


EXCLUSIVE BONUS CHAPTER

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HOW TO
THINK LIKE
BEZOS
& **JOBS**

How to Think Like Bezos and Jobs

*The Secret Habits that
Fuel Breakthrough Results*

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and PERRY KLEBAHN

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Book design by Ashley Villarreal

Dedicated to our fellow students of innovation

If you want to be an innovator in your field, you have probably spent as much time as we have wondering what makes someone forward thinking enough to disrupt an entire industry. Are Jeff Bezos and Steve Jobs, as examples of folks who routinely disrupted industries and invented era-defining products and services, brilliant *people*—or did they just have a brilliant *way of thinking* about the world?

In this short book, we're going to propose the latter.

When you look at any innovator, what you'll find is a way of thinking that reflects a specific set of traits. These traits are not innate to any person—even the most brilliant people we know. These traits are, however, predictable and attainable to anyone who is willing to learn them.

What this means is that you don't have to *be* somebody particularly brilliant in order to become an innovative person. All you have to do is *think* in this brilliant kind of way. We can teach you how.

In the following pages, you're going to learn to think like the best innovators in the world, which means you can become like the people you admire the most. All you have to do is learn the simple paradigm shifts that follow.

When you learn to think like Bezos and Jobs:

- 1. You'll be able to solve complicated problems with relative ease.**
- 2. You'll rise to the top of your field.**
- 3. You'll innovate new ways of doing things.**
- 4. You'll become recognized as an expert.**
- 5. You'll tap into the brilliance that has always been inside of you.**
- 6. You'll earn more money.**
- 7. You'll contribute to the greater good.**

So, it's safe to say that this short book will bring you a ton of value.

In the 45 to 60 minutes it takes you to read the following pages, you'll gain insights that have the power to alter your entire life. (And for even deeper exploration, check out our upcoming book, *Ideaflow: The Only Business Metric That Matters*, due out this fall.)

Imagine a scenario where you're paid top dollar for your expertise, where you are the go-to problem-solver at your workplace and beyond. Imagine that long-standing issues in your work and even relationships can be all but eliminated with your unique way of thinking through solutions.

For Bezos and Jobs, their unique way of looking at the world is/was their most valuable resource, and now the same can be true for you too.

Buckle your seatbelts. Let's dive into how to think like Bezos and Jobs.

1. Don't just be a disruptor. Be a proactive disruptor.

When most entrepreneurs say they want to "be a disruptor," what they're talking about is how they want to disrupt an industry so they can make it better for the people who rely on it.

For example, Netflix upended the movie rental industry by allowing customers to rent DVDs online that were then mailed directly to their homes. They eliminated late fees and sidestepped inventory issues that had plagued brick-and-mortar rental businesses. For most people, this was a much better customer experience than, say, venturing out to Blockbuster on a Friday night, so Netflix took off.

But what if we told you that being a disruptor in your industry isn't enough. You need to become a proactive disruptor.

What does that mean?

Proactive disruptors don't just want to disrupt someone else's company. Proactive disruptors want to disrupt their own products and processes so that they can strengthen their companies and products against outside disruption, so they can foresee problems

¹ Walter Isaacson, *Steve Jobs* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011).

before those problems present themselves. They want to work out the kinks before those kinks slow them down.

Proactive disruptors throw every possible wrench at their own systems so that when a real-life wrench comes, they aren't surprised by it.

For example, as iPod sales were skyrocketing in 2005 (20 million iPods sold that year), you'd think Steve Jobs would be reveling in his success. But he wasn't. Instead, he was obsessing over what could go wrong.

That's because Jobs was a proactive disruptor.

Board member Art Levinson remembered, "He was always obsessing about what could mess us up."¹ And thank goodness he was. Jobs' obsession over what could go wrong is what helped him realize he didn't just need to stay one step ahead of the next problem, he needed to stay a hundred yards ahead.

"As he explained to the board, the digital camera market was being decimated now that phones were equipped with cameras," Levinson said. "The same could happen to the iPod if phone manufacturers started to build music players into them. 'Everyone carries a phone, so that could render the iPod unnecessary.'"

Jobs' willingness to disrupt his own process, his own product, and his own ideas is not only what changed the landscape of technology forever, but also what made Apple's iPhone "the most impactful consumer tech product over the past decade," according to Apple analyst Gene Munster.² It's what made Jobs the leader so many admire and seek to emulate today.

Most of us don't obsess over what could go wrong when things are flying high. Most of us are focused on what is going right. But most of us are not Steve Jobs.

If profits are up in your business this year, and things seem to be going well, what would it look like for you to be a proactive disruptor in your work? How could you imagine what might go wrong and proactively get out ahead of the problem?

In learning to proactively disrupt like Jobs, you might just become the most valuable thinker in the room.

Want a structured approach to proactive disruption? You'll love the "retroactive" tool in chapter 9 of our new book, *Ideaflow*.

¹ Walter Isaacson, *Steve Jobs* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011).

² Kif Leswing, "The iPhone Decade: How Apple's Phone Created and Destroyed Industries and Changed the World," *CNBC*, December 18, 2019, <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/12/16/apples-iphone-created-industries-and-changed-the-world-this-decade.html>.

2. Steal like a master.

Steve Jobs was certainly a believer that “good artists copy; great artists steal.”³

He capitalized on the breakthroughs of Xerox PARC, borrowed design ideas from Cuisinart, and encouraged his team to turn the essence of Ritz Carlton’s concierge service into the Genius Bar we all know and love today (more on Jobs’ obsession with inspiration later).

Jobs even masterfully “stole” bits of his personal and professional mindset from one of his idols, Edwin Land of Polaroid.⁴ Land was a college dropout; so was Jobs. Land valued both the functionality and design of a device; so did Jobs. Before Jobs ever created high-end personal tech devices like the iPhone, Land had long since developed luxury gadgets like the SX-70 instant camera.

Of course Jobs wasn’t the only thief talented enough to turn borrowed ideas into gold. When Amazon was growing at an almost exponential rate in the late ’90s, one of the biggest challenges it faced was human capital; the company simply couldn’t hire as many people as it needed to execute daily operations.

This is when Jeff Bezos stepped in with an idea from Microsoft and solved the problem in a way that actually *multiplied* Amazon’s already explosive growth.

As part of its recruiting process, Microsoft had designated an “as-appropriate” senior interviewer who talked to a candidate last and made the final judgment on the hire. Assigning an experienced executive to this role helped ensure that Microsoft maintained a consistent hiring standard.

Of course, when you’re in a crisis of human capital—or, in Amazon’s case, you have unfulfilled inventory on the floor of warehouses that simply needs to be packed and shipped—you might be tempted to take any warm body that comes your way. But Bezos knew that if he sacrificed his hiring standards then, it would only cost him more in the long run.

So, borrowing from Microsoft, he raised the bar.

³ Jobs famously misquoted Pablo Picasso as saying, “Good artists copy; great artists steal.” However, the correct quotation is, “Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal,” and is properly credited to British poet T.S. Eliot.

⁴ Henry Blodget, “Here’s the Man Who Inspired Steve Jobs,” *Insider*, October 9, 2011, <https://www.businessinsider.com/heres-the-man-who-inspired-steve-jobs-2011-10>.

In fact, he put in place “bar-raisers” who were designated employees in charge of recruiting great talent that would fit the culture Amazon was trying to create. At least one appointed bar-raiser would participate in every interview process and would have the power to veto a candidate who did not add the right value to the team.

“Many companies as they grow begin to compromise their standards in order to fulfill the resource needs. We wanted to make sure that didn’t happen at Amazon,” Bezos explained.⁵

The decision to implement a hiring practice Bezos stole from Microsoft set the tone for what Amazon would become.

It’s easy to think that the best ideas are original ones. But the fact of the matter is most great ideas are just passed along from one brilliant mind to another. The best thinkers out there aren’t afraid to borrow from their counterparts because they know the truth so many of us are trying to avoid: There’s nothing new under the sun.

So, next time you credit one of these “genius” entrepreneurs with being brilliantly original, remember that most geniuses we know are really just talented thieves.

What ideas can you “steal” and how can you make them your own?

In *Ideaflow*, we offer a couple of excellent, simple approaches to finding ideas worth stealing. Check out both the “wonder wander” and the “analogous exploration” tools in chapter 10.

3. Hire an assassin.

What would you say if we told you that the man credited with killing physical book sales was employed by the country’s largest physical book retailer at the time? Further, what if we told you that he was hired for that express purpose?

If you’re like most people, you’d stare back in disbelief.

Let’s back up a minute.

In 2004, Jeff Bezos noticed something that was going on with his entrepreneurial counterpart, Steve Jobs, at Apple. It was the rise of the digital revolution, and with the

⁵ Brad Stone, *The Everything Store: Jeff Bezos and the Age of Amazon* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2013).

introduction of the iPod and iTunes, Apple was owning the digital music space. This got Bezos thinking: How could Amazon get ahead of digital book sales the way Apple had gotten ahead of digital music?

At the time, books, movies, and music accounted for 74 percent of Amazon's annual revenue. If those formats were inevitably going to turn digital, then Amazon would need to move quickly to continue being the trusted provider of those goods.

Bezos wanted to create the iTunes of books, so to speak.

After all, he had a front-row seat while the iPod fueled the rapid switch to digital music, eviscerating Amazon's CD sales. Bezos worried that Apple's next move would be to create a device where customers could read books digitally.

He wasn't about to let that happen.

He ultimately concluded that if Amazon was going to continue to thrive as a book-seller in the emerging digital age, it must own the e-book business the same way Apple controlled the e-music business. "It's far better to cannibalize yourself than to have someone else do it," said Diego Piacentini in a speech at Stanford's Graduate School of Business a few years later.⁶

So, Bezos pulled aside Steve Kessel—the Amazon executive tasked with leading physical books sales at the time—and told him that it was now his job to kill his own business.

"I want you to proceed as if your goal is to put everyone selling physical books out of a job," Bezos told him.

Bezos knew what so few entrepreneurs and business owners are willing to admit to themselves: If you don't kill the business that is sustaining you, someone else will.

If Amazon didn't seize the opportunity for digital books in that precise moment, Bezos knew that someone else would. There wasn't any time to waste.

So, he hired his own assassin.

And thanks to that, Amazon is still the leading retailer of digital books to this day with between 68 and 83 percent of the e-book market in its grasp.⁷

As counterintuitive as it sounds, sometimes you have to kill an idea, a way of doing things, a product, or even an entire part of your business in order for something new

⁶ Stone, *The Everything Store*.

⁷ "Ebook Industry News Feed: Breaking News from the World of Digital Books," *Ebooks.com*, June 2, 2022, <https://about.ebooks.com/ebook-industry-news-feed/>.

(and better) to come in and take shape. Sometimes “murder[ing] your darlings,” as Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch said, is the most productive way for fresh ideas and innovative pathways to form.

When that’s too difficult (perhaps due to personal attachments or cognitive biases on the existing team), the best option is to hire someone to do it for you. In killing your golden goose ahead of your competitors, you can own the future too.

What about you? Do you need to hire an assassin?

For loads more tools designed to help you shake up your perspective and the stories of how innovators have used them at companies like Christie’s, BarkBox, Atari, TaylorMade, Fidelity Investments, and more, check out chapter 8 of *Ideaflow*.

4. Perform an innovation audit.

If you are having trouble getting creative—either as an individual or on a team—maybe it’s time to perform an innovation audit.

After revisiting WIRED’s fantastic biographical sketch from 1999, “The Inner Jeff Bezos,”⁸ we were struck by this paradox: Much has changed in the world of innovation in the last 23 years, and at the same time, much hasn’t. One thing remains clear—no matter how much the times change, the habits of mind and disciplines of being to which creative geniuses adhere set them apart from their similarly intelligent and capable peers.

One of these habits Bezos regularly employs is his quarterly ritual of analyzing his calendar. With the help of his assistant, he examines how much time he has spent—in meetings, on phone calls, taking trips, and so on—within about a dozen different categories that reflect his commitments.

But Bezos isn’t the only great thinker who took his calendar seriously. In rejecting a friend’s social invitation, Charles Dickens once wrote, “‘It is only half an hour’—‘It is only an afternoon’—‘It is only an evening,’ people say to me over and over again; but they don’t know that it is impossible to command one’s self sometimes to any stipulated

8 Chip Bayers, “The Inner Jeff Bezos,” WIRED, March 1, 1999, <https://www.wired.com/1999/03/bezos-3/>.

and set disposal of five minutes—or that the mere consciousness of an engagement will sometimes worry a whole day.”

Dickens understood the necessity of carefully prioritizing his time for the sake of his “inventive capacity,” even at the expense of other meaningful requests. He molded his schedule in a way that enhanced his craft rather than in a way that made him a victim of his calendar.

Like Bezos and Dickens, the reason we take regular looks at our calendars is because, as Annie Dillard wrote, “How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.” And so, when we audit our calendars, we begin to see a clear picture of what matters to us.

You can do the same by asking yourself the following questions:

- **How many projects are you working on at once?**
- **How much time do you spend on each of those projects?**
- **How much time do you spend in meetings?**
- **How much time do you spend with direct team members, folks across the broader organization, and folks outside of your company or industry?**
- **How much time do you spend doing something you love?**
- **How much time do you waste?**
- **How many activities on your calendar do you dread versus look forward to?**
- **How much time do you spend learning or growing or working on yourself?**
- **How much time do you have scheduled for creativity?**

Finally, a less obvious reason to take a look at your calendar regularly is to look for something very few of us think of when it comes to scheduling: blank space.

Those of us who wish to be creative, influential innovators need a good bit of time on our calendar that is entirely *unscheduled*. Time to do things like walk the dog, go for a drive, wander to a local coffee shop, read a book on the back porch, listen to a

podcast—anything that will stimulate creative thought. Research professor and author Brené Brown calls this “white space,”⁹ and it’s unexpectedly valuable to the creative life.

These kinds of activities not only offer space for ideas to flow, they also allow us to recharge mentally and physically, maintain work-life balance, and simply enjoy our lives.

“Steve Jobs was famously driven, but also famously good at keeping things simple, focusing on what was important, including his own health.”¹⁰ Some of his daily habits included coming home for dinner at 5:30 everyday, taking a walk with his wife in the evenings, and meditating or listening to music before bed.

When you look at your calendar, is there any blank space at all? Or have you dutifully packed your days from start to finish with every last progress meeting, project work, and social obligation that a 24-hour period will allow?

If your calendar is too full, no wonder you don’t feel like you have any new creative ideas. Creative thought coalesces in the margins, not under the crunch of back-to-back meetings.

So, maybe it’s time to sit down and do a calendar audit.

If you find you’re spending too much time in meetings, on the phone, or working on things you don’t care about, consider rearranging your calendar to match your priorities. But more importantly, peel back what goes on your calendar in the first place.

Maybe the less that goes on your calendar, the more progress you’ll actually make.

In *Ideaflow*, we dive deeper into this topic, examining how innovators from Einstein and Edison to Maya Angelou and Claude Shannon have been deliberate about creating space for what we call a “tactical withdrawal.” The last chapter of the book is filled with counterintuitive tactics to create the space that creative flourishing demands.

5. Employ an antagonist.

When you think about surrounding yourself with a capable team, you probably think of all the qualities we do. You want a team of people who are smart, kind self-starters.

⁹ Brené Brown, “Are You Living With Your Whole Heart?” *Prevention*, February 12, 2013, <https://www.prevention.com/life/a20454301/how-to-live-with-your-whole-heart/>.

¹⁰ Minda Zetlin, “3 Nightly Habits That Helped Steve Jobs Rest and Recharge,” Inc., May 14, 2020, <https://www.inc.com/minda-zetlin/steve-jobs-nightly-habits-sleep-rest-recharge.html>.

You want folks who are problem-solvers and hard working, and who don't make it a habit to complain. But there's one quality you should be looking for that most people don't.

Michael Dell—CEO of Dell Technologies—described this quality best:

“Opportunities often come...from having a contrarian perspective.”¹¹

A contrarian perspective.

When was the last time you brought a *contrarian* onto your team?

It might seem like having someone on your team who questions the status quo would really slow things down. And it might. At first.

But a friend of ours, one of the most sophisticated organizational theorists out there, advocates a radical approach to innovation—hire a cohort of expert, hostile antagonists whose job is to systematically identify and exploit weaknesses in the incumbent business model.

The idea actually comes from the U.S. military where it was developed in response to failures in Iraq and Afghanistan. According to acclaimed author Bryce Hoffman, the only civilian to ever be trained in this elite methodology:

A lessons-learned team established at the Pentagon concluded that the military's failure to challenge its own assumptions, a tendency to ignore disconfirming evidence and alternative perspectives, and an arrogance born of past success all contributed to the problem, so it decided to create a formal methodology for challenging its own thinking and stress-testing its own strategies. This methodology would rely on an array of applied critical thinking tools and groupthink mitigation techniques, all of which would be taught at a new school created specifically to train contrarian thinkers.¹²

A failure to challenge assumptions?

A tendency to ignore disconfirming evidence and alternative perspectives?

An arrogance born of past success?

These could be lines taken straight from the *Wall Street Journal* describing a once-celebrated business now disrupted.

¹¹ Michael Dell, *Play Nice But Win: A CEO's Journey from Founder to Leader* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2021).

¹² Bryce Hoffman, “U.S. Army Moves to Close Red Teaming University,” *Forbes*, October 26, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brycehoffman/2020/10/26/us-army-moves-to-close-red-teaming-university/>.

Far beyond its application in the military, business strategists have been leveraging the power of intentional antagonism for decades to identify overlooked opportunities for growth as well as key vulnerabilities.

In fact, this approach serves as one of Amazon's celebrated leadership principles: "disagree and commit."¹³ Jeff Bezos has always encouraged folks at Amazon to challenge assumptions, even ones he himself held true.

"Bezos had a rare ability to set opinions aside in favor of data," wrote David Selinger, early Amazon employee, co-founder and CTO of Redfin, and founder and CEO of Deep Sentinel home security.¹⁴

Contrary to his belief that selling advertising on Amazon's homepage was "one of the stupidest ideas" ever, Bezos allowed Selinger to run a live test, and the data proved Bezos wrong. "Amazon Advertising now [in 2014] accounts for about \$1 billion annually, one of Amazon's most profitable services."

Steve Jobs also had a reputation for being contrarian, even antagonistic. Dan Harden, founder and CEO of renowned design firm Whipsaw, Inc., recalled a presentation he gave to Jobs and Oracle's Larry Ellison in 1996 on the emerging concept of the network computer.

"Steve immediately challenged every assumption we had made about the future of computing. 'The network can't handle the speeds or data throughput. The designs are too big and clunky. Keep going, though, because anything is better than Microsoft,' he said...I wish I had recorded the conversation because almost everything Steve and Larry had predicted that night came true."¹⁵

You might be thinking to yourself, "I get the idea of challenging our thought process through antagonism, but surely I don't need to be as antagonistic as Jeff Bezos or Steve Jobs to get the job done." But before you think that a friendly sparring partner is enough to stimulate innovation, both military and business organizations agree that friendly fire is insufficient for the task of challenging our assumptions.

¹³ "Have Backbone; Disagree and Commit," Leadership Principles, Amazon.jobs, accessed June 16, 2022, <https://www.amazon.jobs/en/principles>.

¹⁴ David Selinger, "Data Driven: What Amazon's Jeff Bezos Taught Me About Running a Company," *Entrepreneur*, September 11, 2014, <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/237326>.

¹⁵ Dan Harden, "My Four Insanely Great Experiences with Steve Jobs," *Whipsaw*, February 28, 2016, <https://whipsaw.com/2016/02/28/my-four-insanely-great-experiences-with-steve-jobs/>.

As it turns out, an antagonist who isn't antagonistic enough won't inspire the diversity of thought and creativity needed to stop complacency before it starts.

You need an antagonist abrasive enough to shake up the old way of doing things to make room for the new.

The ideas that survive that kind of test will stand the test of the market too.

So, think about it. Who is the antagonist on your team? Or do you need to hire one?

Our book illustrates many other critical perspectives you need to incorporate into your innovation portfolio. Benjamin Franklin's lifelong hack? Yep, got it. The secret sauce that fueled Lockheed Martin's acclaimed Skunkworks innovation division? For sure. The genius of Harvard Business School's renowned leadership theorist Linda Hill? Of course. You'll find it all in chapter 8 of *Ideaflow*.

6. Be an inspiration junkie.

We've already covered Steve Jobs' ability to capitalize on the ideas of others, taking them and making them his own so as to grow Apple into the success that it was (and is).

But he also had a penchant for seeking inspiration more broadly, a tactic we wholeheartedly endorse. He began with Apple's design:

To make the Apple II successful required more than just Wozniak's awesome circuit design. It would need to be packaged into a fully integrated consumer product, and that was Jobs's role. He began by asking Ron Wayne to design a case. "I assumed they had no money, so I did one that didn't require any tooling and could be fabricated in a standard metal shop," he said. His design called for a plexiglass cover attached by metal straps and a roll top door that slid down over the keyboard. But Jobs didn't like it. He wanted a simple and elegant design, which he hoped would set Apple apart from the other machines, with their clunky gray metal cases. While haunting the appliance aisles at Macy's, he was struck by the Cuisinart food processors and decided that he wanted a sleek case made of light molded plastic.¹⁶

¹⁶ Isaacson, *Steve Jobs*.

He did this years later with the Macintosh as well:

One weekend Jobs went to Macy's in Palo Alto and again spent time studying appliances, especially the Cuisinart. He came bounding into the Mac office that Monday, asked the design team to go buy one, and made a raft of new suggestions based on its lines, curves, and bevels.¹⁷

Does “haunting the appliance aisles at Macy's” seem irrelevant? A waste of time? Surprisingly, such are the schemes of inspiration junkies; they're obsessed with finding unexpected inputs to provoke their thinking.

And Jobs isn't the only one who made a regular practice of seeking out inspiration for his products.

Once again borrowing a tactic from Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos held annual “Think Weeks” during which he devoted an entire week to reading, brainstorming, daydreaming, and just letting his mind wander.

During one such Think Week in early 2002, Bezos came up with a way to help his company move quicker and launch new features sooner. He decided to reorganize all of Amazon into teams of no more than 10 people—“small enough that, when working late, the team members could be fed with two pizza pies.”¹⁸

These autonomous groups, now known as “two-pizza teams,” were tasked with solving Amazon's biggest challenges, sometimes competing with each other for resources and even occasionally duplicating work. But in freeing his employees from the complexity of large group dynamics and slow-moving, company-wide initiatives, Bezos aimed to speed up innovation.

Considering how much Amazon grew in the next decade, the tactic clearly paid off.

You might be noticing a pattern from these examples: Stealing like a master, performing an innovation audit, and being an inspiration junkie all overlap for Jobs and Bezos. That's no coincidence; it's an acknowledgment that sometimes the best ideas come from outside your organization or even your industry, and one of the smartest things you can do is prioritize free time so you can deliberately seek out fresh inputs that inspire you.

¹⁷ Isaacson, *Steve Jobs*.

¹⁸ Stone, *The Everything Store*.

So, how about you? Who and what inspire you? How are you intentionally pursuing inspiration in your life?

For more tactics on how to deliberately seek fresh input for your problem-solving approach, check out “Creative Collisions,” chapter 10 of *Ideaflow*, which is filled with examples and practical steps to help you infuse much-needed tools of inspiration into your business context.

7. Carry a notebook.

Inspiration is like fuel for any creative thinker. But inspiration doesn’t happen on its own. Inspiration is a discipline—one that has to be cultivated over time.

This is one of many reasons we suggest always carrying a notebook with you.

Not only is your notebook a location to capture creative ideas, it’s also a reminder to seek inspiration as a daily, weekly, and life-long ritual.

Take, for example, this handy little gem from Mason Currey’s *Daily Rituals: How Artist’s Work*: “After a midday dinner, Beethoven embarked on a long, vigorous walk, which would occupy much of the rest of the afternoon. He always carried a pencil and a couple of sheets of music paper in his pocket, to record chance musical thoughts.”¹⁹

It’s astounding how many of the most prolific individuals across history have been fastidious about capturing ideas:

- **David Kelley, founder of IDEO and the Stanford d.school, once told us about his friend, the late actor and comedian, Robin Williams, who carried a yellow legal pad wherever he went, documenting wisps of overheard conversations and errant observations.**
- **Anne Lamott sleeps with a journal on her bedside table and keeps a notecard tucked into her back pocket for emergencies.**
- **Scottish-American singer-songwriter David Byrne takes the twenty-first century approach to this tactic, keeping a dictaphone in his back pocket.**

¹⁹ Mason Currey, *Daily Rituals: How Artists Work* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013).

- **New York Times** best-selling author Jon Acuff keeps an “idea notebook” with a running tally of the number of ideas he’s had each year.
- In her essay, “On Keeping a Notebook,” Joan Didion describes her practice of jotting down interesting parts of overheard conversations or other tidbits of information she hears in passing.

You might be thinking to yourself, “That’s all well and good for those creative, artsy types, but I’m a hedge fund manager. Journals and sheet music don’t work for me.”

If that’s true, consider this fantastic detail about Jeff Bezos: He is as fastidious in recording his ideas as Williams, Lamott, Byrnes, Didion, and others, and it’s safe to say things have worked out pretty well for him in the idea space.

In fact, documenting ideas is such a habit for Bezos that people around him regularly catch him in the act. This was true even when he was a hedge fund manager:

At DESCO, Bezos displayed many of the idiosyncratic qualities his employees would later observe at Amazon. He was disciplined and precise, constantly recording ideas in a notebook he carried with him, as if they might float out of his mind if he didn’t jot them down.²⁰

This is important for multiple reasons. First and foremost, it’s yet another confirmation that the most brilliant minds seem to have a pattern of (and plan for) collecting ideas in one consolidated place. And secondly, the phrasing here—that the ideas might “float out of his mind if he didn’t jot them down”—isn’t far from reality.

It’s a well-established phenomenon that ideas tend to strike at inopportune moments, which is to say, the very moments when we are likely to neglect them.²¹ As we often say to students at Stanford trying to develop their innovator’s mindset, “If you don’t capture it, it didn’t happen.”

You might be wondering which is better—an analogue approach or a digital one.

Either option can work well as long as you recognize the most important element to consider is friction.

²⁰ Stone, *The Everything Store*.

²¹ Lucas Reilly, “Why Do Our Best Ideas Come in the Shower?” *Mental Floss*, September 5, 2013, <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/52586/why-do-our-best-ideas-come-us-shower>.

Regarding his own choice, Robin Williams once remarked, “I write on big yellow legal pads, ideas in outline form when I’m doing stand-up and stuff. It’s vivid that way. I can’t type it into an iPad; I think that would put a filter into the process.”

Do you have a plan in place for capturing ideas as they come? With the least amount of friction possible, what strategy will work for you?

In *Ideaflow*, we advocate a simple daily practice called an “Idea Quota” to ensure you make regular use of the notebook in your pocket. Learn more about the Idea Quota, why it’s so powerful as a practice, and how to do it in chapter 2.

Final Thoughts

The ideas we’ve discussed above are fairly simple, but it’s important to remember that innovation doesn’t come easy. Steve Jobs and Jeff Bezos have worked exceptionally hard at their craft. However, the good news is you can most certainly leverage their mindsets, habits, and insights within your own context. The capacity to innovate is within your reach.

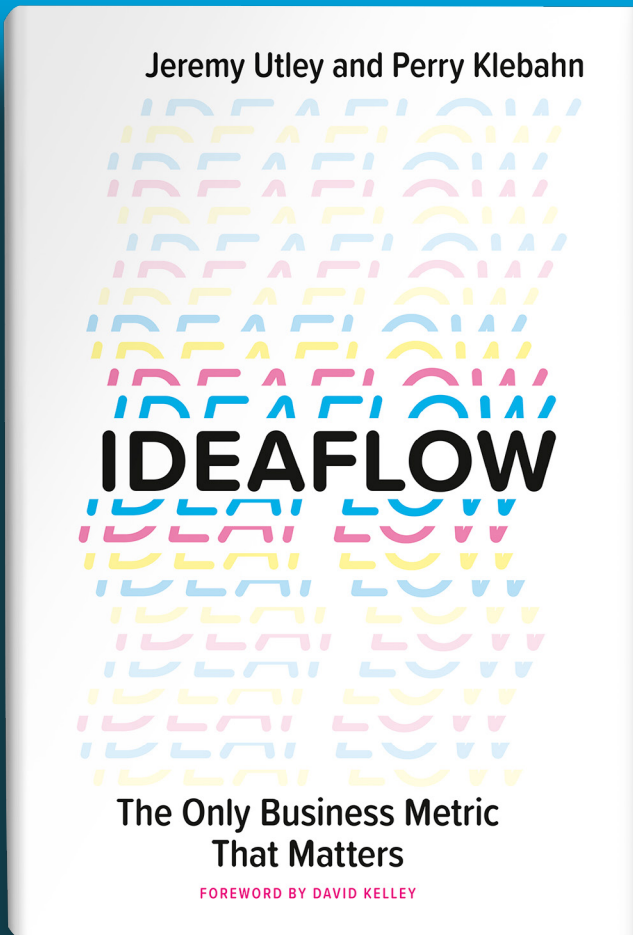
Seek inspiration. Be willing to challenge convention. Kill your darlings. Write down your ideas. Be proactive about self-disruption. Take a hard look at the way you spend your time. And surround yourself with others who will do these things along with you.

To start thinking like Jobs and Bezos, you don’t have to implement everything all at once. Do a quick self-assessment: If you had to score yourself across these seven mindsets, which one are you most deficient in? Start there.

If nothing else, put a notebook in your back pocket.

C’mon, folks, that’s low-hanging fruit!

And if you’re hungry for more ideas beyond what’s offered above, we’ve got you covered. *Ideaflow* will guide you in building a robust daily innovation practice—from inspiration-seeking to market validation of the novel ideas you generate—and provide tools to scaffold the pursuit of innovation. You can preorder the book now or pick up a copy starting October 25, 2022.



Want more tips on how
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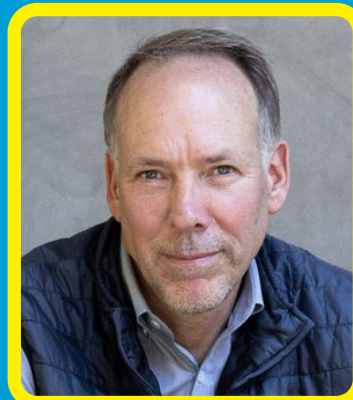
Target

Walmart

In *Ideaflow*, Jeremy Utley and Perry Klebahn of Stanford's renowned Hasso Plattner Institute of Design (aka the "d.school") offer a proven strategy for routinely generating and commercializing breakthrough ideas.



Jeremy Utley



Perry Klebahn

Photos: Patrick Braoudoun