



# Book The 60 Second Innovator

## Sixty Solid Techniques for Creative and Profitable Ideas at Work

Jeff Davidson  
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### Recommendation

Innovation is a chic buzzword constantly bandied about in the modern business world. Popular thought supports the idea that innovation is essential to thrive, or even merely survive, in the competitive global economy. In this quick read, motivational speaker and business author Jeff Davidson outlines 60 strategies for boosting your creative juices, from brainstorming to positive self-talk, from meditation to the Japanese philosophy of *Kaizen*. Ironically, though the book is about innovation, it cites many well-known techniques that rely on tried-and-true approaches. And, as Davidson himself explains, many of the tips overlap or even repeat, so you can pick and choose the items that are most relevant to you to study in detail. *BooksInShort* recommends this guide as an introduction to innovation for the business rookie or as a refresher course to anyone feeling creatively stuck in an environment that continually hungers for new ideas.

### Take-Aways

- The ability to find and promote innovative solutions is an essential career skill.
- Innovators “listen to their constituents” and “stay focused on long-term trends.”
- The search for answers is as valuable as the discovery of solutions.
- View challenges as opportunities to update your skills, test your resolve, make improvements and gain experience.
- Innovations require the right mind-set, hard work, research and adjustments.
- Try brainstorming – lively interactions with inventive, imaginative people – to spark creativity and generate a multitude of ideas.
- People resist change, even change for the better, but don’t be deterred by naysayers.
- Explore the Japanese *Kaizen* philosophy, which encourages small changes to existing systems, products and processes.
- Be strategic about innovating within your firm’s existing power structure. A little preparation will go a long way toward getting your new ideas accepted.
- Listen to your “inner voice”; that’s your subconscious telling you what feels right or wrong.

### Summary

#### Creativity in a Challenging World

Throughout your workday, a variety of big and small challenges confront you. In your quest to find the best way to tackle each problem, you make little adjustments and big decisions in response to prevailing circumstances. Finding new, improved, innovative answers to every kind of challenge is a desirable, necessary skill in your personal and professional lives. The following ideas will help you encourage innovation in yourself and others.

#### There Must Be a “Better Way”

Many people take comfort in routine and prefer to do things the same way every day. However, innovators need to live outside their comfort zones and continually look for new and better strategies. To advance, take a creative approach to every aspect of your job, from the mundane to the complex. To “adopt the mind-set of an innovator”:

1. **“Listen to your constituents”** – Develop hypersensitivity to the needs of your clients. Continually ask yourself what matters to them and how you can help

- them.
2. **“Stay focused on the long-term trends”** – Distinguish between fads and long-range movements. Once you identify a trend, anticipate change and build creative solutions.

“A new, wonderful, innovative idea is a rare thing.”

To recognize momentum and foresee shifts, constantly seek new information about your industry, clients and competition. Subscribe to trade publications, check relevant websites, attend industry events and learn from those around you. An inspiring atmosphere can encourage creativity so arrange your office environment to be conducive to work. Add color, make sure your chair and desk are comfortable, keep clutter to a minimum and surround yourself with positive images.

“Your mind is your workshop. In this day and age the most vital resource we bring to our careers is brain power.”

Perhaps you’ve heard the story of Archimedes, the Greek scientist who shouted “Eureka!” and leapt out of his bath when he realized, at last, that the way his body displaced water when he stepped into the tub gave him the clue he needed to understand how to calculate volume. However, such revelations during quiet times when you aren’t “thinking about anything in particular” usually blossom only after extensive effort. Your mind works diligently on the problem and just when you feel that you’ll never find a solution, the last piece falls into place. The process of searching for answers is as valuable as finding them. Don’t fret when solutions seem unattainable. Geniuses, and even ordinary but dedicated people, reach their goals by focusing on problems and letting the ideas flow. Many people think that problem solving is the province of the analytical left brain only. Not true. Using your creative side, or right brain, can help you find innovative solutions. To engage your right brain, try these tactics:

- **“Plan creatively”** – Instead of making numbered lists when planning, let your brain go where it may; daydream or doodle if that helps you break away from linear thinking.
- **“Move your body”** – Engage in a physical activity, such as walking or dancing, while your mind wrestles with a problem.
- **“Write with the wrong hand”** – Using your less dominant hand to manipulate a fork, brush your teeth or write can open up a pathway to your brain’s right hemisphere.

“If you’re alive, you’re challenged every day.”

When a problem faces you, ask yourself if it could possibly hold a hidden opportunity. If you view challenges positively, you may see things that you previously missed. Innovation will emerge if you face every setback with style and ease rather than panic and desperation. Think of challenges as openings for updating your skills, improving a neglected part of your résumé, tapping into new resources, gaining experience and adding to your value as an employee.

“Challenges reveal what you need to address.”

People often derive innovative combinations and ideas, and then don’t flesh them out fully. To assess how well you generate and build on new concepts, listen to yourself. Record and review your conversations, trying to hear instances where you may have cut off an inspiration, passed it by or moved on before really exploring it. To develop new thoughts, write them down, let them marinate in a drawer for a few days and then view them with fresh eyes. Go over your idea several times and ask for input. Once you revisit it, you’ll probably have to adjust it. Few innovations are completely formed at first blush. You may need to rework your concept several times to get the desired results. You might not garner the support you want initially, but don’t abandon a good idea because of lack of positive feedback.

## The Perfect Brainstorm

Brainstorming is a process that opens creative pathways in the participants’ minds and spawns ideas. The object is to let innovative thinking flow without censoring or rejecting anything outright. To run a brainstorming effort:

- Clearly state the parameters of the problem.
- Assure participants that the group will not ridicule or reject any ideas.
- Make sure everyone contributes.
- Create an open, fun environment. Brainstorming sessions are not somber events.
- Move the process along when the group bogs down in one area.
- Once you’ve compiled a long list of ideas, edit it down to the most viable concepts.

“Whenever you engage others in the problem or challenge you face, you increase the chances of deriving an innovative solution to a challenge.”

Just as one idea leads to another in a brainstorming session, lively interactions with inventive, imaginative people will spark your creativity. Identify likeable colleagues who provoke your ingenuity. Meet with them regularly for win-win idea-generating sessions. Ask people you trust and respect to serve as a “sounding board,” and bounce ideas off them for valuable feedback. To advance faster, enlist the help of mentors and advisers. Idea-sharing sessions usually involve several people, but you also can brainstorm alone.

## Gaining Acceptance for Your Ideas

You can have the best idea in the world, but if no one will listen to you, it will fall by the wayside. People resist change, even change for the better. They may not want to invest the time and effort to shift their direction. They may resent having their comfortable ways disrupted. Individuals oppose change because they feel threatened by new ideas and the pioneers who present them. When you introduce a new concept, pick your time, anticipate opposition and try to alleviate fear.

“It’s futile to be innovative if no one will listen or follow you. It’s worse if people actively resist.”

You’ve come up against a bunch of skeptics who act as “screeners,” the ones who find fault with every fresh idea and say no repeatedly before they finally say yes. You

can't avoid such screeners, but you can work around them. Anticipate negativity from naysayers and present your ideas in a way that is designed to gain their buy-in. Invest time in winning over your firm's screeners. If you're offering a new approach that will benefit them in the end, they'll eventually see the viability of your proposal.

“The innovator who never implements his findings has not done the job.”

On the other hand, if your whole organization is resistant to change, first try to work within the current structure and attempt to present ideas with short- and long-term benefits. If current management continually thwarts your best efforts, you could consider moving to another firm, or you could try to be strategic about innovating within the existing power structure. For example, find inspiration within the company's own vision and mission statements. Using such policy statements as a resource ensures that your ideas will align with the corporate philosophy.

“Sometimes your best innovative thinking can occur in the face of disruption.”

A little preparation goes a long way when introducing a new concept. “Managing the beforehand” means preparing for a variety of contingencies. For instance, salespeople should make sure they have brochures, price charts, sales forms and anything else they may need before heading out on calls. When you're presenting a novel idea, advance planning will boost your chances of acceptance. Consider how you will address potential objections. Have facts and data on hand to support your assertions. Try to anticipate what your audience might like or dislike. Prepare for “the best-case scenario, the mid-case scenario and the worst-case scenario” so your evaluators never catch you off guard or unprepared.

## Finding Innovations

Explore the Japanese philosophy of *Kaizen*, an approach to innovation that encourages small changes to existing systems, products and processes to achieve incremental improvements. When you attend to every detail, whether in production, customer service or back-office procedures, you will increase the likelihood of making practical upgrades in every aspect of your business. If you want to improve or alter an existing product or structure, ask yourself if you can:

- “Make it bigger or smaller?”
- “Make it brighter or darker?”
- “Make it heavier or lighter?”
- “Lengthen or shorten it?”
- “Extend the shelf life?”
- “Refurbish it?”
- “Give it greater mobility?”

## Living a Life that Abets Innovation

Most working people are overscheduled, but human beings need quiet, unstructured moments to nourish their creativity. When you give yourself a few minutes to relax and reflect, you'll see previously undiscovered opportunities. However, avoid complacency, the enemy of creativity. Sometimes, when things are going well, you might get a little too comfortable. Shift your routine. Wake up an hour earlier and use the time for a beneficial activity such as exercising or reading. Try working at a different location, such as at a picnic table or in the library. Get to know people with different interests. Analyze how you spend your time and eliminate activities that don't generate results.

“Sometimes you have to step out of your own arena, abandon your comfort zone and blaze new paths in order to get beyond the obvious.”

When unexpected events occur, try to use the disruption creatively, instead of letting it throw you offtrack. Stay positive in the face of unanticipated interruptions or delays by having a contingency plan for using unscheduled lag time. For instance, if you're waiting for a tow truck, draft a letter, make a few phone calls, plan a vacation or jot down some ideas. Lastly, always hang onto your sense of humor and be willing to laugh at yourself.

## The Innovator Within

You have a great mentor who tells you when you are on track, when you have a great idea or if you're about to make a blunder. It's you. Your “inner voice” is the best guide; the whisper in your subconscious tells you what feels good or bad. Your body sends signals that let you know whether you are on the right or wrong path. When you are eager and energized about an activity, that readiness is your body saying, “This is good.” Conversely, if your stomach aches and your head hurts, your body may be telling you that you are putting yourself at risk in some way.

“Sometimes the step we need to take doesn't need to be a large one, but it's critical to propel us forward.”

Your subconscious also can hamper your ingenuity by setting limits on your accomplishments. Most people develop a belief system during childhood that tells them what they deserve and how high they can advance. To overcome a self-limiting belief system, stay present in the here and now by asking yourself, “What's the best choice for me?” Train your brain and your body to embrace the positive. Nurture inventiveness with techniques such as meditation and deep breathing. Reject limiting, negative self-talk, such as, “I've never been good at this,” or “What a dummy I am.” Replace it with positive messages, such as, “I'm getting better and better at tackling tough situations,” and “I have the capability in me, right now, to master this.”

## Other Innovators

You can learn valuable lessons from leading, present-day innovators, like Steve Jobs, and from great creative thinkers from history, like Leonardo da Vinci, Thomas Jefferson or Madame Curie. Read their biographies and analyze how they developed their ideas, overcame obstacles and persevered. Then apply their lessons to your life.

# About the Author

**Jeff Davidson** is a motivational speaker and a contributing author to Adams Media’s “60-Second” series. His books include *The 60 Second Organizer* and *The 60 Second Self-Starter*.

