a way to capture their ideas.

#### **34. Notepad**

Carry a notepad to jot down your ideas. Some people use index cards.

#### **35. Tape Recorder**

Small tape recorders are inexpensive and an easy way to capture ideas. Just make sure you've got a way to get those ideas off the tape so you can use them. In recent years small digital voice recorders have come on the market. They're great for idea capture and will even let you put ideas in different "folders."

#### **36. Notebook Computer**

If you use a notebook computer, try keeping the Notepad available all the time to jot down your inspirations.

#### **37. Have an idea file**

Lots of people have a special file just for ideas. Be sure to review what's in that file from time to time.

#### **38. Have a special idea notebook**

If you keep a small spiral notebook for ideas, you'll automatically keep them all together. That way you can spot connections between ideas.

**39. Don't have an idea file.**

One of the most successful entrepreneurs I've ever known refused to have an idea file. He claimed that if he put his ideas in the file, he'd never act on them.

**40. Pocket notes**

One writer friend of mine uses slips of paper that he puts in different pockets in his suit, depending on what the idea's about.

### ***Ask Key Questions***

Research by Dr. William Miller identified four Innovation Styles. Each style tends to ask one of the following questions. The people who get the most useful ideas tend to ask more of the questions more often.

**41. What's the goal?**

**42. What do we do well already?**

**43. What people/process should we use?**

**44. What would be fun to try?**

### ***Have an Idea Starter***

Many highly creative folks use a tool of some kind to "jump-start" their creative process. These can come in handy, too, if you've hit a dry spell when you're working on a project or generating ideas.

#### **45. Whack Pack**

This little tool is based on Roger von Oech's excellent book, *A Whack on the Side of the Head*. It's a pack of cards that will stimulate your thinking.

#### **46. Osborn List**

Several years ago, Alex Osborn developed a list of questions to help in product development. You can find this list in several creativity books. It's useful as an idea starter in lots of situations.

#### **47. Automated Lists**

There are software programs on the market, like IdeaFisher that will provide a wealth of idea starters for you.

#### **48. Your Own Idea Starters**

If you find a list of questions, or pictures, or sounds helps you work creatively, find a way to use them again and again.

### ***Broaden the Top of the Funnel***

Being creative is often a matter of making connections between lots of different things. You can do that more easily if you have a wide top on your information funnel. Here are some ways to do that.

#### **49. Read a different magazine**

Every couple of weeks, head to the newsstand and pick out a magazine that you've never read before. It's almost guaranteed to give you a different perspective on things as well as information you probably don't have now.

#### **50. Listen to a different radio station.**

This does the same thing as the magazine. But it's even easier. Just tune in to a radio station you haven't listened to before, or don't listen to often while you're out driving.

#### **51. Different Folks**

If you always hang out with the same people, you tend to hear the same things. That's OK, but you want other ideas, too. Engage different folks in conversation and you'll pick up perspectives and information.

### ***Let Your Brain Go***

You've got the world's best idea generator right there between your ears. You'll get more good ideas if you help your brain do its thing.

#### **52. A Connection-Making Engine**

Your brain is a connection making engine. Give it lots of things to connect by broadening the top of your information funnel. Capture the connections it makes. And learn ways to generate more connections.

Wally Bock

[wally@threestarleadership.com](mailto:wally@threestarleadership.com) <http://blog.threestarleadership.com/>

**53. A fit brain is a creative brain.**

Good cardiovascular fitness helps your brain. Make sure there's lots of oxygenated blood up there for it to use. All that stuff you heard about staying fit works for your brain, not just your body.

**54. Sleep**

Get enough sleep. Take catnaps if that's your style.

### ***Use two kinds of thinking***

You'll do two kinds of thinking on your way to getting lots of good ideas. Knowing which one to use will help you do better.

### **55. Divergent Thinking**

Linus Pauling is quoted as saying. "To have good ideas, have lots of ideas" Divergent thinking is when you try to have lots of ideas. When you do that your objective should be to have as many ideas as possible. Don't worry about their quality, or workability, or refining them, or even whether they'll work. That will come later.

### **56. Convergent Thinking**

This is the thinking you do when you evaluate, modify, play with, improve and discard ideas. Here the idea is to make your idea as good as you can by refining, combining and selecting.

### **57. Use them again and again**

Despite what some books say, there isn't one creative cycle. It's really like lots of cycles within cycles. You'll use convergent and divergent thinking again and again as you move toward excellent, workable ideas.

## **Get Tools**

There are lots of thinking tools you can use. Here are a few.

### **58. Idea Mapping**

This is also called Mind Mapping. This is a great tool to use in any part of your creative process because it helps your brain work effectively. There are two excellent books about this technique.

The Mind Map Book: How to Use Radiant Thinking to Maximize Your Brain's Untapped Potential is by Tony Buzan (the originator of Mind Mapping) and Barry Buzan.

Mindmapping: Your Personal Guide to Exploring Creativity and Problem Solving is an extremely popular book about the technique.

### **59. Brainstorming**

Classical brainstorming came out of the advertising world. It's a divergent thinking technique for groups. Lots of creativity books cover it.

### **60. Email, Discussion Groups, Social Media**

These digital, electronic marvels can help you generate ideas by involving folks and by letting people share ideas whenever they have them. Social media tools, such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Ning are designed to connect people.

### **61. Multi-Voting**

Often when you've got a group trying to pick a "best" idea, the group resorts to voting. You can improve your group's output if you give each member more than one vote. Let the member distribute votes among alternatives.

### **62. Pre-Fab Problem Solving**

There are lots of structured problem solving methods that will help you reach creative solutions. There are articles and books filled with them.

Wally Bock

[wally@threestarleadership.com](mailto:wally@threestarleadership.com) <http://blog.threestarleadership.com/>

***Good General and Practical Books on Creativity***

Brain Boosters for Business Advantage is by Arthur VanGundy. This is one of the latest of several books by this prolific and helpful author.

Thinkertoys: a Handbook of Business Creativity for the 90's by Michael Michalko is one of the most popular books of thinking/creativity tools.

Conceptual Blockbusting: a Guide to Better Ideas by James Adams has the nice structured feel of an engineer's approach to creativity. You might say it's "elegant."

Creativity in Business by Michael Ray and Rochelle Myers is based on their course in business creativity, taught at the Stanford Business School. In addition to giving lots of good business examples, the book includes excellent background on the underlying brain function and various cultural approaches.

## **Wally Bock**

Wally Bock has a simple mission. When he finally hangs up his shingle, he wants the workplace that most people experience to be both more productive and more human-friendly.

The main focus of his work has been on improving the way bosses at all levels do their job. That's what he writes about on his Three Star Leadership Blog.

His book, *Performance Talk: the one-on-one part of leadership* was written to help bosses improve the way they do their two jobs: accomplishing the mission and caring for the people.

Wally's Working Supervisor's Support Kit is an electronic product that includes the full text of Performance Talk as well as a workbook, forms, pocket reminder cards and more.

Wally's latest book, written with Tom Hall, is *Ruthless Focus: How to use key core strategies to grow your business*.

Wally originally wrote "62 Tips for Getting Good Ideas when You Need Them" for a creativity and innovation program he developed for a client.

In addition to his writing, Wally coaches individual bosses, works with organizations to improve their leadership, management, and supervision. He also is a popular speaker to audiences in North America and elsewhere on "One-on-One Leadership" and "Ruthless Focus."

You can read Wally via email at [wally@threestarleadership.com](mailto:wally@threestarleadership.com) or by using the form on the Three Star Leadership site ( <http://blog.threestarleadership.com> ). If the telephone is your preferred method, Wally's Charlotte NC office number is 1.704-246.7871.

Wally Bock

[wally@threestarleadership.com](mailto:wally@threestarleadership.com) <http://blog.threestarleadership.com/>