How To Get To GREAT IDEAS

Masterclass Booklet

DAVE BIRSS

HERE TO HELP

I'd love to help you come up with more effective ideas. Just drop me a line:

hello@davebirss.com

WELCOME

Hi there,

Thanks for attending my masterclass on *How To Get To Great Ideas*.

The session takes the thinking in my book, expands on it and gives you practical tools to help you and your organisation have more effective ideas.

This booklet is designed to help you remember much of the session and give you some tools and techniques to help you apply your thinking in the right way at the right time.

It follows the RIGHT Thinking process, which takes you from defining the problem to testing a solution.

I hope you get lots out of it and it results in brilliant ideas that impact your organisation.

Top regards,

Dave

I've created the RIGHT Thinking process to give you the best chance of reaching a great solution.

In the book, I show you how to apply the right thinking at the right time.

It starts with preparation.

R

I

RESEARCH

Before you can think about output, you need to think about input. Gather all the information you can. Especially the stuff that involves humans.

INSIGHT

It's now time to identify the most interesting observations and then go further to find the interesting reasons behind them. This helps you write a brief.

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G H T

GENERATE

Only once you've done the first two steps can you get to work on coming up with ideas. And then applying judgement to find the best ones.

HONE

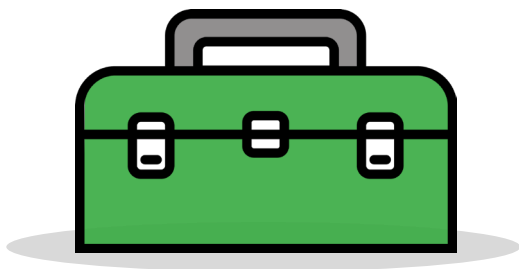Once you have your raw ideas, it's time to polish them to make them as good as they can be. And work out how to actually make them happen.

TEST

Before you go all-in with an idea, you need to test and refine it. That's when you discover all the stuff you hadn't previously considered.

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Your Thinking Toolkit

To help my clients apply their thinking in the most effective way throughout the process, I've collected over 70 tools and techniques.

They include exercises that individuals can do as well as workshops for groups of all sizes.

Many of the techniques include digital tools that have been specially built to broaden your thinking. And all of the techniques come with simple instructions to make sure you get the most out of them.

Best of all, I'm constantly adding to them to help people solve problems even more effectively.

On the following pages you'll find a few techniques to help your thinking.

PREPARATION

You can't just dive into the process and expect great results. You need to make sure you've got everything prepared before you get started.

Here follows a checklist and some tools to help you start off in the best possible way.

All resources can be found at:

davebirss.com/masterclass

To get your password, sign up at:
davebirss.com/mcmember

☑ DEFINE SUCCESS

Get all the stakeholders together at the start of the project to agree on what the project should achieve. Collectively agree on the top 5 criteria that you'll use to judge the success of the project. And get everyone to agree on the level of creativity that you're aiming for.

Before the meeting, ask everyone to share pertinent information that could feed into the project. Then use the meeting to narrow the list down to the most important information.

Agree on what the current situation is, what the ideal situation is and use that to collectively define the problem you're trying to solve. It is probably worth doing the 'Five Whys' exercise to make sure you're getting to the root of the problem rather than just trying to deal with the symptoms.

RESOURCES

Defining Creativity

Five Whys

☑️ ONE DECISION-MAKER

If you want the best ideas to survive, you need to have a single decision-maker for the project. Otherwise conflicting agendas, priorities and standards will muddy the waters.

That doesn't mean that other stakeholders can't have their voice heard. It just means that a single person sets the vision, is involved throughout the process and makes the ultimate decision. The alternative is something that no one will be happy with.

It's best to assign this role in the initial meeting with the key stakeholders. This individual is ultimately responsible for the success or failure of the project.

The first step for this person is sign off the Project Kick-Off document once they're happy with it.

RESORCES

Project Kick-Off

☑ THE RIGHT TEAM

Don't just pick whoever's easily available and simple to get hold of. You want to curate your team and know when you're going to use them.

You need to make sure that your team has all the skills you'll require (and preferably be good at those skills). Because creativity isn't one thing. It's a whole bunch of skills, attitudes and behaviours that work together to give you better results. You may need to call on external help to fill any gaps.

Map out your timeline and work out when you'll need to apply each of the skills.

You won't need everyone at all times but you will want to communicate with everyone on your selected team throughout the process to keep them engaged and motivated.

RESOURCES

The Necessary Skills

The Project Team

☑ TIME

Lots of businesses expect their staff to come up with ideas on top of their day job. Aside from showing a lack of respect for your staff, that approach shows a lack of respect for ideas. So people will tend to put in minimal effort and you'll end up with first ideas rather than best ideas. You'll tend to get obvious thoughts that don't give you much value rather than great ideas that give you an advantage.

You need to assign time for people to dedicate to the project. And not just half an hour for a brainstorm. Give more time than you think it will take.

It's best to do the project in short sprints to keep things moving (and reduce the number of energy-sapping status meetings). I recommend that these are no longer than two weeks and have a definite - preferably tangible - deliverable.

RESOURCES
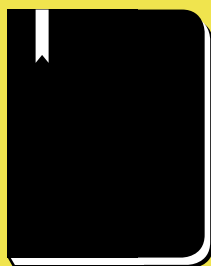
Your diary or calendar

☑ RESOURCES

Work out what resources your team will need to do the job properly.

Will they need tools or software?

Will they need access to databases and knowledge banks?

Will they need to do research to understand the problem better?

Would dedicated space help them focus on the project better?

Would external assistance help them get better results?

Make sure they've got everything they need. Otherwise, they'll spend their energy battling a lack of resources when they should be focusing on solving the problem.

Cutting corners drastically reduces your chances of success.

Necessary Resources

RIGHT THINKING

Once you've done all your preparation and got everything in place, you can move on to the RIGHT Thinking steps.

There are a number of exercises you can do at each stage - both individually and in groups. I've given you a few here that you may find helpful.

If you want more help, please just let me know.

THE PRE-MORTEM

This exercise helps you avoid pitfalls and direct your thinking towards better solutions

Most people wait until things go wrong before they start pulling the situation apart to discover what led to the failure. This technique is the opposite of that.

It looks ahead to work out what the risks and barriers are so that you can deal with them in advance.

And it goes beyond that to help you turn the threats and restrictions into opportunities.

These opportunities can then lead to effective ideas.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED
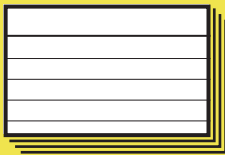
Record cards

Pen

HOW TO DO IT

✅ Grab a stack of blank record cards. In a group, or by yourself, write down one potential problem per card. Put a cross in the top left corner so you know this is the bad stuff.

Think about the people involved in your situation. Think about how they could sabotage it or cock it up. And why they might do that. Think about logistics like money, time and resources. Think about what your competitors could do. Think about how the press could turn against you.

Go to unpleasant places and let your inner pessimist have its voice.

❌ People might read this card and think it's unimaginative and stupid

✅ Use the awfulness of the the example to spur people on to do something better

✅ When you run out of steam, go through the cards and write a positive thing you can do to deal with each negative on the reverse of the card. Put a tick in the top left corner so you know this is the good stuff.

✅ Finally, go through the cards and select the ones with the biggest potential risk or the most interesting positive approach. These are your areas of opportunity. Hold onto these cards and refer to them when it's time to write the brief for solving your problem.

BEYOND OBSERVATIONS

**Get beyond the interesting 'what's
to the more useful 'why's**

You'll often hear businesspeople talk about the importance of insight in making decisions.
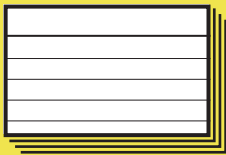
But if you ask someone to come up with an insight, they usually don't know where to start.

Most people provide interesting observations instead.

These can be helpful but they're only half the job.

This exercise helps get you to the information you really need.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Record cards

Pen

HOW TO DO IT

☑ Gather together all the research you can.

Collect all the statistics. Find all the interesting things that people are doing. Get as much information as you can about how the competition deal with your issue.

If you've done the research part of the process thoroughly enough, you'll have a good pile of facts.

☑ Go through everything and pull out the most interesting observations. These usually involve people. But not always. Write each one down on a record card.

☑ Now go through each of these and find the reason behind this observation.

Why do people do that? Why don't costs go down when sales go up? Why are mistakes happening when the system is designed to prevent them?

You may need to do a bit more research to uncover these reasons but it's well worth the effort. These are the insights that lead to effective solutions. Write them down on the reverse of each card.

☑ Select the insights that surprise you the most and use them for the basis of a brief.

SWITCH INDUSTRY

This exercise helps you think beyond traditional approaches and limitations

You may find that a different industry has already solved a similar kind of problem.

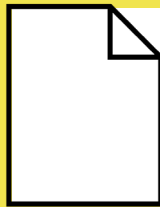All you have to do is discover the solution and adapt it to your needs.

This exercise helps you think beyond the limiting confines of your own industry to discover different perspectives and approaches.

Adaptation may be more effective than originality.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Pen   *Paper*   *Web Browser*

HOW TO DO IT

✓ First of all define what kind of problem you're dealing with. Just use one or two words to complete the sentence:

'This is a _____ problem'.

You're looking for broad concepts like 'flow', 'awareness', 'resistance' or 'motivation'. This will help you explore broader opportunities. Avoid being too specific or wordy. You need to remain open to wider concepts.

✓ Next grab an internet-connected device and visit:

davebirss.com/switcheroo

You only need one device for the whole group. The page will give you a suggestion of an industry. Together as a group, discuss how that industry deals with the problem you've defined. Remember to think broadly. It could include how they deal with customers, their internal systems, how they are portrayed in the press or any number of other approaches. Write down a few suggestions.

✓ Go through each suggestion to work out what you can learn from it that may be useful for the problem you're solving. Look for things you can adapt or principles you can learn.

✓ Tap the screen to move on to another industry.

This exercise is inspired by Mark Earls' book 'Copy, Copy, Copy'. I highly recommend it. Pick it up here:

http://bit.ly/1pTvist

CARTOON BRIEFING

**This exercise helps you think visually
to open up new ideas**

When we approach problems in a business environment, we often think linearly, logically and using language as our main tool.

That limits the ideas we're capable of.

Einstein came up with the theory of relativity by imagining himself sitting on a wave of light. The understanding of the benzene ring came after a dream of a snake biting it's own tail.

Visual thinking can offer breakthroughs that logical thinking can't.

Let's think in pictures.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Pen

Paper

HOW TO DO IT

✅ Start by working together as a group to create your visual brief. Draw three large squares across a landscape sheet of paper.

✅ Draw the current situation in the first frame. In our case, you'll probably be focusing on the person who's behaviour you want to change. You'll probably want to show what your protagonist is currently doing, saying or thinking. Stick figures are good enough!

✅ Now move to the final frame. This is going to show your ideal outcome. This may be what you want your protagonist to do, say or think after they have come into contact with your activity. This sheet of paper with the blank middle frame is your brief. It will probably look something like this:

✅ Individually - or in pairs - come up with middle frames that take people from the first state to the final state. You may want to tear up a sheet of paper into frame-sized pieces to do this.

✅ Once everyone has created a little pile of ideas, get together again as a group to discuss the ideas and select the best ones.

BRAIN-SWAP

**This helps you think in different ways
to generate ideas you wouldn't normally have**

The biggest thing that holds us back is usually ourselves. We often think we're not as capable of coming up with good ideas as other people are.

So rather than fight it, work with it.

Imagine you're someone better, more interesting, more capable or just different.
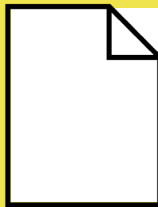
Generate the kinds of ideas you think they'd come up with.

Then take all the credit yourself.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Pen   *Paper*   *Web Browser*

HOW TO DO IT

✅ Grab a pen, some paper and an internet-connected device and visit:

davebirss.com/brainswap

You'll be given a suggestion of a well-known person (if they're not well-known enough to you, move on to the next one rather than waste time Googling them!)

Imagine how they would approach the problem. They may be an inventor who would use an engineering approach. Or an ego-driven celebrity who would find a way to make themselves the star of the show. Or a fictional character with a superpower.

Write down what you think their approach would be. Enjoy yourself and use your imagination.

✅ Once you have a nice list of approaches use them to inspire ideas.

If Lady Gaga led you to suggest using outlandish outfits, come up with a number of ideas based on that. This is about generating lots and lots of options.

✅ Go through the list and select the best ideas.

Write them up clearly so you'll understand them later.

Use drawings or diagrams, if it helps.

DEVIL'S ADVOCATE

Rather than trying to defend an idea against objections, this helps to eliminate them entirely

It's easy to get excited about an idea and only see the benefits of how it works in an ideal scenario.

And it's easy for that passion to be knocked out of you by a naysayer who discounts it based on a single issue that you hadn't considered.

This exercise helps you anticipate criticism and make your idea more robust.

You're about to be your own worst enemy.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Pen

Paper

HOW TO DO IT

☑ Start by listing all the people who will come into contact with your idea - from the decision-makers to the final users.

☑ Write down the priorities for each of these individuals. They may want the solution to be easier or cheaper or make them look good or something else.

Narrow it down to the top three criteria for each person.

☑ Now step into each person's shoes - turn your cynicism up to 11 - and start listing their objections to your idea. Some of these will be rational and some will be emotional. Look at the big things and the little things.

Don't hold back. Find as many problems as you can.

☑ It's probably a good idea to take a little break now. That was tough. Do something that makes you feel good!

☑ Return to your list and deal with each objection one by one.

It may be that you need to amend the idea. It may be that you need to describe it differently to that individual. Or you may find that you can replace the objectionable part with something far more effective.

ADVENTURE TIME

Break down your idea into a step by step process and put it to the test

It's good to have an idea of how people will respond to your solution before you implement it.

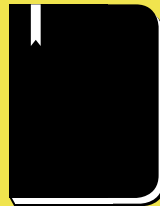Because personal experience shows that they never quite do things the way you imagine.

This is a simple way of mapping all of the ways people might interact with your solution and each of the decisions they could make.

It also gives you a tool you can use to test your solution on your actual audience.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Pen

Notebook

HOW TO DO IT

☑ Start with a large, blank notebook. It should have lots of pages. Number them clearly.

☑ On the first page, write a brief description of what people will initially face. Underneath this description, list the different decisions they could make. Include worst case scenarios, like 'give up'.

☑ Write each of these potential decisions as headlines at the top of new pages. Connect these pages to first page by writing 'go to page xx' beside the corresponding option.

☑ For each of these pages, write a description of what people will now be faced with using pictures and diagrams, if they help. Again, write a list of decisions underneath. Repeat this process until you have covered off all the choices and outcomes for your entire solution.

☑ Sit with people and go through the book with them. Try not to influence them towards making certain decision. Take notes on how they respond. Look for points of confusion or irritation. Amend your idea accordingly.

☑ Repeat until it's right.

ABOUT DAVE BIRSS

Dave is the author of *How To Get To Great Ideas* and is obsessed with demystifying creativity and innovation. He's also written several other books, including *A User Guide To The Creative Mind*, and co-wrote the best-selling *Iconic Advantage*.

He spent 20 years as an advertising creative, coming up with ideas on demand for some of the world's biggest brands.

He's also been a musician, illustrator, poet, radio broadcaster, university lecturer, film director and many other things.

These days he spends much of his time travelling the world teaching, speaking and consulting for businesses.

He's currently working on more books, films and TV shows. All aimed at helping people and businesses have better ideas.

BEST WAYS TO WORK

The office environment usually isn't designed for creative thinking. So you may find it easier to come up with ideas in a different environment. Wherever you decide to do your thinking, here are a few tips to help you:

✅ **Enjoy yourself**

Stress narrows your thinking and leads to obvious and unadventurous ideas. Relax and have fun.

✅ **Separate generation from judgement**

Switch off your judgement when you're generating ideas. Applying it at the wrong time stops the flow and limits opportunities.

✅ **Encourage difference**

You won't get very good ideas if you're all thinking the same. Difference is good. Encourage the unusual stuff.

✅ **Mix solo and group thinking**

It's a good idea to give everyone space to apply their own thinking to the problem before coming together to work on it.
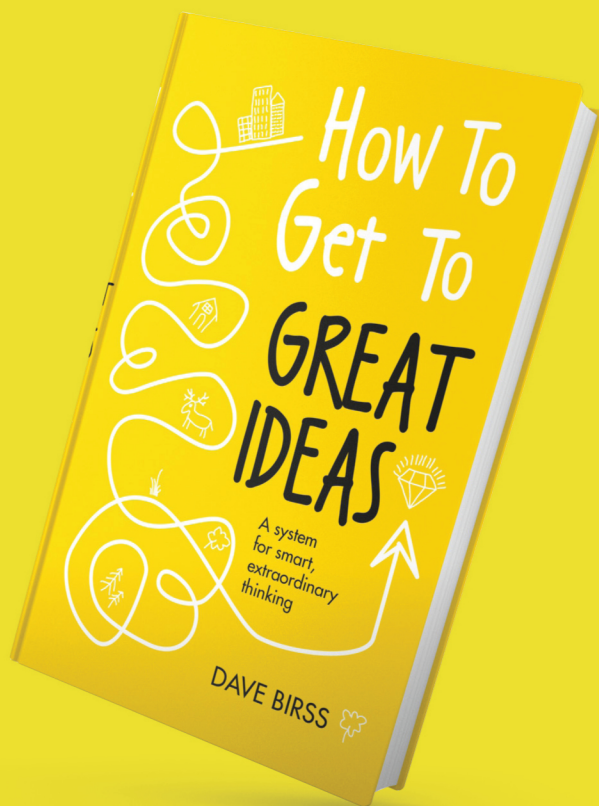
✅ **Remind yourself of the brief**

It's easy to go down an exciting rabbit hole that doesn't answer the brief. Regularly remind yourself of what you're aiming for.

✅ **Aim for simplicity**

Don't overcomplicate things. The simpler solution is usually the best one. Focus on the good stuff and prune the rest.

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