

Harnessing Bathroom Brilliance

Have you ever noticed how often really good ideas pop into your consciousness at the most inconvenient moments such as when you are in the middle of taking a shower? This flash of bathroom brilliance presents two problems:

- There's no one to share it with (at least in our home), and
- There's no practical way to record it (unless you take a wax crayon into the shower every day).



The other worrying thing is the memory of the 'flash of brilliance' seems to fade quickly and can be very difficult to reconstruct even a few minutes later..... which may explain Archimedes running naked down the street shouting 'eureka' after his 'flash of bathroom brilliance' (or more accurately brilliance in the bath¹).

The idea I want to look at in this article is around the concept of creativity and how most people can work to unleash their innate creativity ('bathroom brilliance').

Creativity is an essential element in problem solving² and process improvement³; and the challenge facing most professionals is finding the

time to be creative. This needs time and then quiet-time but is not predictable or controllable – all you can do is create the environment to allow your innate creativity to cut in. While everyone is different, there seems to be three key elements in being creative:

1. **Make sure you understand the issue or problem that needs to be solved.** Most people jump straight into solution mode, creative people spend the time needed to define and understand the problem without trying to impose a solution.
2. **Sleep on it.** Allow time for your subconscious to work on the problem. It may take one or two days or one or two weeks. Allowing the subconscious to work on the problem does not mean forgetting it, you need reminders to keep prodding your creativity towards a solution. Maybe a note book you look at a couple of times a day, maybe a white board 'parking lot' with the issues drawn or sketched out in some way. Adding notes and possible concepts to the parking lot keeps your subconscious focused. You need to stay relaxed and open during this period – stress kills creativity.
3. **Finally, you need to make some quiet time in your day** for the 'flashes of brilliance' to move from the subconscious into your conscious mind. This process seems to occur at the most inconvenient moments but you can help. The key seems to be doing some enjoyable function such as showering or walking where 90% of the processes you are doing are automatic learned reactions that are

¹ Archimedes discovered the relationship between volume and mass (density/buoyancy) by observing the change in water level as he entered his bath: <https://www.livescience.com/58839-archimedes-principle.html>

² For more on **problem solving** see: https://mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1013_Problem_Solving.pdf

³ For more on **process improvement** see: https://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1046_Process_Improvement.pdf

themselves run by your subconscious brain. Do this and at the same time stop worrying about other things so your conscious mind is just being present – no worries, no focused thoughts, and very often the ‘brilliant solutions’ that have been developing in the subconscious will literally bubble up to the surface of your consciousness.

Then you have the real problem – finding a way to capture the ideas before they fade back into your subconscious..... taking a notebook or having a ‘record’ function on your smart phone can work if you are enjoying a pleasant stroll through a park – neither work really well in the shower.

Now think about your teams and how you work with them to innovate creative solutions⁴. Do you call them into a room, dump the problem on them and demand a brainstorming session to creatively solve the problem (and then wonder why it did not work) or do you socialise the problem first, ask people to think about it and discuss it with each other off line and then call the meeting to see what’s been developed?

In summary, creativity needs space, time and a freedom from pressure. This is the antithesis of most modern work environments where people work in a high-pressure job, and are under pressure for most of their waking hours dealing with the constant stream of ‘stuff’ arriving on their PDAs.

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⁴ For more on **innovation and creativity** see: <https://mosaicprojects.com.au/PMKI-TPI-010.php#Innovation>