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Rachel Coffey

50 Ways to be more creative at work

RACHEL COFFEY

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Rachel Coffey is a leading voice and communication expert who has been working in the creative industries for over 25 years. She coaches companies and individuals from all parts of the globe to create, present and communicate using innovative and engaging techniques. As a result of working with everyone from Hollywood actors to corporate CEO's she has learnt that, "We all have the capacity to use our creativity in both our professional and personal lives to move forward and create the future. Whoever we are, whatever our personality. Creativity unleashes potential, it is a rewarding and fulfilling process that makes the impossible possible."

Rachel has an MA in Professional Voice Practice (trained in association with the RSC) and is an NLP Master Practitioner. She is the founder of a successful communications, business and life coaching consultancy that she runs from her base in London. She has worked with numerous companies from The Royal Court theatre to global advertising giants helping to unleash creativity and bring about real and lasting change. She has featured in a number of publications including Psychologies magazine, Tatler and Metro newspaper.

Her own journey of creativity began through her career as a professional actor. After fifteen years she moved into business where she gained a deep understanding of the commercial world. Since becoming a coach eight years ago she has managed to fuse together all of this experience to create a unique set of techniques that can transform the way we connect with our audience, colleagues and our own creative self. She has a passion for working with businesses to design programmes that deliver results in a uniquely engaging and experiential way.

On a personal level loves to travel and relishes the opportunity to experience new cultures and cuisines. She lives in her Chelsea riverside apartment with her husband Campbell and their three cats (one of whom talks more than Rachel herself - which is saying something for a voice coach!).

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1 INTRODUCTION

As someone who trained as an actor - before working professionally in the industry for 14 years - I had a bit of a shock when, in between jobs, I found myself sitting in the office of a fire, health and safety company. I say it in that way because I hadn't exactly planned to be there. The evening before, I was in a meeting at my agent's office and declared to the other actors present,

"I'm skint, does anyone know of any jobs?"

Fortunately (or perhaps in my eyes at the time, unfortunately) my friend Becky, who had just landed a nice theatre tour said, "I do." She handed me a scrap of paper saying, "Go there tomorrow morning, ask for Stu. Say you are here for Becky's job."

I took the piece of paper and followed her instructions. I turned up at 9am and said my line as directed. I was met with a quizzical look from said 'Stu', who simply replied, "Where's Becky?"

So there I was sitting in an office I didn't want to be in, doing a job that I never even applied for, wondering what had just happened! To say the job was dull is an understatement. The thought that my creative soul might die under a pile of fire risk assessments crossed my mind more than once. But it was a small office, I needed the cash, and the people were nice.

It was only a few weeks before I found my next acting role and I was on my way again. But each time a contract ended, I went back to that same company. As the company grew, all my other acting friends began to work there too. In the end, when I decided to give my theatre career a break, I worked for them full time, eventually becoming their senior innovation and communications manager.

The question is, why did I keep going back? How come all of these arty types, myself included, fitted into an industry that seemed so straight? One answer: because at the heart of the company was a spirit of creativity and innovation. It was forward thinking and open, ahead of its time. The [company](#) realised that employing a mix of personalities made for the perfect environment to foster change. It allowed the business to grow from a few people in a small office to a nationwide leader in its field.

That was quite a few years ago now, a different lifetime in fact, but I learnt a lot there. One of the things I discovered is that it doesn't matter what industry you are in, creativity is key to growth and success. Without it, staff will stagnate and your product offering will become gradually obsolete.

It is now widely recognised that creativity is of great value to companies as they forge a way forward and aim to get ahead of the competition. Creativity is the way of the future. The [World Economic Forum](#) predicts that by the year 2020 it will be one of the top three most important skills, jumping up from tenth place in 2015. At one time, creativity used to be thought of as the demise of the arts - literature, art, drama. Now however, we realise that creative thinking needs to be applied in *every* sector if it is to thrive in an increasingly intangible world.

Unlike other business skills, creativity cannot be learnt. It has to be nurtured. It isn't something we acquire; it is something we already have. Trying to make somebody creative is as nonsensical as the notion of forcing somebody to be happy. Creativity needs to be developed, not taught. Increasingly, workers are becoming more aware of their creativity. In a survey carried out by [Microsoft](#), nearly three-quarters (73%) of British workers considered themselves to be creative. Whilst that may sound promising, many of them felt that their stressful working environments and lack of appreciation prevented them using their skills.

The good news is that this book contains 50 different practical ways to encourage our creativity to grow. It is designed to be easy to use - each chapter with a clear focus. You can dip in and out of it to find an exercise to fit almost any situation. Some are more complex than others, some a little more unusual, but all are accessible and engaging.

Who is this book for?

Anyone interested in accessing their creativity will find something that works in this book. Leaders to interns, experienced to novice, there is something here for everyone.

Other than time, the resources required are minimal - making it accessible to businesses and organisations of all sizes. Some exercises are for groups, others for the individual. Of course, as this is a book on creativity, feel free to adapt them to your own style and requirements!

How to use this book

Every technique or exercise is a stand-alone suggestion with step by step tips and easy application. The chapters are separated into different categories to enable you to easily find one that will fit your situation. There is also a guide at the top of each page giving you an indication of the amount of time and effort that might be required to complete the task.

No business needs to be boring. Whatever the industry or organisation, there isn't just the space for creativity, there is a need for it. This book is a simple and fun way for you to bring more creativity into your workplace.

2 MOTIVATION

"The way to get started is to stop talking and begin doing."

– Walt Disney

Anyone who has ever made sparkling bright New Year's resolutions on the 1st of January only to have completely thrown in the towel two weeks later will know about the importance of motivation. It can be the difference between achieving our goals and dreams in life and, well, not! Motivation in itself won't get us what we want, but lack of it will almost certainly be our downfall. As Thomas [Edison](#) said, "Our greatest weakness lies in giving up."

What is interesting about motivation is that when we truly *need* something, rather than just want it, we don't even think about trying to stay motivated. It just happens. In this chapter we look at ways to tap into that natural state of motivation - putting ourselves in the right frame of mind to succeed!

2.1 2 MINUTES PER DAY

Aim: Benefit from the effect of a positive mindset

How: Reliving the best thing from the past 24 hours

Effort level: 3/10

Time commitment: 2 minutes per day

Harvard psychologist [Shawn Achor](#) said: "If we study what is merely average, all we will learn to be is average." However, for much of our lives that is what we do. We focus on the average occurrences and events that make up our everyday lives. There's nothing wrong with that but imagine if we could maximise the impact of the really good experiences we have as well.

When our mind is in a positive mode it is 31% more productive than if we are negative, neutral or stressed. The way our brain is designed means that it responds in the same way whether we are experiencing a positive event for the first time or are reliving it in our minds.

In this technique, we take just two minutes per day to focus on the most positive experience we have had in the past 24 hours. Maximising the effect of the positive experience and

gaining a double dose of benefits. The more vividly you recall what happened, the better the results will be.

The process

1. Each day, preferably around the same time, set aside 2 minutes where you can concentrate, uninterrupted.
2. Think back over the past 24 hours and pick out your most positive experience. If you choose you can focus on work events, but personal events are just as valid.
3. Now spend two minutes remembering every detail of what happened. Notice any sounds you heard and how it felt. Create a clear and bright picture and play it through like a film in your mind.
4. Play it through again. As you do so, notice exactly what it was that made this feel so good.
5. When you have finished make a note of what the experience was and the specific thing that allowed you to feel particularly good.

Doing this exercise everyday for at least 21 days will begin to give you a brighter outlook and you will start to notice the things in life that make you happy. At the end of the 21 days review your notes and see if there are any helpful patterns that will help you to stay positive and motivated.

2.2 PROCRASTINATION POPPER

Aim: Get things done and ticked off

How: Take the emotion out of laborious tasks

Effort level: 5/10

Time commitment: 20 minutes

People often put off things they don't want to do. However the longer they leave it, often the more burdensome it becomes.

Andi, a client, was forever procrastinating. Not only did she put things off but she also complained about the task to anybody that would listen. One day Andi unwittingly (and momentarily) parked her car in a restricted bay without a permit. Despite her protestation she was issued with an on the spot ticket. After examining it briefly she noted she had 28 days to pay the fine and threw it into her glove box to be dealt with later. She was too annoyed. The month passed, each time she thought of it, she became more annoyed. She

kept trying to forget, then the letters started to arrive. Each *more* annoying than the last, with most never making it out of the envelope.

This continued until finally she was threatened with court proceedings. She realised she had to deal with it. Now, luckily for Andi, not only was she a great procrastinator but also a great persuader, managing to get the debtor to agree to her only paying the original fine. A minor miracle out of what could have been a very costly mistake. However what she suddenly realised was that she had caused herself months of stress and annoyance and ended up paying it anyway. If she had of dealt with it on the day, by the next morning she'd have been free of it. Below is a simple technique to deal with all those things we don't want to do!

The process

1. Face the task you haven't wanted to do and do so calmly and without emotion. Ensure you don't complain, that you are breathing calmly and are in a neutral state.
2. Decide that you will make this task disappear from your to-do list with minimum effort and in the least time possible.
3. Calmly work out, again from a neutral position, how much time and resource it requires if done successfully without distraction and in the simplest way. Do this almost as though you are working it out for someone else.
4. Decide on the least invasive and most appropriate time to do it. Ensure you have everything that you require beforehand and if it is going to be a long task, put in place a reward for the end.
5. Then simply, again without complaint, just simply do it. Ensuring you get any reward due.

It is incredible how simple some tasks can be when we take the emotion and notion of effort out of them. Something we have dreaded can be simply dealt with and we can be free of it. Of course, there is always one other option, give someone else the resources and ask them to do it for you! Now that really is a quick win!

2.3 ONE THING AT A TIME

Aim: Mindfully accomplishing a single task

How: Removing distractions and getting into the Zone

Effort level: 7/10

Time commitment: 30 minutes

When doing something creative, we need to give our mind space to focus, allowing the ideas to flow. Many of my clients report being constantly distracted from tasks by emails,

messages and notifications pinging up numerous times a minute. A study conducted in [2005 by King's College London](#) suggested that a person's IQ falls by a whole 10 points when they become distracted by emails alone. That is thought to be the equivalent of losing a whole night's sleep! Put that together with the rest of today's technology and that's quite an impact.

Of course we can shut off the distractions temporarily, put our phone into airplane mode, turn the volume down on the computer. Though this can be helpful, what we really need to do is consciously get into the *zone* of focus. Below is an exercise to help do just that.

The process

1. Think of something that you do, anything, where you are naturally 100% focused.
2. Remember a specific time when you were doing this task and replay it through in your mind in great detail. Really focus on that feeling of being in the zone.
3. Now play it through again, this time noticing what you did just beforehand, any preparations you made - did you move to somewhere quieter? Make sure you had everything you needed? Turn off any devices? Then go through the memory noticing everything you did to enable you to stay focused. Also notice how you responded to any unwanted distractions.
4. Now using that same feeling and those same tactics, imagine doing the creative task you need to work on. Go through it in your mind in detail, right up to successfully completing the task and achieving what you want to achieve.
5. This is now your strategy for getting into the zone, dealing with distractions and using your natural ability to focus on one specific creative task.

Along with being more mindful in your approach, you will probably also find that you accomplish things in a much shorter time than you would have were you distracted. The added bonus? You'll have time to reply to all those emails that were waiting and still have time for dinner!

2.4 WHAT A DISASTER

Aim: Gain a fresh perspective on a problem

How: Learn from other's mistakes

Effort level: 3/10

Time commitment: 15 minutes

Having a bad day at work? Then this might be the one for you. We are always told to think positively. However, as every good Hollywood disaster movie shows there is something very cathartic in revelling in somebody else's blunders. History, it so happens, is littered with

them! Whether it be NASA taping over the video of the moon landing or maybe when they lost a Mars orbiter because half their team were using metric measurements and the other half imperial, it is refreshing to know that even the world's brightest brains can make a mistake. Give yourself a few minutes of active edification and learn from the mishaps of those who went before us!

The process

1. Is there a particular type of circumstance that you want to feel better about? Financials, organisation, poor decision making? If so, choose one.
2. Now do a simple search online for the biggest blunders of this kind, e.g. 'the world's biggest accounting blunders'
3. You'll find plenty of material, often in long lists. Pick the one that seems the most interesting or entertaining.
4. Do another search and read about what happened in detail, allowing yourself to enjoy it as the mishaps unfold. At the end of the story ensure you notice what went wrong and what you would have chosen to do instead.
5. Coming back to reality, your own circumstances should now be more in perspective. Identify exactly what the problem was and decide either what you need to do to address it or how you will alter your approach next time.

Indulging in a tale of someone else's misfortune allows us to disassociate with what has been going on around us. Along with realising that there have been people far worse off than us, it is also very helpful in giving us a new perspective. Allowing us to move forward and deal with our situation much more constructively.

2.5 AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

Aim: Refresh the mind to kick it into action

How: Have an active mind break

Effort level: 5/10

Time commitment: 15 minutes

Everybody has noticed at some point or other, if your brain is overloaded, it is hard to think. This is even more the case if we are hoping to engage our creative mind. Our creativity wants to flow, not be pushed, so trying to make ourselves be more creative tends to end up with the opposite state of mind. However, there are plenty of studies, including one carried out at the [University of California](#), that suggest that allowing our mind to wander or do „nothing“ helps it to refresh and allow the creative thoughts to flow once again. This isn't

just about doing nothing or wasting time, after all there is no such thing as doing nothing. It is about actively doing something that turns off the conversation with our conscious mind, allowing our subconscious to come through.

The process

1. Choose an activity that allows you to seemingly 'switch off' your brain, whilst doing something else. Good examples of this might be Yoga, going for a walk somewhere peaceful, listening to relaxing music or even watching a comedian you find particularly funny. It needs to be something that is low on adrenalin as we want our breath to stay naturally relaxed.
2. Find a space to carry out your activity and let others know that you'll be busy for the next 15 minutes as it won't be as effective if you are disturbed.
3. Start doing your chosen activity and make sure that your only focus is on that activity. Allow your mind to wander. Do not try to think of anything in particular. The more you 'switch off' the better.
4. After 15 minutes, clear your mind and re-focus on the task in hand. Hopefully your mind will be brighter and refreshed.

This one can take some guts as none of us wants to be seen as wasting time. However, taking just 15 minutes out can make us far more creative and productive. If it doesn't quite work the first time, do a different activity next time as finding the right activity is important (there is no point going for a walk and spending the time trying to remember what bills need to be paid this month). If you look back through time, you'll notice that all successful creatives took time out to clear their mind, some of them years, so what's 15 minutes in the scheme of things?

2.6 NOT SO RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS

Aim: Reciprocal feel good factor

How: Do one kind action per week

Effort level: 6/10

Time commitment: 10 minutes

The business world can be a cold place. After all, in a way you could say it is all about making money, essentially out of somebody else. Maybe it is what we do with that money that makes a difference. Come to think of it, not just money, but our time, thought and intention. The problem with inward looking environments is that they can be low on emotional wins. This can be very demotivating and bad for creativity. By carrying out one

act of kindness per week - kindness being something that takes thought and is beyond what is normally required or expected of us - we can combat this negative effect. Giving feels good. In fact, in [one study](#) it was shown that giving actually feels better than receiving, creating more activity in the relevant parts of the brain. Here's how to do it;

The process

1. Make a note on your to do list every week to include one act of kindness.
2. You can decide ahead of time what you want to do, but spotting a spontaneous opportunity will reap more rewards.
3. When you see the opportunity, do something for somebody or something else that you know will be of benefit to them and isn't something that you are expected to do. Ensure that while it isn't overly costly to yourself, you do need to go a little out of your way to make it happen.
4. When you have done it, notice or envisage the effect it will have had.
5. Choose a new act of kindness next week.

By consciously choosing to be kind we are widening our awareness of those around us and what their needs are. Heightening our emotional intelligence. It also makes us look and feel good and gives us a sense of worth. By differing how we demonstrate our kindness we continue to expand and learn - imperative in creativity, as opposed to doing something solely out of habit (which would take away the reward as we don't acknowledge it any more). Spread the word and you might even find yourself on the receiving end! Double bonus!

2.7 RE-WRITE THE SCRIPT

Aim: Help yourself be a success

How: Replacing negative self-talk

Effort level: 7/10

Time commitment: 10 minutes at a time

My mother always said that people who talk to themselves are crazy. Well, I hate to break it to you, but we are all just a little bit crazy! Have you ever noticed that in any situation where you are working something out, stressed, annoyed or even when we see something we really want, we talk to ourselves in our head. We often don't take the time to clock it but it is almost like there is a little narrator in our mind. Now that's just fine - so long as what we are saying is helpful.

A client of mine was going to be doing a presentation. He said he didn't like doing them as they 'always went wrong'. When I enquired how, he came out with a whole list of stuff, from

forgetting his words to the technology not working. I noticed as he relayed this, there seemed to be a lot going on in his head. I asked him to go through his strategy before a speech. It turned out that everything he was telling himself was negative. Not just negative, but frankly fear inducing. Not one bit of it was helpful. We went through his whole strategy changing his conscious thoughts into something that was going to help rather than hinder him. Funnily enough, it worked. The whole thing became much easier without someone on his shoulder telling him how hopeless it all was! Here is how to change the script for yourself:

The process

1. Firstly, begin to actually notice what you are saying to yourself in times of stress or importance.
2. Ask yourself if this is a helpful thing to be saying. If a friend was in this position would you be saying the same thing to them?
3. If not, catch the thought (rather than repeat it) and ask yourself, what is the purpose of me saying this to myself?
4. You will usually find that the actual purpose is something that can be turned around to the positive. It might be a warning and now we need to turn it into something that will help us achieve our goal. For example:

Thought: *Oh God, I bet the AV doesn't work again tomorrow.*

Purpose: I want the AV to work tomorrow

Replacement thought: *How can I give myself the best chance of the AV working tomorrow?*

This will then often be followed with a helpful decision or action

Action: Call conference centre, speak to IT person, check what the set up is and if it is compatible with my laptop. Ask them if they can be around for the half hour before my speech tomorrow to help set up.

All of a sudden we have moved from a negative thought that worries us or makes us feel bad to some positive action that will help us succeed!

Most of us wouldn't talk to anybody the way we talk to ourselves - and if we did we'd probably end up with a black eye. Notice if you are being helpful to yourself when the pressure is on, work with your thoughts and see how things change in your favour!

3 PROBLEM SOLVING

“Inside of every problem lies an opportunity.”

– Robert Kiyosaki

Every day we are faced with problems - a delayed train, a pressing deadline, a demanding client. Problems make up part of what it is to be human. Or at least the conscious recognition of them does. Most of the time, given a choice, we would opt to do without them. That isn't the same as ignoring them of course – a problem remains a problem whether we wish to engage with it or not. Is there another way to look at problems though? Are they simply a red flag to say that something needs putting right? An opportunity? The jazz legend Duke Ellington is quoted as saying, “A problem is a chance for you to do your best”.

Whatever their purpose, problems still need a solution. In this chapter we look at some original ways to approach problems and touch on the idea of whether a problem is in fact a problem at all, or merely a differing perspective.

3.1 ATHLETIC VISUALISATION

Aim: Make winning easier with your mind

How: Visualise success

Effort level: 6/10

Time commitment: 20 minutes

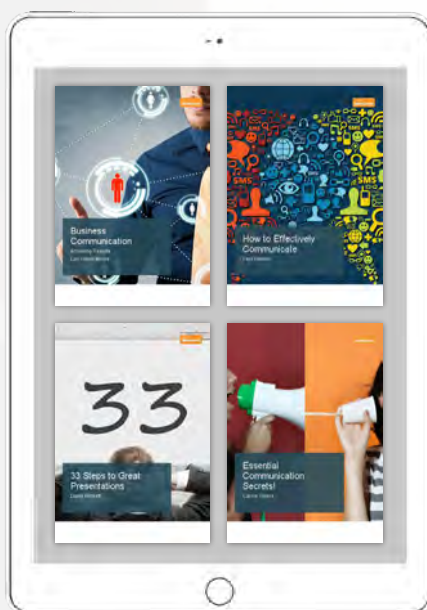
It is common knowledge that many athletes use visualisation to help them win. [Scientists in Russia](#) have even proved that Olympians who spend a significant amount of time on their mental performance alongside the physical earn more medals. The question is how does it work and can it be applied to our everyday lives?

Firstly, it is worth noting that these guys are experts in what they do. It isn't magic, they have already learnt their skill. For it to work with us, we need to use it on something we have the ability to do but that sometimes gets let down by our performance on the day. It

works by the fact that when we carry out a set of actions, a pattern of neurons fire in our brains and create a [neural pathway](#). The more we do this, the more robust and automatic the pathway becomes, this is how habits are formed. Essentially we want winning to become the habit rather than the exception. The same thing happens mentally whether we are actually doing the activity or vividly imagining doing it. Can this be applied to our everyday work and personal lives? Yes, it certainly can and here's how:

The process

1. Choose an activity that you already have the ability to do but that sometimes doesn't work out as well as you'd like in reality.
2. If there is a time that you did this and it went really well, begin by imagining that. Close your eyes. Remember everything about it as though you are re-living it in person. Notice what went well, how you were thinking and behaving, feel how it felt.
3. Now open your eyes and pick a similar kind of time in the future that you want to do really well.
4. Close your eyes and begin to imagine the event. Right from the night before even. Think about waking up and feeling good. Your journey there, saying and doing



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all the right things. Notice how easy everything is. Get to the point just before you begin. Imagine your environment, the noise, the colours, the smell. You are feeling good.

5. Now, making the colours really bright imagine you are going through the event, with the same positive feelings and thoughts that you felt before. Everything is going well, exactly how you want. Imagine coming to the end of the event and receiving recognition from others. Reflect on how successful this has been and how that feels.

The more you imagine the same event, the easier the automatic switch into success mode will be when it comes to the real thing. If any challenges come up whilst you are imagining it, ensure you deal with them in your mind and also make any necessary adjustments in real life. It seems simple, but all those world champions can't be wrong. Now it is your time to go for gold!

3.2 HELP THEM HELP YOU

Aim: Make delegation more effective

How: Be clear and compelling

Effort level: 4/10

Time commitment: 20 minutes

Jonas was an architect and partner in his own practice. He clearly loved what he did and had carefully assembled a talented young team. He needed to improve his work/life balance and couldn't see what he was doing wrong. He wanted more time with his family but didn't feel he was getting the support he needed from work to enable him to do so.

We looked into Jonas' strategy and it quickly became clear that he was doing everything that was required for his role to be effective. That doesn't sound too bad, does it? However, what he was missing was that it was actually him personally that was doing everything. He wasn't delegating at all. He had decided that it was easier to type up his own letters than to take the time for someone else to learn his handwriting. He'd build his own models, just in case somebody else didn't get the vision right. He'd even insist on running every Friday staff meeting himself, which inevitably meant they were brief, rushed and often missed. This meant that nobody felt heard or got the chance to connect company-wide. He was trying to be in control of everything and as a result felt out of control of his own life. All he needed to do was ask for help in the right way. He needed to learn to delegate. Here are four simple tips on how to get the results you want from delegating:

The tips:

1. Actually ask someone for their help or expertise. Don't wait until they ask you or it just has to be done. Also beware of repeatedly asking someone else to ask for you - that isn't effective delegation, that's passing the buck. People like to be asked because you think they know something you don't.
2. Ask at the right time in the right way. Different people have different styles. If you know someone is overloaded in the office, it's probably not the best time to get what you want. Invite them for a coffee instead and drop in the request. If someone is a visual person, draw them a little diagram of what you need instead of a list. Think who you are talking to, it can make all the difference.
3. Let them know exactly how to help you and when you need it by. Being vague isn't you being nicer, it just causes confusion and affects the results.
4. Give them the reason that they are going to be doing this for you and why it is so important. It will give them motivation.
5. Feedback - if something went well because of their help, let them know - and others. It will give them a sense of achievement and have them first in line to help next time.

Jonas transformed the way he worked. He felt better and his colleagues felt valued. Far from giving up control, he had taken command of his own ship. This made him less stressed with more time to spend with his family, which in turn made him even less stressed. Remember helping people to help you is always more effective than badgering others or trying to do everything yourself, it takes far less time and gets much better results. Everybody's happy!

3.3 WORK BACKWARDS

Aim: Make an effective plan

How: Work backwards from your goal

Effort level: 7/10

Time commitment: 45minutes

Sometimes it's hard to sit down and make a plan. You know where you want to get to but don't have a clue how to get from here to there. That is usually because it seems like such a big jump. Often though if we just try to make it more detailed step by step, we somehow get lost along the way. The trick is to work backwards. I use this all the time with my clients when they are wanting to make changes in their career, figure out how to tackle a project or simply get a plan together. You may need a few sheets of paper for this one!

The process

1. Identify your goal and in how many days/ months/ years you would like to achieve it. Write it all at the very top of your paper in the centre.
2. Next, think what step you would have need to have happened just prior to you goal to allow it to happen. Say to yourself 'In order to do that I will have needed to have:' and write down the thing that you'd need to do below your goal. Draw a line to connect the two. Write the point in time that it will happen (see example below).
3. Repeat the above step and keep on going until you reach the present.
4. Here's a simplified example
 - i. Goal: Meet friend Dave in Australia. 3 months' time
 - ii. In order to do that I will have needed to have: Booked the flights. 2 months' time
 - iii. In order to do that I will have needed to have: Booked time off with work. 2 weeks' time
 - iv. In order to do that I will have needed to have: Checked with my manager that she's happy to support the annual leave. 1 week's time at 1-2-1
 - v. In order to do that I will have needed to: check with Dave exactly when he's about and looked at the work calendar to see if anyone's on leave.

Now
5. Once you have got to the present, decide exactly what you have to do now and when you are going to do it. **Example:**

What I need to do now is: Speak to Dave and check the calendar. When am I going to do that: Dave – tonight, Calendar – tomorrow.
6. You now have a plan complete with time frames. You can add in steps and also add in detail or information on the side of each step.

This tool is great at giving you the steps you need, presenting you with a time line and seeing if your goal is realistic in the given time. It is also very useful in terms of noticing the steps further down the line that you may not have thought of yet and that might require some preparation. It can be a little tricky to use this technique at first, but soon you'll be working back to get to the future all the time!

3.4 SOMEONE ELSE'S SHOES

Aim: Seeing things from a different perspective

How: See solutions through another's eyes

Effort level: 7/10

Time commitment: 30 minutes

At times, especially if there is a problem, we can get so rigid in our stance, we fail to see the opportunities we have to solve it, or even if it is actually a problem at all. If we are feeling frustrated or defensive, it can be even harder to see things from another's point of view.

This is just a fun technique that can be used as many times as you like, even played as a game with someone else, that helps us to think how others would view our problem and its solution.

What this gives us is the ability to be flexible and adapt. Adaptability is essential to survival and the more the world changes, the more adaptable we need to become. That goes for the companies we work in and the people within it. As an illustration, according to [Forbes magazine](#), fifty years ago each company in the Fortune 500 was given a predicted life expectancy of 75 years. Today it is only 15 years. That, at least in part, is due to the unpredictable nature of business today and whether a company has the skills to adapt.

This short technique will broaden the mind a little and engage the imagination. It might even solve your problem!

The process

1. Identify your problem. More than that, think what part of it you'd particularly like to solve.
2. Write down a substantial list of people and characters, they can be real or fictional. Include some people you admire and if you are brave enough, put down a couple that you maybe aren't so keen on. Make sure you have quite a broad range of personalities from a variety of backgrounds.
3. Cut all the names of the characters out and put them in a hat/ receptacle.
4. This is the trickier part, as you pick them out actually imagine being them. As them, ask yourself (or get someone else to ask you): "What would you do about this problem?", then, in character, give an answer. Next ask: "What are you going to achieve by doing it?"
5. After each one, come back to being yourself and ask yourself (of the previous solution): "Is this a good idea?" If it is, write it down, if not discard it.
6. Put the solutions aside, maybe for an hour or even a day. Then review the list of solutions and see if there is anything there that can help you to solve your problem.

It may seem a fairly trivial task and on one level, you might be thinking, why do I want my Great Aunt Maude's view on how to improve our purchasing strategy? But, of course, all the views are actually from your own mind so it is simply widening the realms of your thought to see if, in fact, you had the answer all along!

3.5 WE ALL AGREE ON SOMETHING

Aim: Bring two sides together

How: Find a point of agreement

Effort level: 8/10

Time commitment: 1 hour of prep

In May 1945 it was the last few days of World War II. [Itter Castle in Austria](#), was serving as a Nazi prison housing some very senior French prisoners - including two former prime ministers. The castle guards fled as the war waned but the prisoners were trapped, surrounded by the outlying SS soldiers. One prisoner escaped by bicycle and came across a German unit of everyday Wehrmacht troops headed by a Major Gangel. On hearing of the VIP's plight, Gangel formed an alliance with American troops in the area and fought with them, against the elite SS troops to free the French prisoners. This was the only known time that the opposing sides fought as allies. So why did they do it?

The French, it seems had little to lose and being senior figures, clearly had adept negotiating skills. The German major, it is thought, decided that given Germany was almost certain to lose the war, it would stand him and his company in good stead once the war was over to aid the elite prisoners. Despite the fact that these two were ideologically poles apart, they had one point of agreement - they both wanted to survive, and if possible, prosper after the war.

When we are negotiating a deal or even simply dealing with a difficult colleague, there will always be something that both sides agree on. This is your starting point because once your opposition begins to agree with you and you manage to find common ground, a resolution is often just around the corner.

The process

1. Firstly, it is imperative that you know and, as well as you can, understand the person you are dealing with. In order to find that common ground you need to be open minded. Do your homework without being too presumptuous, ask questions - effectively getting them to give you the answers.
2. Be genuine and generous. Ideally this isn't about winning, this is both parties coming away feeling they have something they want (even if they didn't even realise they wanted it in the first place!).

3. Be clear in your mind about what you need out of this. Being greedy won't work. You need to accept when you have what you want, it'll pave the way for much better relations going forward.
4. Find that point of agreement, it will be there somewhere. Once found, ensure that you are explicit about what it is and get your counter-part to agree that you both want the same thing.
5. Finally, a little grace and charm go a long way. Even if the person you are negotiating with seemingly has more power, there is a reason you are at the table. Make them feel good about themselves and it'll stand you in good stead.

One small note, things didn't go quite so well for Major Gangel, in fact he was the only casualty of the battle. A lesson here that if we can use a little charisma rather than get the big guns out, we are a lot less likely to get shot ourselves!

3.6 HISTORY IN THE MAKING

Aim: Apply a new strategy to solving a problem

How: Learn from the past

Effort level: 7/10

Time commitment: 1 hour

One thing that is certainly true in the history of the world is that it has continuously evolved. It has evolved in reaction to problems that have occurred. We all face issues from time to time and it can be difficult to find the answers. However, if the world has always been full of challenges, by its nature, it must also be full of solutions. Here we take a little inspiration from approaches used in the past to solve unusual problems.

Examples:

- **Use cats**

In [525 BC](#) The Persians were battling the mighty Egyptians when they came up with a nifty plan. Knowing how cats were revered by the Egyptians, they decorated their shields with painted cats and actually took 100's of live moggies with them to the front line. The Egyptians ceased to fight for fear of reprisal from the Gods and were undone.

Application: Show how something important to the other party might be put at risk by following a particular path. Offer an alternative, less damaging solution.

- **Humble blacksmith**

In World War II [German u-boats](#) were intercepting cargo preventing thousands of tonnes of supplies from reaching allied shores. The British knew the u-boats relied on their periscopes to see. In the dead of night they sent tiny boats armed with little more than a blacksmith and hammers and crept up on the massive vessels. They smashed and dismantled the periscopes, meaning their only way to navigate was to surface and therefore expose themselves. They managed to thwart 16 boats with this simple plan.

Application: You may have been facing a big problem, but perhaps there is a simple solution. See if there is one thing you can alter about the problem.

- **Baggage**

Some years' ago [Houston airport](#) was regularly facing a barrage of complaints from passengers saying that the wait time at the luggage collection point was too long. It took just one minute for travellers to reach it for the plain and there was no way of getting the bags there in that time. However, somebody realised, the bags weren't actually taking an unreasonable amount of time to arrive. It was the boredom the passengers experienced whilst waiting that was the problem. Houston moved the carousel six times farther away meaning people had to walk further. Passengers stopped complaining as they no longer felt they were having to wait too long!

Application: Take time to identify the root cause of the problem and not just what people perceive it to be. The solution might be there waiting for you.

The bottom line is that if a problem seems hard to solve, then we are probably looking at it in the wrong way. It is always worth taking a break, getting some inspiration and coming back to it. Take a look at the innovative way solutions have been sought and applied in the past and your problem might be solved by tomorrow.

3.7 YOU ALREADY KNOW HOW TO DO IT

Aim: Approach a tricky situation in a manageable way

How: Apply a familiar mindset

Effort level: 9/10

Time commitment: 30 min

[Dweck](#), a Stanford University professor, carried out an experiment in a New York junior high school. She took children, some of whom were failing and taught half of them that changing their mindset could allow them to get better grades. She challenged their fixed belief that they couldn't be any cleverer than they had been and that instead they could have a direct impact on how well they did by changing their thoughts and behaviours. The outcome was positive, with even the troubled kids making an improvement.

If we apply this to ourselves, the easiest way to do it is identify a situation where we already have a useful mindset. A situation that we go into naturally expecting positive results. This way we aren't having to learn a whole new set of beliefs but tap into something that we already know and use.

In the example below we will use someone with a poor work life balance who struggles getting through a Monday. We will assume that their everyday positive situation is a trip around the supermarket. Of course, you can replace these with your own situations. Be sure you imagine everything in detail. If you like you could get a friend to read the scenarios aloud for you:

The process

1. **Positive:** Firstly, close your eyes and imagine an average successful trip to the supermarket. You turn up with your re-usable bag, you walk in with a sense of purpose, generally find the things you want, get help when you need it, check out smoothly, noticing some savings along the way and off you go. Open your eyes.
2. **Negative:** Now think of the more stressful situation. Closing your eyes, remember what it felt like before setting foot in the office, the thoughts that went through your head. Notice how stressful it felt just walking in, looking at all the work ahead of you. Imagine that you are about to ask someone for some information, but may have already been expecting a negative outcome. Imagine going through the day with this mindset and then finding it really difficult to get out at the end of the day. Open your eyes.
3. **Negative application:** Go back to the supermarket and imagine you approached it just the same way as the work situation. Close your eyes. You walk in feeling like you don't want to be there. You don't have in your mind the things you need. Walk round. Notice what a pain it is when something is out of stock. You are about to ask for help but maybe don't even bother as you decide you probably won't get the answer you want. It takes ages to check out, everyone in front seems to be taking forever. Despite some reductions you resent having to pay up. You finally leave. Open your eyes. How do you feel?
4. **Positive association:** Now, taking a deep breath clear your mind and with your positive supermarket mindset, think about walking into work. Close your eyes. Walk in assuming you will get what you want and you have come prepared. Get to work going through tasks as easy as picking things off the shelves. Feel free to adapt your style, be flexible in your decisions, be outcome focused. If you ask for assistance choose the best possible person and ask in a way that will get you what you want. At the end of the day notice what you need to do in order to leave

happy and do it. Imagine a positive benefit of having done this work. Open your eyes. How does it feel?

You will notice that, even in a situation that is usually easy, a negative mindset would make it a struggle. Likewise, when we approach what has been a stressful situation with a positive mindset, it changes the outcome. Our thought processes and behaviours have changed. You already know how to be in the positive mindset, because you are already using it. Time to apply it...

4 1-2-1 MEETINGS

"To listen well is as powerful a means of communication and influence as to talk well."

– John Marshall

Some of the biggest decisions that happen in the world – and our own lives – come as a result of a 1-2-1 meeting. Those private words that are said between the Queen and her prime minister, two leaders disappearing behind closed doors as the press look on or that ground breaking negotiation cemented over dinner. For us personally it can be a place where we share our vision, ask for support or seal the deal on a long awaited pay rise. The thing to note is that the outcome of a 1-2-1 meeting is very much in the hands of its participants. The possibility to influence the outcome is high. This is a space for opportunity and communication.

In this chapter we explore ways in which we can get the most from our 1-2-1 meetings by setting the right tone, building rapport and truly hearing what is being said.

4.1 A PLACE FOR EVERYTHING

Aim: Support the outcome of your meeting

How: Find the perfect surroundings

Effort level: 7/10

Time commitment: 20 minutes

A 1-2-1 meeting gives you a bit more freedom than if you have your whole team in tow. Due to this you can afford to be a little more flexible on your venue.

People have been getting quite creative in terms of where they meet. Angleton of Aegis Finance had high aspirations when he chose a helicopter to host the signing of a \$17 million loan agreement. He wasn't just being flash though, it turns out it saved them \$900k in offshore tax. Still, I'm sure the novelty didn't hurt. The CEO of Blue Blazing Media thought just that as he took a break from the boardroom in exchange for a 1.2 mile hike up Camelback mountain with a potential partner. Or you could look at Ben Smith of Chancebending Media who essentially used a taco truck in place of a cab to sign his biggest deal to date.

A little bit of flexibility allows for some of the traditional constraints of meetings to be loosened. A taco truck might not be for you, but have a look at some of the other possibilities below:

The venue suggestions

1. **Grand Museum**

Good for: Feeling grounded, being established, being part of something bigger

2. **Art Gallery**

Good for: Creativity, gaining perspective, seeing the big picture

3. **Park**

Good for: Calming down, difficult conversations, contemplation

4. **Local Caf'**

Good for: Getting back to basics, managing expectations, knuckling down

5. **Restaurant**

Good for: Back of the napkin ideas, extending gratitude, asking for more

6. **Sporting event**

Good for: Getting the adrenaline going, a sense of reward, goal setting

7. **Close to water**

Good for: Being reflective, expansive ideas, floating a concept

There are many more opportunities to host a good meeting, the list goes on and on. The important thing is that supports your outcome and makes you more likely to get what you want. Be aware of things like needing privacy, noise levels and requiring something to write on - the venue does need to be fit for purpose. Also, ensure any directions are clear or that you accompany them there - you don't want to spend half an hour trying to locate your other half! Otherwise, feel free to be imaginative and find the perfect place to create the ideal outcome!

4.2 GET ON THEIR WAVELENGTH

Aim: Communicating well

How: Doing it in their style

Effort level: 5/10

Time commitment: 15 minutes

I once had a report called Max. Max was a great guy, an illustrator. Great sense of humour, talented but not the best at time management. Or, it seemed, delivering quite what I'd asked for. His intentions were good, but somewhere there was a gap. I tried all kinds of approaches and all got an enthusiastic reception, but the results were variable. Until that was, one day, out of sheer frustration, rather than type him a list of instructions or stand there and clearly say them, I ended up drawing him a diagram. Lo and behold, to my great surprise, I got what I needed - ahead of schedule. Now I wasn't the only one who had dealings with Max, so I told my MD to use the same approach. Sure enough, it worked.

I don't know why I hadn't thought of it before. Of course, Max was a visual person, so to really get hold of something complex he needed to see it, visualise it.

People tend to fit into one of three categories, Visual, Auditory or Kinesthetic. Most of us have elements of all three but have a stronger preference (Max, as it happened, was heavily visual). If we give instructions or have discussions and use a style or language leaning towards someone's preference, they often find it much easier to absorb. Below is a list of each preference, the types of thing a person of that preference might say (so you can identify them and use that language) and communication styles they might like.

The process

1. **Visual person:** Thinks in pictures. Visualise things in their mind.
Language: I see what you mean. It looks good to me. Look, I'm not saying... Appears fine.
Approach: Diagrams, Images, Flow charts, Colours
2. **Auditory person:** Will recall hearing what people have said. Talks things through in their mind.
Language: I hear what you mean. It sounds good to me. Listen, I'm not saying... I heard that.
Approach: Explain what you want verbally. Get them to repeat it. Get them to talk about things.
3. **Kinesthetic person:** Will remember the sense of something. Will be driven by what feels right.
Language: It feels right. I have a funny feeling about... I'm getting the sense that this plan...
Approach: Recognise their feelings. Give them something tangible to take away. Use appropriate physical contact, such as shaking hands or a literal pat on the back.

It may sound/look/seem simple (!) but it can make quite a difference to the ease of communication. Also, note which category you mostly fall into and see if it makes a difference for you. You may find that those who you naturally understand the best are already using your language.

4.3 FORGET THE SANDWICHES

Aim: Find effective ways to feedback

How: Drop the praise sandwich

Effort level: 3/10

Time commitment: 10 minutes

We have all been on the end of it at some point, the praise sandwich. Actually, we have probably been on the end of it too many times, which is one of the contributing factors to its ineffectiveness. The praise (or feedback) sandwich typically begins with some kind of compliment or positive point, then delivers the bad news in the middle, finishing off with further praise or encouragement. To those who have been on the end of it before, the first statement only serves as a warning that something bad is about to be said. To this end it is devalued, merely a pre-cursor to the real event - the bad news. In a similar vein, once that negative feedback has been aired, the final positive statement is barely heard by the employee at all. In fact, a research paper from S.E. [Oklahoma state](#) University suggests the only people that feel better from the sandwich, are the managers delivering them, as they have said something pleasant as well as negative. That really isn't any good though, if it doesn't get results. Here are some more effective ways to present feedback:

The alternatives

1. Affirm the positive, turn the negative into a question.
Say what went well and why. Then if there is a negative, pose it as a question
e.g. The pitch on the whole went down really well I think, we got a good response. What happened with those numbers though?
2. Take the positives as progress and the negatives as areas to work on
e.g. The report was so much better than last time, good work. Now, we need to look at how we can build on that, maybe include the quarterly figure graphs next time, beside the text.
3. Take out the blame and look at the issue
e.g. instead of 'You and four members of your team were late!' go to 'We really have to ensure that everybody is on time next time, it just looks unprofessional otherwise'.
4. If you are speaking to an expert and you notice an issue, trust them to fix it
e.g. Speaking to the FD, 'John, the figures for quarter three look wrong to me, can you take a look?'

We don't need to candy coat every minus point. People appreciate honesty. So long as it is delivered in a way that promotes progress or learning, it gives us integrity. That way, when you do give a compliment, it will be worth far more to the lucky person on the receiving end.

4.4 TURN YOUR BACK ON IT

Aim: Free thought and listen

How: Remove unnecessary visual distractions

Effort level: 7/10

Time commitment: 5 minutes

When I had done something really wrong as a child and I stood there wanting to disappear, inevitably my mother would say those immortal words “Look at me when I am talking to you!”. Did it make me listen? No. Obviously, it is polite to give someone face time when they are talking to us, but there’s something interesting that happens when we focus on one sense and remove another.

I once went to a restaurant in London staffed by blind waiters, where the diners were led down a darkened corridor to tables that were in complete darkness. I expected that things might taste different or stronger, but what really hit me was the level of noise. It seemed almost unbearable, but was probably no different to many busy restaurants I’d been in. However for some reason my hearing sense was heightened.

We use that premise in this exercise to see if it can improve our capacity to listen. As a totally pitch black room may seem a little forced, instead, the participants sit back to back, with reduced light. This removes the visual cues given by the other person.

The process

1. Book a meeting room that is relatively small and indoors, to ensure that voices will be heard.
2. Prior to the meeting, set out the chairs so that they are directly back to back. Leave an inch or so between them for comfort.
3. Have a side table near each chair for any notes.
4. Turn off any bright lights - though make sure that there is still enough light to see to documents.
5. Give your colleague any documents they need to refer to at the start of the meeting.
6. Have your meeting and notice if there is a different quality to it than usual. Feel free to close your eyes if appropriate. Is it easier to listen?
7. At the end of the meeting, turn to face one another and recap on what you have agreed and discussed during the meeting.

It is worth noting with this one, that both parties need to agree to it beforehand, to ensure both feel it is appropriate. However, it can bring up some surprising results - boosting listening skills, thought and creativity and lessening conflict.

4.5 GO GLOBAL

Aim: Get out of habitual style

How: Borrow styles from other countries

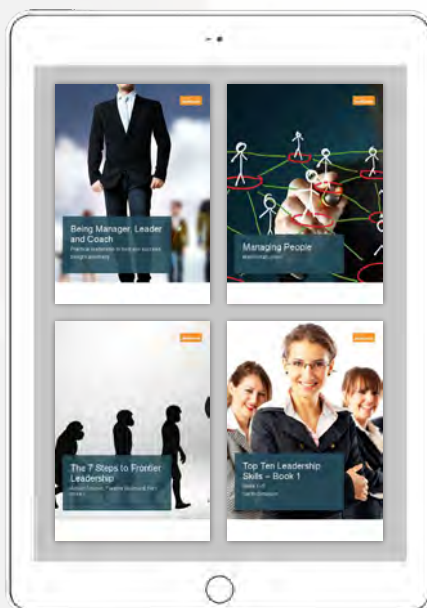
Effort level: 6/10

Time commitment: 20 minutes

It is probably fair to say that we are quite habitual in terms of the approach and style with which we conduct our meetings. Although on one hand this can save time, on the other it can mean that we come up with very similar results and outcomes, especially if the same topics keep on arising. If we are wanting to be creative, this can be counter productive. Instead, as a one off, how about trying out a style of meeting that belongs to another country or culture - seeing if changing the style also results in a different outcome. Below are suggestions based on the style of meeting frequently held in a variety of countries.

The styles

1. **UK:** General friendly atmosphere. Papers may be circulated prior to or at the meeting. Attendees will arrive just before or just after the official start time. Meeting will begin with informal small talk. An agenda will generally be followed. Humour can be used. Some decisions will be made though many will be postponed to the next meeting following some action from this meeting or running out of time.



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2. **Finland/ Sweden:** All attendees are on time. Formal set agenda. No small talk, can be seen as a waste of time. Long pauses in between questions and comments, used for contemplation and thought process, must not be interrupted. One person speaks at a time, often with permission of the chair or other attendee. What is agreed is expected to happen.
3. **Germany:** Formal, little in the way of smiles. Detailed agenda to be passed out several days beforehand. Meeting will commence on time. Both parties will have researched their position and will argue their case. Any negotiations will be direct. After an examination of facts, argument and counter argument, a firm agreement will be met. Meetings will finish as soon as possible, long meetings can be seen as ineffective communication.
4. **China:** Formal. No laughing, even if something is funny. No pointing out the mistakes of others, this would cause embarrassment. Both parties treated with overt respect. Meetings will be one party proposing a method to achieve a pre-agreed desired outcome. Comment will be made by other party however, meetings are not for brainstorming or lengthy discussions, this must have already happened in preparation. Once proposal and comment made, final decision will come after meeting following consultation with others. This way if proposal is rejected, both parties save face.
5. **Mexico:** Start of meeting is flexible, even to the point of it actually happening the following day. If there is an agenda, it will not necessarily be followed, new ideas welcome. Meetings are seen as creative places and will have a free flow of ideas, with as many interruptions and questions as deemed necessary by the attendees. Emotion isn't to be shied away from and is not seen as a lack of professionalism. Each meeting is part of a process and the end decision is not the immediate goal.

These styles can be used in a 1-2-1 meeting or group setting. The more free the style, the harder it is to keep control if more than two people are involved. Some styles will suit certain situations more than others and there are plus points and draw backs to each. If you are looking for one to try, choose one that is least like your habitual style.

4.6 DO YOUR HOME WORK

Aim: Build rapport and get results

How: Do some background work

Effort level: 6/10

Time commitment: 15 minutes

As Dale Carnegie said, “To be interesting, be interested”. The fact is people like people who like them. It makes them feel valued and as a [recent study](#) has shown, Brits put having a good relationship with their colleagues and their boss above career prospects and even pay.

Whether the person you are meeting is senior to you or on the same level, internal or external, take some time to fill in some background about the person and also refresh your memory of your last meeting, even if it was on an unrelated topic. If your counterpart feels you understand where they are coming from, negotiations will become easier to steer and your message will be heard. See below for some ways in which you can prepare:

The process

1. Take 5 minutes to review your last meeting together. If you show that you recall things from a previous time you will come across as someone who listens.
2. Have a look at the projects this person is working on currently, so that you can ask pertinent questions. Do this with skill though, they don't want to feel spied upon.
3. Note any recent successes (or difficulties you can sympathise with). Mentioning these will give them a chance to open up and also feel noticed.
4. Gather any background info, such as how long they have worked at the company, other things they might be involved in (this is usually readily available on sites such as LinkedIn).
5. Read and understand anything you have been sent by them prior to the meeting. You will seem invested in the process.

In any business dealings, building and maintaining rapport is crucial to a positive working relationship. Knowing background information and being able to engage your meeting partner will go a long way toward helping you get the meeting outcome you are aiming for. Just remember, even if you only have a few minutes to prepare on the way to your meeting, it always pays to do your homework!

4.7 MAKE NOTES

Aim: Encourage a particular meeting mood

How: Put on the music

Effort level: 5/10

Time commitment: 10 minutes

Music has a profound effect on our moods. For centuries people have used music to motivate, to relax and enjoy what they are doing. It is a great way to have an effect on both mind

and body without really having to put much effort in. However, if we make it known what effect we expect it to have, it [impacts](#) positively on listeners. Maybe this is why DJ's often do this before they put on a track. How many times have you heard "Here's one to really give you that Friday feeling" or similar.

Although lots of people listen to music while they work, how often have you heard it in a meeting room? Could be time to give it a go. Here are some [genres of music](#) and their effect on the mood:

The styles

1. **Blues** - These tracks can be great for taking anxiety or nervousness out of the atmosphere. Even though they are 'blue' by nature, the rhythm is said to slow the heartbeat and have a calming effect.
2. **Reggae** - About to tell your boss that the project deadline needs to be extended by two weeks? Bring out the Bob Marley. Reggae might well be useful for anger management as the beat is similar to that of a healthy resting heartbeat. Bring down the pulse and the temper to a more manageable level!
3. **Classical** - Need to find a solution? With its timeless appeal, classical music, especially harmonious varieties, increase brain power and have an uplifting effect. The ideas will be flowing in no time.
4. **Show tunes** - Is your meeting lacking a bit of pizzazz? Put on some big show numbers and the motivation levels will lift in an instant.
5. **New age** - If you require some calm introspection and open minded reflection, new age music will relax the mood and broaden the mind.
6. **Salsa** - Feeling tired? Bring on the Latino beats! Your meeting will be fuelled with energy, fatigue will be banished and replaced with bright and lively discussion. And maybe a bit of dancing. You've been warned!

Although music can have a very positive effect, there may be some styles you might want to stay away from. A lot of mainstream pop is very repetitive and fast paced, great for the gym or if you are doing a monotonous task, not so great if you don't want people to zone out into auto-pilot. Also, Country music is known for bringing up depressive feelings. Playing love songs anywhere near someone who has just had a break up means you can forget the business, you're more likely to end up using the quarterly report to mop up the tears. Choose carefully though, and your meetings could be in for a boost!

5 INFLUENCE

“Think like a wise man but communicate in the language of the people.”

– W.B. Yates

Influencers – social media’s new best friend. You’d think it was a new concept wouldn’t you? It isn’t. It, or they, have been around since time began. Every time you end up agreeing to something you had no intention of doing, every time you start spreading the word about something you’ve only just been introduced to yourself: you have been influenced. Used adeptly, influence encourages others to buy into our ideas in a seemingly effortless manner. Influence is a powerful tool that allows us to potentially affect the way that people choose to think and what happens as a result. The philosopher Nietzsche stated; “The future influences the present just as much as the past”. Essentially, it isn’t just about telling people that something will work because you have the evidence that it does. It is about Influencing them in a way that means they take action today because they believe in the potential that you see in the future.

Influence is a subtle creature with great power. In this chapter we look at how you can develop your own powers of influence.

5.1 FRESH EYES

Aim: Know who we want to influence and how

How: Taking a new look at familiar territory

Effort level: 6/10

Time commitment: 45 minutes

Sam knew that he was going to be up against it. He’d pitched ideas to the board before - and so had all of his colleagues. Everybody knew what they were like. Everybody knew how they’d respond and that pitches rarely resulted in immediate action. Or at least they thought they did. When Sam sat down with me, he told me what he thought the board was like. What he couldn’t identify quite so easily was why he was thinking it. Turns out there was only a part of this opinion that he had actually formed himself, the rest was the stuff of legend from those that had gone before. He even admitted that some of his own opinions may be out of date or inaccurate. Instead we worked together to see the board, the challenge, his pitch and his desired outcome from a new perspective. His feedback from the board? His ideas seemed fresh and relevant and his proposal moved to the top

of the pile. Here are some things to think about when you might be wanting to influence someone that you already had a preconceived idea of:

The considerations

1. Who are they?

Approach this from a clean slate. Using your knowledge and yet being impartial, who is this person, what do they do, where are they going and what are they like when they are at their most receptive?

2. What do they want?

As in what is it they actually want when you look at the big picture? How does your idea fit with helping them achieve what they want? How are you going to show this?

3. What is their strategy?

How do they play the game? Rather than coming head to head with them, how can you show that you are running alongside them? That you think in the same way.

4. How is this going to work for me?

To answer that you also need to know the reason your pitch is going to work for them. Also, what you want the outcome to be and how you want to be seen going forward. Are you forging a stronger relationship or do you want to get in and get out?

It's funny how often we don't clearly ask ourselves these questions when we are about to set about influencing someone. So many people just focus on their presentation, pitch or argument, assuming a lot of background information, because they think it's something that is a given. As we all know, familiarity breeds contempt. It doesn't matter how many times we might have pitched to someone or pitched the same thing to different audiences, we need to look at it with fresh eyes every time.

5.2 IT'S A GIFT

Aim: Spread the word

How: Give them the tools to sell it

Effort level: 6/10

Time commitment: 30 minutes

"I've just been to a really interesting talk"

"Really? What was it about?"

"It was about a new concept thing, a sort of idea of like, well kind of brains and confidence and stuff and how its like, well kind of like we can already sort of do it."

"Oh right, sounds interesting! Anyway, all good with you?..."

We have all been there. We watch something. We are absorbed. We take it in but, especially when it's new, we don't quite know how to articulate it on the other side. Whilst this isn't a great issue for the listener, if you are the one trying to spread this new idea around and gain interest, it's far from ideal. In today's world of soundbite communications, we need to ensure that we have people walking away or finishing reading about something, that they are then easily able to share with others. It is like we need to package the information in a manner that is compact and useable. We need to gift them the information, so they can, in turn, gift it to others. Here are some things to think about in your writing or presentations:

Tips for gifting info

1. **Compact the concept** - Make sure, however gargantuan your amazing idea is, that you can boil down the essence of it into one sentence.
2. **Give them reason** - Give your audience a feel good reason to pass this on. The joy of a gift is in the giving. Let them know how it is going to benefit others. The difference it is going to make to their lives. Share how enthused others become when they hear of it. It means they will gain a sense of satisfaction when passing it on.
3. **Repeat repeat** - Once is never enough. We live in a world of repetition. Every TV documentary will tell you what you've just been watching after every break. Ads will repeat the same idea time and again in just 30 seconds. Repetition is hypnotic, so people don't really notice it. Throughout your piece, repeat your compact concept several times over, so it sticks in the mind.
4. **Enthuse** - Fill your audience with a sense of enthusiasm for your idea or product. Give them context, present the problem and show them just how fantastic the solution is for people. The more [emotional connection](#) to something, the more loyal your audience will be and the more they will want to gift it to others.

We all love to spread the word about a new and interesting thing. It makes us feel like we have something to contribute. It allows others to think we are moving ahead and full of good ideas. The more somebody talks about your idea or product, the more they identify with it, the more it becomes theirs. Once it is theirs, they are yours! From that one sentence that's gifted, the conversation begins...

5.3 VOICE OF INFLUENCE

Aim: Use the voice to deliver your message

How: Engage the listener through your voice

Effort level: 6/10

Time commitment: 20 minutes

As a qualified voice coach I know only too well just how much the way a person speaks can impact upon the listener, what they hear and the outcome of any meeting or presentation. It is also surprising just how many people, old and young, junior to the most senior, are worried about how they sound. In fact public speaking is among the top three phobias both in the US and the UK. The most important things are to sound natural and genuine, be clear and be heard. Below are a few starter points to help you do just that:

The elements

1. **Clarity** - The way we shape our words is important, it allows the listener to understand exactly what we are saying with minimum effort. Wake up your articulators and the muscles around them before you speak. Warm up your tongue, lips and teeth by making a 'brrrr' sound with your lips, saying a tongue twister, quickly and perfectly and doing a big Cheshire Cat style grin.
2. **Pitch** - There is nothing more dull than a monotone voice. Our voices naturally vary in pitch, but the delicate muscles in our throat get negatively impacted by tension affecting the movement in pitch. Simply make sure your shoulders are relaxed, your neck can move and your breathing is deep and calm and your pitch will work perfectly for you.
3. **Resonance** - This is where and how the sound vibrates in our bodies. Good resonance creates a rich tone and also ensures that there is enough volume to be heard. Our main resonator is the cavity in our mouths. Ensure your jaw is relaxed by imagining all the tension flowing out. Allow any tension in the shoulders to melt away and do a couple of big yawns with your mouth closed, to stretch the soft palate. All of this will help to amplify the sound and help you sound good.

It is always worth remembering that the adrenaline that runs through our bodies before saying something important is completely natural, we just need to keep our breathing relaxed so that we use it as a positive focussed energy, rather than spiralling off into fear. Whenever you are saying anything of importance, remember to keep at a measured pace, be succinct and clear and remember to pause - it will let you breathe and gather your thoughts, and let the listener have a moment to digest what you are saying. You'll have them in the palm of your hand in no time!

5.4 STORY TIME

Aim: Be remembered and meaningful

How: Use the art of narrative

Effort level: 8/10

Time commitment: 40 minutes

Since the beginning of humankind stories have been used to educate and enthrall. From an early age we are captured by stories that ignite our imaginations and teach lessons we never forget. The imagery and feelings that stories conjure up are extremely memorable. They are memorable because as a listener we create them in our mind. We connect, they mean something to us personally.

Story telling is being used ever increasingly in business and to great effect. You will barely hear a keynote speech that doesn't kick off with one. Due to the value to the advertising industry, there has been a lot of research carried out on the subject. [Paul Zack](#), a neuroeconomist, has shown that tense moments in a story releases cortisol in our brain, helping us to focus. The resolution releases oxytocin, bringing that feel good factor and an emotional connection. With that comes loyalty. You can use stories in business during talks, meetings and even training. Anywhere a message needs to be meaningful and any situation where you want to be remembered. Below are the ideal elements within a story that you need to really make it stick:

The elements

1. **Exposition** - This is where you set the scene. Introduce the characters and background. Reveal the issue or desire and why it is so important that they achieve their aim. It is also where you gain your listener's attention, so make sure it is rich with imagery and description.
2. **Action** - The protagonist (or main character, which by the way doesn't need to be an individual, it could be a company or group) sets out to achieve their aim.
3. **Problem** - Things start to unravel or become more difficult. They become aware of the opposition or threat. The tension grows and it becomes apparent not everything is plain sailing.
4. **Climax** - Here the protagonist comes face to face with its biggest fear and is thrown into complete disarray, this is the height of the drama. This is where the cortisol is flowing.
5. **Resolution** - Finally we see the protagonist winning through, overcoming its fears/enemies and using all of its will and energy in order to do so.
6. **Denouement** - The sense of relief after the struggle. The gains achieved. The benefits enjoyed. This is the 'happy ever after' moment where the oxytocin is released.

7. **Segue** - Your link from the story back to the real world, business focus or opportunity. You don't always need to over-explain here. Leave a pause. Allow the listener to derive their own meaning. What you do need to do is ensure that what you speak of next is supported by the story you have just told. Leading to a more meaningful and memorable association.

Story telling is an art, but it can be learnt. The more you practice, the better you get, until it simply becomes natural. Remember to be genuine and always be yourself. This isn't about performing, it is about engaging. Be fairly succinct (otherwise attention will drift) and try it out on an unsuspecting friendly audience first. Find your own style. You will know when you hit the mark.

5.5 LEARN THE LINGO

Aim: Make a connection

How: Use their language

Effort level: 3/10

Time commitment: 5 minutes

It makes sense that we connect with people on our wavelength. We begin to assume that they are familiar with our needs and understand what is important to us. We are perhaps used to the idea of mirroring body language - though often it is best to allow this to happen naturally. What then, about how we speak? Or more pointedly, what we are literally saying. [Research](#) carried out in Poland, has uncovered a concept coined as 'echoing'. The researchers found that subjects who were communicated with using their own words were more open to suggestion, in their case giving to charity. It was less about the content of the entire message and more that the subconscious recognition of language allowed them to let down their defence barriers. Although repeating whole sentences worked, the best results were when the researchers used the same words as the subject but in a different order. This is probably because the more astute subjects might have noticed a direct copy - which may have seemed disingenuous. Below you can find how to do it for yourself:

How to echo

1. Listen first. The only way you will be able to find key words or phrases is by hearing them.
2. Choose words that seem to matter to them. It is especially useful if someone is describing an issue. Using their negative word allows them to feel you empathise, whilst also leaving you in a safe place. For example, if someone says, "I read the

terms and conditions but section three doesn't seem to make sense", it is far better to use their words ("didn't make sense") rather than their sentiment e.g. "So you didn't understand section three?" For them this could have other connotations such as you suggesting they aren't intelligent enough to understand.

3. If it is an unusual phrase or expression that not everybody uses, prior to repeating it, accept it next time it is said. You can do this by nodding in agreement the next time you hear it. This will give an unconscious cue that you understand what it means. That way you will appear more genuine when you say it back.
4. Don't repeat entire sentences unless it is particularly relevant. Times it may be relevant is when someone has raised an objection and you want them to know you clearly identify with the issue they have.
5. If you are going to echo, do so with confidence. Half heartedly repeating a word because you feel a bit embarrassed saying it will do the opposite of what you are wanting to achieve. These are their words - treat them with respect, even if you do feel rather odd doing it.
6. Use sparingly. Unless you are a master, don't go overboard! Choose a key area of your communication to employ the tactic. Otherwise you'll sound like a parrot!

Remember when using someone else's words, say them as if they were your own. That is where the connection is built. Mimicry won't get you anywhere other than embarrassment! Also begin to notice when this occurs naturally. We do it all the time when we have a true connection with someone. The more genuine you are, the easier it will be to influence.

5.6 WALK THE TALK

Aim: Let them see how it will work for them

How: Guide them through

Effort level: 6/10

Time commitment: 40 minutes

Jeremy gave great presentations. They looked good. He sounded good. People came away thinking he was confident, knew what he was doing and believed in his ideas. Even that his ideas probably worked. Thing is, they didn't always take them up. Probably 50/50. This really confused Jeremy. He was bright, likeable and always got good feedback. So how come it seemed so unpredictable in terms of take-up?

The problem is his audience could see it worked for him. Others even. What they didn't know was whether it would work for them. This is where walking the talk comes in. Present

your ideas or concept. Tell them how it works and then get them to guide you through how it would work for them in their own business or department. Have them explore how it will work in practice and when they hit a stumbling block there you are, guiding them through, providing a path forward.

How to do it

1. Present your ideas or concept in your usual engaging way. Making sure that others can fit themselves into your model (using an overly specialised example won't work here).
2. Allow your audience to ask questions about it and explore the concept. Welcome questions, they are your opportunity to dispel doubts.
3. Ask if your audience can see if this could be something that might be of use to them potentially. Here you are creating a possibility - and in agreeing they are opening the door to your ideas.
4. Invite them to see how it will work for them. To begin with, where could it fit in with what they already have/want to keep.
5. From there, go through the whole journey with them, acknowledging that they can work through any incongruences with you in detail.
6. Leave it open ended. Don't quite finish the story. People revisit stories that they don't know the end to. They want to see how it all works out. This is where you present a potential way forward for the two of you.

Even if you have a bigger audience, this technique works so long as it doesn't take too long or get overly specific. The questions you are asking need to be broad enough to allow others to play along as you guide them through, applying it to their own situation. Jeremy was in the world of corporate change and this really worked for him. Sure it wasn't a 100% hit rate but it was much nearer 95% than 50%. Do it for yourself and see how walking others through your talk puts them firmly in the picture.

5.7 PERFECT PRAISE

Aim: Boosts a sense of recognition

How: Give praise well

Effort level: 4/10

Time commitment: 10 minutes

Whether you think of it as reward or affirmation, praise can be an excellent motivator. It allows workers to feel valued and appreciated. It also sends a signal that they and their work is being noticed, and it is that sense of recognition that allows us to feel that we are

making a difference with our work. This feeds in to our sense of purpose which is at the core of who we are. Deep stuff. Yet so easily achieved!

The Japanese National Institute for Psychological Science has discovered that being paid compliments activates the same part of our brain as being given cash! [Strategists](#) have commented how being given praise can have the same effect as an on the spot 1% pay rise. Bonus! For this to work though, there are certain factors we need to take into account to achieve the perfect praise. See below;

The factors:

1. **Honest** - Come from a place of honesty. Disingenuous praise will only serve to damage trust, or make others feel like you are trying to manipulate them.
2. **Earned** - Give praise where there is reason. Totally unwarranted yet seemingly well meant praise can lead to others doubting the validity of your opinions across the board.
3. **Specific** - Commenting on something specific will earn you more points than a generalised comment. Picking upon a particular piece of work rather than just saying someone is simply doing a 'great job'. It holds more value, makes it more memorable and shows you have taken the time to notice.
4. **Re-affirmation** - A physical pat on the back, a smile, a handshake or nod of the head will all add further weight to your words. This is because they work with people who have a kinetic or visual sensory preference, not just auditory.
5. **Effect** - When you are giving praise let the person know, not simply that you think they are great, but what effect their actions or work has or will have in reality. Knowing the effect they are having will deepen the meaning of the praise and is more likely to bring about a repeat in the beneficial behaviour.

We all like a bit of genuine praise. Even if someone seems a little embarrassed or unaccepting, pay it no mind, it will have made a difference to them. One last thought; although it is always great to praise those at a lower or the same level as us, it works wonderfully well upwards too. Sometimes those in high places are the most praise starved of all!

6 TEAM MEETINGS

"Mankind's greatest achievements have come about by talking, and its greatest failures by not talking."

– Stephen Hawking

Meetings are a vital communication point for any team. A place where ideas are shared and alliances formed. A space to innovate and collaborate. At least, that's what we want them to be. However, according to a survey carried out by electronics company [Sennheiser](#), this may not always be the case. It was found that the average British worker sits through 6239 meetings in their life time. During those meetings 70% of workers reportedly claimed to constantly 'zone out' for an average of 20 minutes each, with 1 in 5 of them actually falling asleep. It would seem that it is now more important than ever to look to ways of re-invigorating our team meetings.

Tackling everything from engagement to productivity, this chapter is full of creative techniques to get your meetings back on track!

6.1 POSITIVE PII

Aim: Make meetings more creative and productive

How: Get each team meeting off to a positive start

Effort level: 3/10

Time commitment: 10 minutes

We all want our meetings to be a productive space to communicate and create solutions. However, if they get off to a poor start, they can begin to be seen as an unwelcome distraction, or simply a place to offload. Positive initial input (Pii) will help lead to a successful meeting.

Research by [Prof. Barbara Fredrickson at the University of North Carolina](#) has found that when you experience positive emotions, all kinds of good things happen. Your field of peripheral vision increases from 15% in a negative or neutral mood to taking in 75% of what's happening around you. Your brain ups its dopamine and serotonin levels, making you more responsive, creative and innovative. On top of that, your defences go down, encouraging you to be more collaborative and inclusive. Even better, it has been shown that these effects become greater over time, meaning meeting by meeting, things will continue to improve!

The process

1. Send an email round requesting that each member of your team arrive at the meeting with their two pieces of Pii (Positive initial input).
2. At the meeting each team member, one by one, brings their Pii to the table
 - i) Something positive that they have experienced this week. This can be project-specific, person-centred or organisationally relevant. It is up to you to decide how work-centred you require it to be. The key is that it must create a feel-good factor and be of value to the team member.
 - ii) One positive outcome that they'd like out of the meeting today. This needs to be both achievable and beneficial.

At the end of the meeting, do a recap to see how many of ii) have been achieved. Your goal is 80%. Any left outstanding need an action point to enable it to be modified in light of discussion or achieved by the end of the following meeting.

6.2 AGENDA POT

Aim: Bringing new ideas into meetings

How: Creating an opportunity for your team to input

Effort level: 5/10

Time commitment: 30 minutes

If the same person is writing the agenda for each meeting, before long, things can start to look very familiar. This can bring about a predictability to meetings and also mean that the agenda is often influenced by the views of one particular person.

This was happening with a client of mine who worked in a mid-sized company in the telecommunications sector. As the MD he liked to be in control of the agenda and he was keen to see the business grow. Although his PA would send around a note requesting inclusions for the agenda, he noticed that there was a real lack of innovation, with responses becoming predictable. This is when we came up with the Agenda Pot. A real carte blanche for his team to put new ideas on the agenda or flag up issues, anonymously if desired, that were usually left unspoken.

The results were surprisingly good. Out of it they tackled problems that had overstayed their welcome, set up a charity venture and even came up with a new product line. All in all, attendees looked forward to the Agenda Pot item as it made meetings less monotonous and sparked fresh ideas.

The process

1. Appoint a guardian to place a physical box with a slot labelled Agenda Pot in a position that can be easily accessed by the team. Provide slips of paper to detail the agenda item with an optional space for a name and also a space to write the date on that is visible once folded.
2. Introduce the agenda pot to your team. Let them know that it is available for non-urgent ideas, big or small. Encourage them to use it for items they might not necessarily normally flag up to put on the agenda. Fresh thoughts, items that might contribute to the company culture or issues that may have been hanging around unresolved are all good.
3. Rules for the suggestions are:
 - i) The idea must be dated and the guardian must remove any item older than 3 months. Ideas can be resubmitted after this time if they didn't make the agenda and are still relevant.
 - ii) The item must have a positive focus - the outcome of resolving or discussing it must be beneficial.
 - iii) The item must fit into a 10-minute initial time slot on the agenda.
4. At each meeting (or just prior), pick out an item from the Agenda Pot and discuss.

Using this technique, you can bring many ideas to the table that would never normally have made it, giving people the freedom to add good ideas as they come to mind. Do ensure though that your agenda pot item isn't the final thing on the agenda, otherwise it will be in danger of falling off, undermining the whole process!

6.3 LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Aim: Put your team in the perfect place

How: Choose a space that fits your focus

Effort level: 7/10

Time commitment: 1.5 hours

Quite often what dictates our choice of meeting venue is simply what's available that's closest, big enough and easy to book. But where you choose to hold your meeting can help to dictate its success.

There is a huge raft of research that tells us that the environment we work in affects our performance such as the study by [Cornell University](#) that shows how temperature impacts

upon our productivity levels. The technique below will allow you to use some of that knowledge to pick the perfect environment for your next team meeting.

The process

1. Aim to change your space for one in four of your regular weekly or monthly team meetings. This should be enough to create an impact overall.
2. Be clear on the main focus of the meeting, numbers of attendees and what kind of activity will dominate before you choose your space.
3. Let your attendees know why you have chosen the space in a simple yet positive way. With a good team, the suggestion itself will have an impact.
4. Choose your space wisely; here are some factors you might want to consider:
 - **Window of opportunity:** natural light encourages us to feel alert and productive.
 - **Add warmth:** aim for a room that is warm, rather than too hot or cold. People make more mistakes in cold rooms and hot rooms make people dozy and switch off. Around the 21-22°C mark is perfect.
 - **Go green:** spaces with plants are meant to make our memories work better and encourage us to feel happier. If the weather is good, you can even head outside: the sporadic distractions around us give our brains a break, making us more creative and relaxed.
 - **Size matters:** small spaces, or huddle rooms as some call them, are supposed to evoke a feeling of collaboration and focus. Large rooms on the other hand can allow for thinking space or break out groups. If the room is formal it can also give an air of status.
 - **Colouring:** blue rooms evoke creativity, whilst green are good for innovation. Red can be powerful, but avoid it if there might be conflict as it is reported to stimulate the pulse and raise blood pressure!

Your group dynamics and the mix of personality types will determine exactly what effect a space has on your team. One thing is for sure though: your choice of space will have an impact, so make it work for you.

6.4 CHANGING CHAIRS

Aim: Effective chairing in egalitarian teams

How: Sharing the role of chair

Effort level: 7/10

Time commitment: 3 hours

In modern working environments the traditional perception of hierarchy is becoming less popular. It is being replaced with more collaborative working practices, where everybody is seen to have an equal role to play.

This approach works really well in business terms for forward-thinking companies which tend to have a young modern workforce. It can be less beneficial though when it comes to meetings. If nobody is ‘in charge’, meetings can lose focus and become unproductive, having a demoralising effect on the team.

Mike and Paul were two very bright guys running a successful tech start-up company. However, they had begun to notice that although their colleagues were highly productive in their small teams, when it came to cross-team communication, something wasn’t working. This was making it difficult to hit deadlines and work in a connected manner.

When we looked further into the problem, we discovered that their meetings weren’t particularly effective, causing the communication breakdown. Inevitably somebody would reluctantly ‘take charge’ (aka *chair*) and the meeting would get underway. However, due to a hesitance to take on the role and a general lack of chairing skill, the meetings floundered.

Instead we implemented *changing chairs*, a technique by which each person in the meeting would act as chair over a period of time. One by one the team members learnt to understand the challenges arising from being chair and gained new skills. This in turn brought about a new respect for the role of chair and the positive effect it could have on a meeting. Before long, order was restored and productive and efficient meetings were in place, solving their cross-team communication problems.

The process

1. Each team member is required to research the responsibilities of a chairperson. A good resource can be found here at bookboon.com. Alternatively, you may wish to run a short workshop or webinar on the subject.
2. In the planning of each meeting, a new chair will be chosen from the attendees, either by rota or at random.
3. That person will be asked if they are happy to chair and take on the role of chair for that meeting and any follow-up actions arising from it.
4. At the end of the meeting, the chairperson will share their experience of taking on the role and constructive feedback will be given by the team.

Along with the dilution of a sense of hierarchy, this technique is very good at negating the influencing effect that can arise from always having the same person as chair.

6.5 INVITE AN IMPOSTER

Aim: Gain an outside perspective

How: Inviting an outsider in

Effort level: 7/10

Time commitment: 3 hours

Managers invest a great deal of time cultivating a cohesive team environment around their reports and colleagues. It is something that is essential to maximise both productivity and collaboration. Whilst it is great to see things from a shared point of view, it can mean that innovation becomes stifled as we begin to lack an outside perspective. According to [Cranfield University](#), 94% of managers consider having an *external perspective*, as they call it, as being critical to achieving organisational objectives.

A great way to do this is to bring an outsider into your meeting. Depending on the focus of the meeting, this could be a client, an expert or even someone from a different department. You can gain an insight into their experience of the areas you are interested in or even ask them to share their thoughts on how you do things. Either way, you'll benefit by being able to see things from a completely new perspective.

The process

1. Decide what you want the focus of your meeting to be and what kind of knowledge you'd like to bring in.
2. Choose somebody who will either gain from the learnings that result from the exercise (for example, a client might benefit from improved service levels) or somebody you believe will have plenty to contribute to the process.
3. Fence off a good amount of time within a particular meeting to spend with your imposter.
4. Invite your chosen imposter in to a meeting you know will be well attended. Remember to alert your team in good time if they have anything to prepare and provide a copy of the agenda for your imposter if relevant.

Make sure you build in time for an informal Q&A with your outsider at the end of your meeting to ensure you get the full value from the experience.

6.6 I'VE STARTED SO I'LL FINISH

Aim: Utilise the knowledge around the table

How: Allowing attendees to fully contribute

Effort level: 5/10

Time commitment: 30 minutes

Most of us have been in a position where, however many times we begin to contribute in a meeting, somebody interrupts. This is frustrating for both the speaker and those who are attempting to listen. It is a fact of life that introverts dislike interruptions, whilst extroverts see it as part of the debate. But have you ever thought about the expertise that goes by the wayside when the contributions of your deep thinkers get sidelined?

According to a study carried out by the Harvard Business Review within a large global bank, just 35% of the workforce felt they were always able to contribute when they wanted to. It isn't just the introverts either, it goes on to suggest that both those on a conference call and women in general also get interrupted far more regularly (I hasten to add here that women are just as likely to interrupt other women as men are).

This technique is a great way to allow everyone with a contribution to be heard. It also has the added bonus of making the natural orators of the group more concise, as they know they have a limited time to contribute their ideas.

The process

1. Designate a member of the team to be the timekeeper. This can be the chair or another attendee. Ensure it is someone fairly senior to begin with in order to encourage compliance.
2. You will need a flag or similar to indicate time is up and a device to measure the time passed.
3. If a speaker is interrupted within the allotted time period, the flag will be raised and the speaker may continue.
4. Any attendee speaking beyond the allotted time will cause the flag to be raised. At this point they must desist, making a closing remark if relevant.
5. The rules are:
 - i. Any person in the room is allowed to speak, if they wish, for up to 2 minutes without being interrupted.

- ii. Any person continuously speaking for more than 4 minutes will be flagged; they must make their point and stop.

The technique works well within a formal or semi-formal meeting structure. It can be used throughout the meeting or in designated sections where an even contribution is desired.

6.7 SHOWTIME

Aim: Get meetings started on time

How: Draw attention to latecomers

Effort level: 3/10

Time commitment: 10 minutes

There are few things more irritating to colleagues than having fellow workers turn up late to meetings. It dilutes focus, promotes apathy and generally wastes everybody's time. A study cited in the British Psychological Society's [Research Digest](#), conducted by Steven Fogelberg et al., suggests that in the UK alone 37% of meetings start late, often with repeat offenders.

So how can we encourage our colleagues that it is going to be in their own best interests to set their watches and turn up on time? Simple, we borrow a technique used by some of the world's top entrepreneurs: if they are late, they sing! It might be an idea to print out the words to the national anthem and another famous song – just for those who get a sudden onset of amnesia.

The process

1. Send out a memorandum letting people know that if they are more than 1 minute late to a meeting, they will have to sing for at least 30 seconds!
2. Implement the policy and stick to it as long as you need to (which shouldn't be long).

It is worth remembering that you have to use this technique consistently to begin with for it to work. After that, the mere threat of the technique usually keeps people in check!

7 TEAM BUILDING

"The way a team plays as a whole determines its success. You may have the greatest bunch of individual stars in the world, but if they don't play together, the club won't be worth a dime."

– Babe Ruth

Babe Ruth may well have been talking about baseball, but as every people manager will know, a cohesive team is essential for a project to succeed. We need our teams to work together in a way that supports and drives the work forward. To do that we need the individuals within it to want their co-workers to achieve and prosper just as much as themselves.

This chapter is full of novel ways in which you can foster team spirit, strengthen bonds and develop group thinking.

7.1 COMMON GOAL

Aim: Strengthen the team

How: Help others

Effort level: 7/10

Time commitment: 30 minutes

Most efforts to strengthen teams tend to be very inward looking. More about focusing on the group - either with a straight-forward meeting or pulling together on outward bound style away days. These things certainly have their value, it might be surprising to learn though that teams get a lot out of helping others succeed too. A study by [Notre Dame and the University of Illinois](#) shows that teams who work together for the benefit of others learn to relate better to one another, improving overall performance. It also proved to have a positive effect on the sustainability of the teams, with fewer people voluntarily leaving.

If we use this concept within our organisations, it will not only benefit your team but the company as a whole, here's how it might work:

The process

1. **Choose your beneficiary** - Once a month choose another team or element within your organisation that you are going to reach out to and support in a specific way. One month your coms. team might reach out to finance to see if there is anything

they'd like promoting internally or instead you might aim to organise an event for the office charity.

2. **Get your teams ready** - fire up your teams with a stated goal, ensure you give it context and highlight the value their contribution will make.
3. **Set your parameters** - this process will benefit your team, however, you don't want it to take over everyday work. Make sure that the space for this to take place in, is secured and outlined. Obviously if people wish to add in their own free time on top, so much the better.
4. **It's the whole team that will make this work** - research shows the more interdependent the team is on each other in making this happen, the stronger the results. Having one part of the team rely on the other to make a difference will create the biggest change.
5. **Play to people's strengths and celebrate!** - you might have somebody new take the lead each month ensuring that the different topics picked use the particular skills within your team. Make sure you celebrate the wins, its the positive feedback that will solidify the gains.

You can of course make this more inclusive by asking the team themselves to come up with new topics on who to support. If your team enjoy being competitive, you might have a prize for the best common goal of the year. Take care though - if you split your team so half do one month and half do the next, it may begin to have the opposite effect. Otherwise, have fun and who knows, you might get the whole office at it!

7.2 WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Aim: Define the true problem

How: Ask the right questions

Effort level: 7/10

Time commitment: 1 hour prep, 1 hour group time

Much time has been lost in the world by people coming up with answers to the wrong questions. Often this is because the solutions were based on assumptions, assumptions which were incorrect. Today the idea of giving someone with depression a lobotomy would seem unthinkable. However, at its peak this 'remedy' was used in the UK on more than a [thousand patients](#) a year. The process was based on the mistaken belief that the connections in the brain had to be severed. In reality it was destroying the very thing that needed to function.

In business, there are many assumptions made and decisions taken based upon them. This can be particularly true of long standing problems that may be embedded in the company

culture. It is important for our teams to be able to combine resources and ask the right questions in order to find solutions to the true problem.

The outline

The *poser* has a problem. The *questioner* needs to work out the problem. They can ask as many questions as they wish, but the poser will only supply the information that is asked for, nothing more. The aim is for the questioner to ask the right questions to give them enough information to understand what the true problem is.

The process

1. Create a scenario in which the desired outcome is repeatedly not being achieved. Let's say that the sales team should be converting 60% of all customer interactions into sales, however they are only achieving 30%.
2. Now decide what the true problem is. In this example we shall say there is an over complicated ordering process, preventing customers from completing their purchase.
3. Next, develop the background story and facts about the situation for the poser. You will need information that, providing the right questions are asked, will discount would-be problems and highlight the true problem. In this scenario you would want to include things like; there is a full team with few sick days, all team members are trained, customers are happy with product, customers rated order process 4/10 etc.
4. Give the questioners the undesired result the problem is causing (in this case poor sales figures) and a brief context. Each questioner then gets 5 minutes with the poser to ask as many questions as they wish. They then split into two groups and have 15 minutes to pool the answers they obtained individually to define the problem.
5. The two teams come back with their guess at what the problem is. The poser reveals the true problem. Discuss how the teams brought the information together and the strategies used to give their answer.

It can also be interesting to have the groups discuss what they think about the scenario before questioning. This can add in an element that often happens in real life - group influence of perception. All-in-all though, the answer is to ask the right questions!

7.3 BOOK IT

Aim: Increase wellbeing and communication

How: Create a workplace book club

Effort level: 8/10

Time commitment: Commuting time plus 1 hour per quarter

Reading has long been known to be a beneficial pastime, however, recent [research](#) has demonstrated just how profound an effect reading can have on us. Readers apparently feel more connected to others and the world they live in, more creative and happier with themselves and their lives. There is no doubt that these are all things that will benefit any team. More than that though, using reading in the shape of a workplace book club can allow teams to learn to communicate better, bring in a sense of team spirit and commonality as well as provide both personal and professional growth. With all of those perks, its hard to see why you wouldn't start your own work book club! Here are some things to think about when setting up your club:

Considerations

1. **Frequency** - as it is pretty much guaranteed that your team will be busy, ensure the frequency of your club is realistic. Once per quarter should be enough to harness the benefits whilst giving everyone the time to read up.
2. **Group size** - be sensible about the size of your group. The best results come when there is time for everyone to speak and share their thoughts.
3. **Inclusivity** - a book club is a great place to get communication going across different levels of your company. After all, everybody's opinion of a book is just as valid as the next. Use this to its full potential, it will make working relationships all the more smooth later.
4. **Fact or fiction?** - it might seem obvious to pick a factual book that clearly relates to the workplace, however, fiction has been shown to be very beneficial in inspiring movement and change. The key is to choose a book that has readily translatable themes, that work in the same direction as your team is working towards. Biographies can be interesting too!
5. **Book choice** - once your team has the hang of it, you can invite suggestions for book choices. You may want to suggest a particular topic or area, or you could instead ask the proposer to identify what they think a particular book might bring. The proposer may well have read the book in which case they chair the next quarter's book club discussion.

Book clubs can be a fantastic way to learn other's communication styles and also give and take feedback and constructive challenge in a non-threatening environment. If any of your team thinks it is a waste of time remind them that [Warren Buffet](#) claims to have spent 80% of his day reading - and it didn't seem to do him any harm!

7.4 DRAWN OUT

Aim: Communicate creatively

How: Translating images

Effort level: 7/10

Time commitment: 30 minutes

Creativity consultant and author [Sunni Brown](#), claims that even doodling gets our neurons firing and doing something called 'atomization', breaking down an image into the sum of its parts, helps us to rethink what we originally thought and make connections that we were previously unaware of. In this exercise we are going to be doing just that and also bring in an element of communication. This will not only help your team see things differently but also develop their listening skills and ability to share ideas in a way that gives them the best chance of being taken on board.

This exercise can be done with as few as 2 people or in a larger group in teams of two. Put simply, one of the pairs has a picture they describe and the other of the pair has to draw it as accurately as possible without seeing the original image. If you are working with a larger group you can make this a competition with the winner being the team who have the most drawings that closely match the originals.

The process

1. **Prepare your material** - if your team is playing this for the first time choose fairly simple images. Children's flash cards can be useful and easy to download from the internet. You need about 6-10 per team.
2. **Get your teams ready** - split into twos and have each pair sitting back to back. One partner has a drawing pad and pen and one has the flashcards.
3. **The rules** - the person with the flashcards has to describe each image, but only by giving technical instructions using the shapes within the picture and their position. So a cat might be made up of two circles sitting on top of one another with triangles for ears, lines for whiskers and a semi circle for its mouth. At no point can the describer mention what the image is in its entirety.
4. **Scoring** - the team gets a point for every completed image that resembles the original closely enough - you can decide what standard you think is passable!

Remember if both players in a team are going to get a chance to draw, only hand out half of the cards to each team member as having a preview would make the game somewhat easier! This game is both great fun and also very eye-opening. You can focus on the element that you most want to improve in your team, maybe putting two people who don't communicate

well together or focus on accuracy if your team need to tidy things up. As your team gets better at the game, you can progress to more advanced pictures. If anyone manages to get to the level of an accurate Van Gogh, do let us know!

7.5 COLOUR OF SUCCESS

Aim: Create a team mood

How: Wear it!

Effort level: 4/10

Time commitment: 20 minutes

It's funny, we don't think twice about our favourite sports team wearing the same colours. In fact, there'd probably be uproar if a large football team was to turn up wearing different coloured tops. We also totally accept certain political parties adopting particular colours and activists at a march adopting a notable shade to show their allegiance. There are many instances where we accept that the use of colour brings us together and makes us part of something. However, have you ever stopped to think of the effect this might have in the workplace. You might have just noticed that some highly effective teams automatically end up showing up to work in a matching colour. But what about if we do it deliberately? Furthermore, what of the shade we choose to wear?

There is plenty written about [colour psychology](#). If you want to bring your team together in the same spirit one day, suggest everyone wears the same colour and see what effect it has. Below are some suggestions of the mood inspired by different colours;

The colours

1. **Blue** - gives a sense of calm, trust and security. A good colour if you want your team to work autonomously but to the same goal.
2. **Green** - symbolises growth, freshness and working organically. Use this at the start of a new project to encourage people to get going.
3. **Red** - a colour that gets the energy up and firing on all cylinders. It is a powerful colour often associated with winning teams. Beware though, people wearing red take bigger risks and are more confrontational. Best used for positive high energy days and less if you are having to deal with team tension!
4. **Black** - for most, black shows power, authority and style. It is a good colour to wear if you want your team to be strong, level headed and business-like. It can be depressing if there is already a sombre mood so stay away if morale needs lifting.

5. **Pink** - a self assured, lively and individualistic colour. It shows that people have their own mind and are also open to the thoughts of others. A good colour to put a bit of life into a project or show a little flair.
6. **Purple** - A regal and creative colour, that promotes thought on a higher level. Good for innovation, imaginative strategy and looking for ways to improve the richness of your work, be that creatively or financially.

You may have colours that have a significant meaning for your team and if so feel free to adapt the above to your own way of thinking. It is worth noting though that some colours are best to have around rather than worn. Too much white can be stark and cold, though a little can be cleansing. Yellow can brighten the mood but become annoying in large doses and greys can look sleek but also bring about boredom. Have a play around and see what effects each colour has on your team!

7.6 WHO'S WHO

Aim: Get to know your team members

How: Just ask!

Effort level: 7/10

Time commitment: 10 minutes individually, 1 hour + as a team, depending on size

Go to any of the thousands of 'team building' activity providers and they will reel off a list of benefits of your team bonding and getting to know one another. What is it though about a team understanding each other personally that helps them work together better? One reason might well be what is called 'prosocial motivation'. A study by [Notre Dame](#) University highlighted the fact that when team members see one another as human beings, they behave in a more helpful and generous way which ultimately benefits the team's performance.

This exercise helps your team get to know a little more about each other, often with interesting results. When one of company I worked with did this exercise everyone was pretty surprised to learn that their less than athletic middle aged FD actually used to be a national trampolining champion! Here's how to help your team make some discoveries:

The task

Before your meeting email round the list of questions, making sure you stipulate that answers must not be shared or discussed within the team. The answers must be truthful and need to include the question being answered. Each team member prints off their answers, cuts them up and puts them into a sealed box.

Once the team is together all the answers are laid out randomly on a table. On the wall each person has a column/space. Conversing as they wish, everyone chooses a statement each to pin in every other team member's column. Once all are allotted, one by one a team member stands next to their column and rejects the incorrect answers and expands on the rest. The team as a group has a guess at who the remaining wrong answers belong to and if they don't guess the owner ultimately claims the answer, explains it and is deemed a winner!

Examples of questions

- Tell me something that no-one else on the team knows about you.
- What is your ideal Saturday night?
- What country or place in the world would you most like to visit?
- If there was one thing at work you could change for the better, what would it be?
- What makes you angry?
- Tell me about an idea that you have had that you haven't told anyone here about.

This exercise is a fun way to get people talking, discover commonalities and see people in a new more interesting light. Its also great to get the creative juices flowing of the person who is doing the answering. Another way of using this is for members of the company to get to know managers or board members (and vice versa). It works really well to break down walls and assumptions that people might have built up. Who knows what you might discover!

7.7 A FREE LUNCH

Aim: Fuel team friendships

How: Make a meal of it.

Effort level: 8/10

Time commitment: 1 hour at home, lunch hour in the office

Food has long been something that has brought people together. Food made with thought is nearly always a way of showing appreciation and friendship and its something we can easily bring into the workplace.

This idea came about from working with a fairly large team in an IT company. The manager wanted to do something that would get colleagues interacting, break people's everyday routines without eating in to the working day (no pun intended!) and with minimal outlay. What we came up with was sharing food. More than that though, actually making food

specifically for one other colleague. It all happened over the course of a week; Free lunch week. Each person made a meal and brought it in for another member of the team, along with a story or message that went behind the dish. It worked really well, introducing colleagues that had barely spoken, broadening people's understanding of others' culture (it was a diverse group) and building appreciation among the team. It was also quick and easy for the company and everybody got a free lunch!

Considerations:

1. It is best to put everyone's name into a hat and draw out the pairs who will cook for each other at random, lessening the chance of any favouritism.
2. Suggest that the dish has some kind of meaning for the maker, be that it is part of their heritage, from their childhood or simply their favourite dish. Encourage this information to be shared with the diner.
3. Running the initiative over a week will allow for greater flexibility and less stress on facilities.
4. Prepare sheets to fill in that detail allergies and dietary requirements of each participant that must be shared with their partner. At prior request a list of ingredients should also be provided.
5. If appropriate, hand out basic H&S food prep. information.
6. Allow people to opt out if they wish to (or indeed make something else for one another). We don't always know if someone has a personal issue with food or a life-threatening allergy.
7. Encourage people to be bold, whilst bearing in mind that the meal needs to be able to be stored, possibly heated and eaten in the work environment.

The IT company took this idea even further by asking the diners to privately score their meal for flavour, originality, presentation and perceived effort. The top five scorers each won a prize and were asked to share their recipes with their colleagues - some of which are still being enjoyed today I believe!

8 INNOVATION

"The future depends on what you do today."

– Mahatma Ghandi

Innovation is a buzzword in today's society. From carbon neutral coffee cups to cutting edge cloud computing, innovation is everywhere. But what exactly is it, and is it really that important? To innovate is to change something that is already established and improve it by creating new products or introducing new ideas and methods. Innovation requires creativity, and according to business leaders, we need innovation. A recent [study](#) of over 1220 executives in 44 countries showed that companies that embrace innovation are twice as likely to expect growth rates of 15% or more compared to their counterparts. Aside from which, it's pretty good fun!

In this chapter we explore different ways to approach innovation and encourage it in the workplace.

8.1 CREATE THE FUTURE

Aim: Help good things happen

How: Create expectation

Effort level: 8/10

Time commitment: 1 hour

When we think of being able to predict what will happen in the future it often conjures images of fortune tellers and fantasy. How can we know what will happen if it doesn't exist yet? However, there is a big difference between *knowing* what will happen and choosing what *might* happen.

It has been proven time and time again that expectation can influence results. There has also been a lot of research by scientists such as [Richard Wiseman](#) about how our expectations affect how lucky we are in life. Essentially, this suggests that our attitude and mental approach impacts upon what happens to us in reality.

What does this mean when we put it into a work context? In essence, it suggests that if we engage in viewing things in the right way, we will have a stronger chance of them working out in our favour. One way of doing this is by visualising scenarios. By creating a future that works in our mind, we alter our expectations. This in turn subtly alters the opportunities

we look for and the choices we make in the present. After all, it is what we do today that creates our tomorrow. Below is an exercise which will allow you to visualise your future:

The exercise

Step one

- i) Choose an event you would like to influence in the future. Have a specific day and time in mind.
- ii) Find a calm, uninterrupted space. Sit comfortably and close your eyes. Breathe in a slow, relaxed manner.
- iii) Now begin to focus on your chosen event. Allow your mind to wander. Start to imagine it going the way you want. The choices you make are the right ones. People are reacting well. Things are working. Be as vivid as you can. Play the scenario through until it reaches a positive conclusion. Congratulate yourself.
- iv) Repeat the whole thing again. Make the colours brighter. Note your good decisions and any pitfalls avoided.
- v) Open your eyes and notice how you feel.

Step two

- i) Write an account of what happened in your visualisation as if it were either a news article or a diary entry. Write it in the past tense, as though it had already happened. Be as expressive and detailed as you can.
Make sure you include all the highlights: how you overcame challenges, and what really worked.
- ii) Read it aloud to yourself and allow yourself to believe it. Set a note in your diary to read it again one week prior to the event date and again the day before the event.
- iii) After the event, compare your imagined scenario to reality. Did you do anything different to normal because of the visualisation. If so, consider if it helped you meet your objective.

Once we have visualised things in a particular way, we begin to see opportunities that we otherwise might have missed. Maybe you might just have helped to create the future!

8.2 RE-INVENT THE WHEEL

Aim: See that innovation is everywhere

How: Looking at how things began

Effort level: 7/10

Time commitment: 2 hours

Sitting there with a blank piece of paper looking for the next brilliant idea. We've all been there. All those possibilities, infinite possibilities and suddenly our heads are filled with... nothing! This was where Nathan, a project manager and newly appointed innovations manager, found himself whilst working at a facilities management company. Acknowledged as a creative soul within the business, it had seemed the perfect fit. Now though, all he could see were problems - without a clue of how to come up with any solutions. We worked together and instead of just looking at what was wrong, we decided to free up Nathan's mind. We took a bit of a tour - through the archives of innovation! It suddenly gave him a new perspective and the next day he had an open mind and a new attitude that sparked lots of ideas.

The fact is we take many innovations of the past for granted. We don't give a second thought to how they came into being, why they came into being, and what strategies their inventors used to overcome the inevitable challenges. Have a bit of fun, create some space in your mind and apply some of the strategies of bygone innovators to your own current day issues!

How to do it

1. Choose 3-4 inventions that we generally take for granted these days. If you are working in a group setting, each team might take an invention each.
2. Identify the problem that allowed the invention to occur in the first place. What were they trying to solve/improve?
3. Look at the process that occurred to get to the end product. What did they try before they hit on the answer?
4. Once they had identified their potential solution, what challenges did they face and what strategies did they use to get their concept to be taken on board?
5. Finally, what help or outside inspiration did they receive that enabled their idea to thrive?
6. Write each of these down, so that you are clear on every element. If you are working alone, apply the strategies to your own issues and work through any similarities. Use the same thinking and see how it sheds a new light on things. If you are in a group get each team to present the story of their invention. Have a group discussion about how this might be applied within your business.

I've seen this exercise used with many different inventions from the obvious, like the light bulb or the first railway, to the more unusual including dog-poop bags and Rudolph the red nosed reindeer! It isn't that everything will be applicable to your 'innovation situation',

but the exercise reminds us that we are surrounded by innovation everywhere we look. It frees up thinking space and gets the creativity flowing again!

8.3 IDEA POD

Aim: Spark ideas through listening

How: Podcast them!

Effort level: 9/10

Time commitment: 3 hours+ prep/ 5 minutes listen

There is a widespread belief that for a company to continue to succeed it needs to innovate. One source of ideas that makes the biggest impact is from within the company employees themselves. However, [studies](#) have shown that many workers don't know how to get their ideas heard. It is also true that spreading new ideas between colleagues sparks fresh thoughts in others. When this is done in a way that is new to the company it has even more impact.

This idea is based on having a weekly or monthly 5-minute podcast to spread new insights - recorded by the employees themselves. With nearly a [quarter](#) of Americans listening to podcasts each month, it is a great way to reach out to people. Every month (or week) a member of the company will get the chance to have their 5-minute idea pod broadcast. The topic will be either a new idea, an area that needs improvement or a call to help with thoughts on a project that is already running. In no time at all, you will have everyone wanting to contribute, or at least engage in looking for ways to move the company forward.

How to do it

1. Decide who is responsible for the process on an ongoing basis. That will include inviting and filtering contributions as well as ensuring each podcast is recorded, edited and distributed.
2. Identify what your gathering and filtering process will be. If you want this to be a quality addition to your business, you are going to need to spend some time each week or month picking the right candidate for the job. You might for example invite a one-line pitch either on audio or in text from each would-be contributor.
3. Decide on the frequency of the podcast, but ensure it has a regular slot so that people can look out for it. Also, you need to know if you will be inviting suggestions on one particular topic each time or if the category is unrestricted. This will depend on the outcome you are wanting from the project.
4. Come up with a set of guidelines of what format to record on, length, and any other considerations, such as language or clarity. Most people have access to some kind of microphone these days, but you need to ensure the process is accessible to all of your workforce and is also good quality.

5. Find the right channels to sell the idea. This will work best if there is a bit of a buzz about it. Everyone loves having their 5 minutes of fame - which is a reward in itself.
6. Decide what happens after the podcast. Is there going to be a forum to discuss the topic online? If it is a great idea, how might it progress? People will lose interest if there is no potential action following the broadcast - and they can get very excited if they feel it is a catalyst for change.

The scale on which this is set out will determine the amount of time and organisation it will take. In a group of 8-12 people it is pretty straightforward, company-wide will take more investment perhaps. However, it is a fantastic way to bring in ideas and allow people to really feel involved.

8.4 BE AN ANIMAL

Aim: Switch out your work persona

How: Take on someone else's animal

Effort level: 7/10

Time commitment: 1 day

It's always fun to bring out the animal in us! There's a lot of research on different personality types in the workplace, but have you ever stopped to think: if you were an animal, what animal would you be? This exercise is all about recognising your working style and finding out what happens when you adopt a different approach.

Below is a list of animals and their work characteristics. Read through and identify who you most relate to. Then put all the animals except yours into a hat (not literally!) and pick one out at random. Spend a day being that animal! See what happens when you work in a different way.

The animals

1. **Monkey** - Inquisitive, fun and sociable. Prefers to be part of a team than to lead one. Brings energy but can get bored if left to work alone for too long.
Be one: Take time to enquire about others. Offer to assist your co-workers. Invite ideas from your colleagues. Solve a problem or play a game with others.
2. **Badger** - Conscientious and clever with a good eye for detail. Likes routine and dislikes disorder.
Be one: Find a quiet place to work where you won't be distracted. Plan and prepare before you begin. Tidy your workspace and organise your work. Double check

everything when you have finished. Work on the detail of a project that you may have overlooked so far.

3. **Fox** - Agile thinker, likes to know a team is there but often works autonomously. Charming but can be impatient.

Be one: Look at a problem in a completely new way. Work somewhere other than your desk. Connect with others for input and feedback, otherwise work alone. Delegation is allowed. Invite someone for lunch/after work drinks, tell them about your project and pick their brain!

4. **Ant** - Always active and getting things done. Happy to do work that will help the team despite getting little recognition. Important in making things run smoothly but not overly inventive.

Be one: Pick a 'doing' task and do it. Be happy to take direction with little deliberation or complaint. Work hard, this is for the good of the team.

5. **Dog** - Loyal, bright and active. Part of the team and likes to be valued. Takes initiative once let off the leash, otherwise happy to toe the line. Works best with regular recognition/reward.

Be one: Do a task that has a clear pay off/reward for you and the team. Keep at it until you reach your objective. Be friendly and outgoing. Actively seek out involvement from others who can help you achieve your goal.

This is a great, fun way to see what happens when we discard old habits and work in a new way. It's even more effective when a few people are taking part. Can you guess who's being which animal today?

8.5 BLACK OUT

Aim: Heighten the senses

How: Take one of them away!

Effort level: 5/10

Time commitment: 10 minutes

Have you ever noticed how your perception changes when you are in the dark? I remember one time when I was staying at a plush hotel next to the gate of India in Mumbai. I was all set to have a blissful night's sleep under my luxury duvet until, that was, I turned out the light. There was a dog barking incessantly in front of the hotel. It seemed to be right outside the window, though we were over 4 floors up! It made getting to sleep pretty tricky that evening. The thing was, I hadn't even noticed until the lights were out!

Research suggests that, as mentioned earlier in the book, not only does our hearing become more focussed in the dark, but our understanding of [others' feelings](#) does, too. This got me to

thinking, what if we held an innovation discussion in the dark? Try it for yourself and see what happens, it is a fascinating experience.

What you might find

1. People focus on what is being said more and consider the meaning behind the words.
2. Others interrupt less as they aren't relying on visual cues to tell them when someone is about to finish.
3. People feel less inhibited about what they are saying as they aren't picking up on judgemental body language or facial expressions.
4. Those who might have a tendency to raise their voices do so less, as everything sounds louder in the dark.
5. The truth will out - it is far harder to mask how we feel when we are only using our voices and don't have the distractive techniques of bold body language or masking facial expressions .

Considerations

1. You can either create darkness through using eye masks or choose a completely darkened room. The benefit of the former is that someone without an eye mask can take notes and also if someone needs to present they can read a screen. The latter however might produce a more authentic atmosphere if you can manage to find a room that truly has no light.
2. Cut out other distractions, such as mobile phone alerts - everything becomes heightened in the dark!
3. Remember health and safety. Remove any obstacles that might be trip hazards or request that people stay seated. Additionally, those who suffer from anxiety or claustrophobia might wish to remain in the light/without a mask, so make it optional.
4. Personal space needs to be respected, you might want a no contact rule or no contact beyond the elbow.
5. Be culturally sensitive, this may not be suitable for a mixed group in all cultures.
6. If you are completely in the dark, audio record the session so that all those great thoughts don't get lost!

Although this idea may seem a little unusual, it can bring some interesting results - if only by putting people in a situation that seems alien to them in the context. It can bring about interesting insights and works well in groups that often speak over one another or are very competitive - once you have set out the ground rules of course!

8.6 THERE'S NOTHING NEW IN INNOVATION

Aim: Freshen the approach

How: By pinching someone else's!

Effort level: 6/10

Time commitment: 1 hour

Of course, innovating is all about new approaches. What we sometimes miss though is that the answer is already there, it just hasn't been applied to the context we are in. For example, it is well publicised that major tech companies like Facebook and Google have a strategy for providing fantastic perks, but they aren't the only industries doing something right. There are many different strategies, not only within companies, but also within society that are potentially highly beneficial. They often get overlooked because it isn't traditional within the industry or culture we are in. Perhaps it is time to look around, see what has been working elsewhere, and apply it to your workplace or team? Here are some examples of different ways that people vary the day to day:

Some examples

1. **Switch to theatre time** - You will find it is almost unheard of, even in the most dedicated of rehearsal rooms, to start working before [10am](#), whilst clocking off time is at 6pm. So maybe it's time to beat the rush hour and still get home for dinner?
2. **Vow of silence** - Take a tip from the Benedictine nuns who start and end their day in silence or, as they term it, '[The Great Silence](#)'. Now imagine nobody being able to call your name as you are finally heading out the door! It might just work!
3. **Stretch it out** - In [Japan](#), there has long been a tradition of group exercise at work. Mainly consisting of dynamic stretches, they've been credited with all manner of health benefits. Perhaps it's time to get your workforce moving!
4. **Life is Swede** - Always stuck at your desk? Try a bit of [Fika](#)! Fika is a Swedish tradition - a break taken from work twice per day, usually at 10am and 3pm, that lasts around 20 minutes. Essentially it is a prolonged coffee break where colleagues get together and chat. The interesting thing is that a recent survey showed Fika's the place where most creative and innovative ideas are born. Time to put the kettle on!
5. **Go political** - Just want more time off whilst maintaining a high profile job? You could follow the Westminster politicians who get a whole two weeks off every Christmas and Easter and near enough six weeks in the summer. We aren't sure what your customers will say, but if you can run a country on it ...

Some of the examples above might be more intriguing than implementable, the fact is though that there are many different tried and tested ways of working effectively. Picking

the brains of your connections in other industries might just lead to an interesting idea that could work for your team or business too!

8.7 SEE THE DIFFERENCE

Aim: Encourage audiences to take in your data

How: Present it differently

Effort level: 8/10

Time commitment: 2 hours

There's nothing like a grey old graph, or indeed several grey old graphs, to make an average presentation even more average. At the same time, the data is important, right? Actually, what is important is that we use the data and to do that we need to be able to take it in. As David McCandless, author of [Knowledge is Beautiful](#), puts it: "Understanding is the key. When you understand something, you're able to perceive its structure: its connections, its relationships, its significance relative to everything else."

It's time to get innovative about the way we present data. Below are some approaches we might take to make your next presentation that bit more engaging:

The approaches

Picture it - You can use illustrations of an object in differing sizes, possibly accompanied with a percentage, to show growth or decline of an element. It is a good way to simplify data. If you were wanting to depict how coffee consumption had grown over the last ten years you might, for example, have a graphic of 3 takeaway coffee cups: one small, one medium and one extra large with the relevant numbers under each one.

Shape it - Having a simple horizontal line graph follow the path of a shape, like a semi circle, can be much more interesting to look at than some straight lines, especially if you use colour well.

Scatter it - Using different shapes in different sizes and colours in a scatter graph can draw the viewer in and make them want to understand more. It is particularly useful when you have a lot of information to display.

Time it - Using a timeline rather than a simple chart will help you create context. You could also use images to be more memorable. This is good if you want to click into detail on a further slide and go back again. The image will create a cohesive link in the mind.

Make it physical - It is possible to get rid of your graph altogether and create a physical demonstration of your data. Experiences can have real impact. An example of this was when, in 2009, Bill Gates released a jar full of mosquitos into the audience of his TED talk

highlighting the spread of Malaria. He certainly generated a lot of attention in the media, not to mention that of his audience!

You may not want to go to the lengths Bill Gates did, that's understandable. There is no doubt though that making your data engaging and memorable will help you achieve your objectives in any presentation. As long as you stick to high quality graphics and have an authenticity to your work, the sky is the limit!

9 NOW ITS YOUR TURN

"Every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it."

– Attributed to Michelangelo

Time to get your chisel out...

9.1 BUILD YOUR OWN

Aim: Design *your* creative exercise

How: Read on ...

Effort level: 7/10

Time commitment: 4 hours

Now it is time to design your own creative technique to fire up the imaginations of those around you. It is relatively simple to do. We all have the capacity to think creatively and use this skill in everyday life, more than you may realise. Some struggle to have the confidence to share their ideas and ask others to get involved. Not you though, not with the confident creative animal you've become from reading this book, eh? All the same, it can be tricky to know where to start. Below are some tips to bear in mind to develop your successful creative exercise:

The tips

Base it in reality - It is much easier to get people involved if they know that the basis of what's on offer has already worked in a real-life context. Take the example of 'Make it physical' in chapter 8.7. It would be one thing to announce you are running a 1 hour session on using props in presentations and just hoping people turn up. It is another if you put it in the context of the attention that Bill Gates generated when he did his mosquito stunt. Giving a real life example allows people to begin to imagine how this could work for them.

Make sure it serves a purpose - Doing 'fluffy stuff' for the sake of it will win you few converts. Let people know what the purpose is of doing the exercise. Offering half hour mindfulness sessions before work will appeal to those already tuned in. Coming up with

some facts about how it helps people to deal with stress, and allows them to be more efficient and clear minded might draw a bigger crowd.

Come up with the evidence - You can say how wonderful your idea is until the cows come home, but you still might find the sceptics are reluctant to join in. Coming up with evidence of the real benefits of creative thinking within business gives your idea some validity. The internet is awash with examples, stats and studies (as is this book!) Use what is out there to give your idea some clout.

Shout about it - Let everyone know about your idea. Being shy will only undermine your belief in it. Give as many people as you can the chance to take part. Framing it in a simple way will allow others to understand it and spread the word too. Once you have had a successful experience, gather feedback to help you to promote it further.

Be authentic - If you aren't exactly Salvador Dali, don't pretend to be. Or Elton John, Steve Jobs nor the Dalai Lama for that matter. Nobody wants a [David Brent](#) style cringe-fest on their hands. It's best to work with your strengths and interests. That isn't to say you can't push your own boundaries, it is just about working with your own style. If everybody knows that you are really passionate about your team doing great presentations to clients, coming up with something that will help them excel at that makes complete sense. If the last time you went to an art gallery was on a school trip aged ten, hosting a life drawing class might not make sense at all! Be brave, but be you; it'll gain trust.

Anything that frees the mind up is beneficial to creativity. Anything that does so in a way that might benefit your business has value. If you are comfortable with your idea then others will be too. Pinpoint something in your team or company that needs improving. Identify your desired outcome. Think up a fun way to get there. Now what could be simpler than that?

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