

5 things to do to spark creativity

Feel as if you get in your own way when it comes to being inventive? Five smart thinkers—including an economist and a memoirist—offer their ideas for breaking free from the routine and making the magic more available.

1

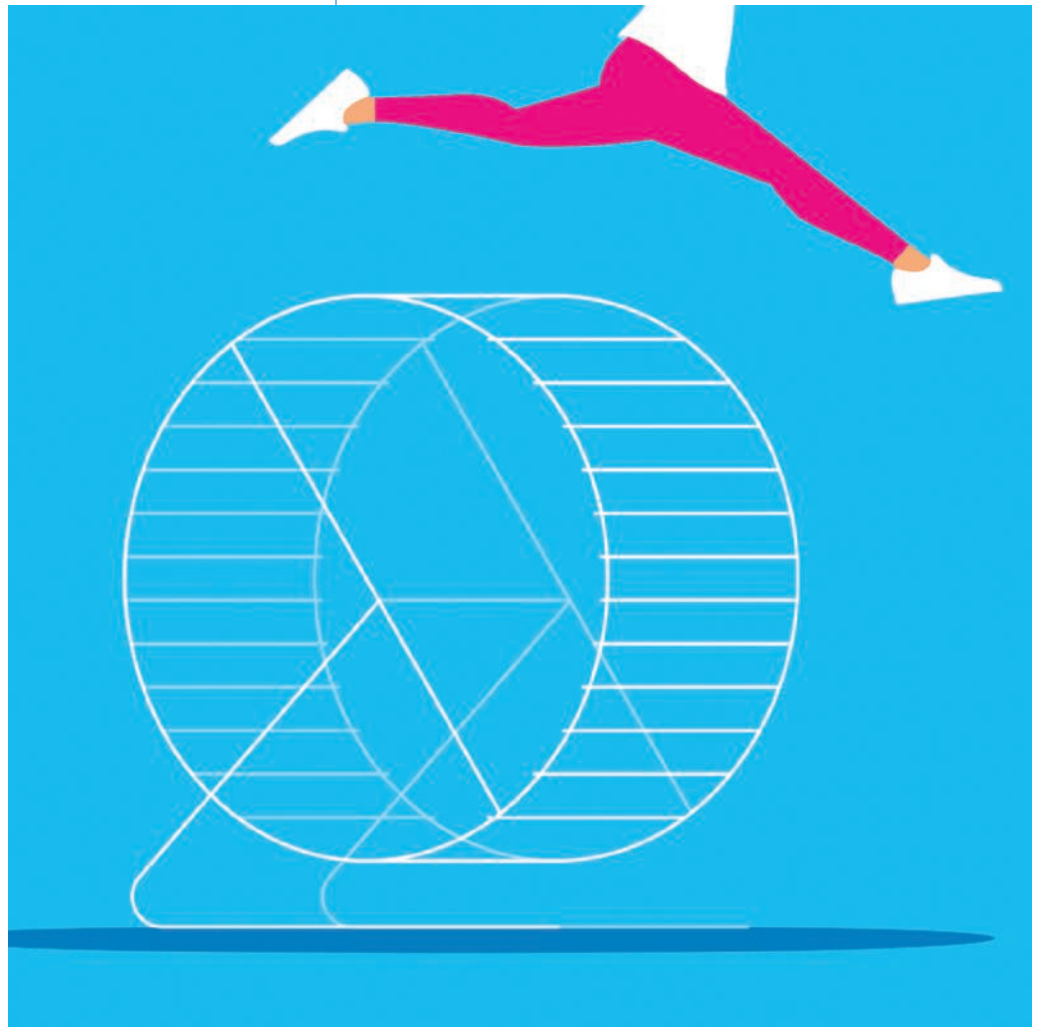
TIM HARFORD

Invite randomness.

So often we're on autopilot.

Mix things up by writing down six different options for your day—some that you might normally do, like having coffee with a friend, and others that make you a bit nervous, such as performing at an open-mic night. Number the items.

Then roll a die and whatever comes up, take on that activity. The idea is inspired by the composer and producer Brian Eno. Knowing that bands would get stuck following the same patterns day after day, he would keep a deck of cards with ideas that he called “oblique strategies”—tasks like “swap instruments” or “work at a different speed.” The amazing thing about this type of randomness is that it forces us to do things that make us uncomfortable. And that's when we discover new ways of thinking.



Written by Sarah J. Robbins

Illustration by Ben Wiseman

2

ERIN STUTLAND
Get moving.

Whenever I'm feeling trapped in a creative cul-de-sac or I'm stuck in a negative thinking pattern, I go outside, put on a playlist, and start walking. Some of history's greatest thinkers, from Charles Dickens to Steve Jobs, have used walking to tap into their creativity. Even if it's just 10 minutes away from your house and 10 minutes back, walking helps you get out of your head and connect more to your body and intuition. I call them "soul strolls." Music helps because the rhythm jolts your brain into a different thought pattern. Try going out with no set destination. Learning to trust yourself to lead the way will help you build your creativity.

3

CARA BROOKINS

Commit, then figure it out.

When I decided to build a house with my kids, everyone thought I was crazy. But I don't believe much in plans. My philosophy instead was "I don't know how to build a wall, but I do know how to pound a nail." In my writing career, it's been the same: In the beginning, I thought, I don't know how to plot out and write a whole book, but I do know how to tell my kids a bedtime story. I do know how to write a grammatically correct sentence. And, really, isn't a book just a lot of grammatically correct sentences put together? Creativity is about living in the moment, rather than being lost in despair, thinking about the million steps between here and there.

5

DAVID GREENFIELD
Cut yourself off from technology.

With our relationship to smartphones, we've lost our ability to tolerate boredom—to the point where we can't even wait in a line for coffee without using our phones as a distraction. The problem is, new ideas and energy toward change and social connection can come from boredom. So experiment with untethering: Leave the phone in the car for the day, or even just for an hour, while you run an errand; eat a meal without it on the table. I recently turned my phone off while I waited for an appointment. At first my heart rate increased and I felt anxious, but then I settled in. It was a little like meditation.

4

JOSHUA WOLF SHENK
Find someone you connect with.

There are a lot of people who think that artistic craft is entirely solitary, but the hidden story behind most innovation is extraordinary partnerships. It's just often underplayed, because editors, producers, and coaches tend to be offstage. While there is a place for solitude in the creative process, most people will benefit from taking a social risk—whether it's seeking feedback or going for drinks. Because when you find someone that you have chemistry with, it shakes the foundation of your psychological house. The pictures fall from the walls, and you become open to new views.

THE EXPERTS

ERIN STUTLAND is a mind-body life coach and a fitness expert. She lives in New York City.

CARA BROOKINS is the author of seven novels. Her memoir, *Rise: How a House Built a Family*, details her escape from an abusive marriage.

TIM HARFORD (opening page) is the author of *Messy: The Power of Disorder to Transform Our Lives* and a columnist for the *Financial Times*. He lives in Oxford, England.

JOSHUA WOLF SHENK, the author of *Powers of Two: How Relationships Drive Creativity*, leads the Black Mountain Institute, at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

DAVID GREENFIELD is an assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine and the founder of the Center for Internet and Technology Addiction.