

## Creativity 101



[Guy Kawasaki of How to Change the World](#) | February 4th, 2009 - 01:05 AM

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I just came across an interview called [“The Hidden Secrets of the Creative Mind”](#) with psychologist R. Keith Sawyer, author of the book *Explaining Creativity: The Science of Human Innovation*. Sawyer’s research examines the secrets to the creative process, and the interview makes four great points that every small businessperson should take to heart:

1. **Give yourself permission to think up many ideas.** Creative people have tons of ideas, but most of the ideas simply don’t pan out. That’s okay because even though most of your ideas will suck, they help you get to the great ones. The trick is to let your mind wander and come up with many ideas and then cull the good from the bad. Nobody has only good ideas. (Almost everybody has selective memory, though, so they might think they had only good ideas.)
2. **Keep chewing on the problem.** Creativity is not about the rare giftedness of a “visionaries” and “geniuses” with their Eureka! moments. Research shows that most ideas are the result of thinking about a problem over a long period of time. Creativity is about big numbers and hard work, so don’t feel frustrated if you haven’t had an epiphany yet. Certainly don’t believe that if you aren’t “gifted” (whatever that means), you’ll never come up with good ideas.
3. **Build on ideas that came before.** The iPod isn’t a miracle that came out of the blue—it was built on the Sony Walkman’s concept of a shirt-pocket device coupled with early MP3 players from other companies and the online store of a company like Amazon. The concept that creativity is built on what came before has important ramifications: consume information voraciously, go outside your market niche, and don’t be too proud to steal inspiration.
4. **Put yourself in environment that will use different parts of your brain.** Often this means taking a break. Sawyer refers to the three Bs—bathroom, bus, and bed—as places that stereotypically produce groundbreaking ideas. If you’re stuck on a project, try something that will get you to find new creative paths. One way to do this, for instance, is to schedule time for unstructured conversation with your peers. Personally, I get my best ideas while driving; this has led me to believe that if I bought a better car I would be more creative because I would drive more, but I digress.

If you do these things, some day an author like Sawyer may feature you in a book about creativity, and then you can claim that you’re a gifted visionary whose ideas come in flashes of brilliance during your regular ole awesomeness. Only you and I will know the truth. And if you like to read about innovation and creativity, check out [Innovation.alltop](#).

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