

Four Easy Ways to Keep Your Creative Edge

By Doug Harris, Creative Animal



A few months back, I had the opportunity to work with two PD's from the same company who had swapped responsibilities on their respective stations. They stayed in their same offices, but now each deals with a new playlist, a new set of air personalities, and a new set of challenges. With a twinkle in their eyes, each is naturally looking forward to besting the performance of his predecessor, which no doubt delights their GM.

Our conversations ultimately turned to Spencer Johnson's book "Who Moved My Cheese?" and all parties agreed that this "cheese-moving" had rekindled a creative spark. But since you can't change job descriptions every day, how is a programmer/manager/sales executive to keep his or her intellectual

faculties sharp in a time when asked to generate greater results with fewer resources in a shorter length of time?

Here are four quick tips that may serve you in your pursuit of creative breakthroughs for sales, programming, and/or promotions:

*Take a different route to work.

Do you start your work week the same way Monday through Friday? Routine is the enemy of creativity, and although you may have mapped out the quickest way to get from your home to the station, I encourage you to take a different route every once in a while. You'll see businesses you haven't noticed before, as well as billboards and other visual stimuli that could help trigger an idea or at the very least, give you a taste of how some of your listeners live and commute. Once you get to the station, don't stop there. Enter through a different door. Pass through a different department or engage a staffer with whom you don't normally communicate. Simple, free, and effective, you will be amazed at the effect this tactic will have on your day.

* Eat something wickedly delicious or outrageously different.

In my world travels, I've eaten kangaroo, reindeer, and rattlesnake. But you don't have to go to these lengths to test the limits of your creativity--or your stomach. Just try a new restaurant or a different menu item that you have not yet experienced. And while you're enjoying it, talk to the waitress or the hostess, or the person seated next to you. See if you can guess their favorite radio station. Embracing a new environment or a new taste sensation could be the first step to breaking out of a creative rut. And uncovering a fan of your radio station can certainly add some sunshine to your day.

*Talk to a generation "ahead" or "behind".

When September 11th changed our lives forever, I was reminded by my (now) 93-year-old father that Pearl Harbor had had a similar effect on his generation. We spoke of the Kennedy assassination, the

Challenger explosion, and the OJ trial and I came to realize that these tragic milestones meant different things to different people. The best way to broaden your perceptual horizons is to talk to someone older or younger than you are. Those of you with children will know exactly what I mean. An iPod means something completely different to my mother and to my nephew. Likewise the election of the first African-American President, the Tiger Woods incident, and the war in Afghanistan. It is possible to be thought-provoking without being controversial and broadcasters and sellers walk this fine line every day. Surely the most important perspective to appreciate is that of your audience, but remember that the people you are trying to reach are not all of a like mind, and listening to different viewpoints can be an effective stimulus for creativity.

*Go to a competitor's promotion or event.

This one is simple and the reason for doing it is obvious. Besides comparing your street presence to theirs, you can see their listeners up close and personal and watch how their DJs interact with the public. I am astounded at the number of broadcasters that don't go to their own promotions, much less those of the guys across town, and I think that they are really missing out. See if this practice turns out to be the eye-opener it has been for me.

Try one of these this week and let me know the results. Your audience—and your clients—are waiting for the next big thing. Wouldn't it be great if your station delivered it to them!?!

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