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## 6 ways to unlock your company's creativity

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### Let Everyone Contribute

Innovation lurks within myriad nooks and crannies of any company—from the receptionist to the head of information technology. While running a full-fledged democracy is impractical, employees at every level should have a way to share their ideas. Get started by scheduling a group innovation strategy session—even if it means coming in on a weekend or setting aside a few hours a week, says Rowan Gibson, innovation consultant for firms like IBM and Bayer. Don't just pay lip service: Let the discussions play out, and reward the creative for their efforts—say, by offering participation on the development team; bonus pay based on the commercial success or savings generated by the idea; extra vacation time; or even a prized

parking spot.

### Knock Heads Together

Working in silos dulls your company's creative edge. "If people in different organizations aren't talking to each other, it's difficult to tap into collective know-how of the organization," says Peter Skarzynski, chief executive of Chicago-based Strategos, an innovation consulting firm. Skarzynski suggests organizing your company into cross-functional, creative teams with people from different departments, and with varying levels of experience, who meet on a regular basis. That's how Proctor & Gamble generated the idea for Crest Whitestrips—the company paired people from its oral care unit, the Crest brand-marketing division and the laundry detergent business.



### Prize Diversity

Sameness—of thought, background and experience—is a creativity killer, warns Steve Shapiro, an innovation consultant and Accenture veteran. Indeed, "the person you like the least is the person you need the most," he warns. Innovative organizations tend to have a healthy mix of four kinds of people—creative types, consensus builders, analytical minds and plan implementers—which fosters a healthy creative tension. The tough part: finding an overall fit. To boost the odds, U.K.-based sandwich retailer Pret A Manger, for example, requires that all potential employees spend one "test day" working on the floor of a store before they are hired.

### Rethink The Assumptions

Death and taxes aside, make no assumptions. Reed Hastings didn't. When he launched Netflix in 1997, Blockbusters were virtually on every block. Hastings shelved three assumptions: 1) that customers would only pay to rent movies they could watch on the same day they thought about watching them; 2) that late fees were a necessary evil and revenue driver; and 3) that a start-up can't compete with an entrenched giant. Netflix's recent market cap: \$2.1 billion. Blockbuster's: \$643 million



### Identify Your (Truly) Precious Resources And Exploit Them

Most companies have a clear sense of what they do, but not of what they know or own. Innovation comes from truly defining these precious resources and building on them. Start by making a two-sided list, each side with two columns: On the left side, list both the services you provide for customers and your exceptional internal operational capabilities; on the right, list all of the potential customers and industry segments you might serve. Think broadly about how to apply your current capabilities to capture new opportunities. For example: One of Shapiro's former clients, a

regional bank that served small businesses, realized that it could harness its clout with office-supply vendors to offer better deals on supplies for its banking customers. Or, maybe your product, initially designed for a specific purpose, also fulfills another role—a la Arm & Hammer's baking soda cum air freshener.

#### **Hammer It Home**

Manhattan-based Fahrenheit 212—a consulting firm with clients such as Gucci Group, Diageo and Warner Music—aims to inculcate innovative thinking by running a three-day, off-site meeting every three months. Chief Executive Geoff Vuleta's 25 employees earn bonuses based on their ability to meet targets set every 100 days. All goals—including Vuleta's—are shared with the entire staff, and feedback is encouraged. There's nothing like a little public pressure to ratchet up the creativity quotient.



Via [Forbes](#)

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