

3 Tips to Leverage Your Capacity for New Ministry Ideas

Suppose you're invited to participate in a brainstorming session. The facilitator says that "every idea counts" and invites you to propose as many ideas as you can in the next 15 minutes. You feel rushed. You suppress ideas you think won't get support. You narrow your own limited list of ideas, offering just a sample to the group. The facilitator posts yours and your colleagues' ideas, inviting everyone to vote for which is best. Of course, not everyone is on board with the winning idea and while some give in, most aren't sure about the new direction the meeting has taken.

Therein lies the rub. **Our tried-and-true ideation processes can actually dampen the creativity companies are working so hard to create.** To promote real innovation, we need to stop giving lip service to new thinking, get away from the need to reach consensus and instead nurture approaches that truly forge new ground.

The resistance to change and real innovation is natural. It's driven by some deep-seated forces that we need to recognize to foster new thinking.

- **Force #1: Need for inclusion and connection:** When we are brainstorming with others, the need to agree, feel included and to think the same way others do. Real innovation requires divergence and expanding our ideas into the far recesses of our brain that may be less comfortable or familiar.
- **Force #2: Being Right:** Thinking the same thoughts repeatedly lulls us into a sense of comfort. Thinking we know the "correct" answer reinforces feelings of intelligence and good judgment. We may not even realize we are in a repetitive loop, or experiencing status quo thinking. Instead, we feel good that we got it right.
- **Force #3: Mental Grooves:** Thinking repetitive thoughts etches "grooves" into the brain. The brain then reinforces what it knows, perhaps at the expense of what is new and novel. Along these well-trodden paths, brain structure serves to link learning to behavior in predictable ways. Yet getting into those parts of the brain forges new connections—both at the idea level and at the level of the brain tissue itself.

To up our innovation game we have to think differently. We rarely pay enough attention to leveraging our capacity to form new ideas, test, refine, and advocate for new concepts. Here are 3 tips to do just that:

>> Tip 1: Prime your brain with trigger words. We need to prime our brains to freely generate and express ideas, not suppress them. So, state the problem or challenge you are working on. Find trigger words related to your challenge to get your juices flowing. Sleep on it, watch a movie, and go to a park. Give the body something to do while the mind wanders freely. Then put yourself to work.

If you're in a group, consider listing trigger words in two columns on a white board and asking colleagues to look for connections between the words that otherwise wouldn't be obvious. Invite people to generate as many ideas as they can for a few minutes, and then conduct your

brainstorming session with your brains primed to think differently.

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>> **Tip 2: Think of the worst idea.** Remove the fear of making mistakes, feeling stupid or safe or receiving negative feedback. No idea is a bad idea. In fact, research shows that what appears after 'the worst idea' can become a trigger for the best ideas no one has thought of before.

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>> **Tip 3: Let it flow.** Don't wait for inspiration or settle for perfect solutions. Instead, generate a wealth of ideas with others. When you're inclined to stop, or judge your ideas, keep going. Don't get caught in your usual patterns and instead open up your mind to a 'non-judgmental' state where your ideas and others' ideas can connect. If you are feeling anxious, uncomfortable, or lost in uncharted territory, know you are on the right track.

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Remember: Most innovative ideas come through experimentation and discovery. **Prime your brain and set the stage for the most amazing new novel and exciting ideas to emerge.** In the process you'll learn to learn to trust innovation instincts – yours and everyone else's.

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