Muskie Tank Starter Help

Today we live in a society where there are new ideas, new inventions, and new businesses every day. The challenge is, how is your idea better than what is already out there, and what sets you and your ideas apart. This is a document that will help give pointers on how to start thinking about an idea, and ways to improve on ideas.

Get the ball rolling.

You need to get those creative juices rolling. It is also important to understand that everyone has potential to be creative. Sometimes other people get in the way of our original ideas, or our own expectations are too high. This is where you need to take a step back and ask ourselves ‘what if’, even to ideas that already exist. It would be beneficial to daily find an idea and ask ‘what if’ and write it down. We say this because unfortunately our memory is not as good as we would like to admit, and we might not remember an awesome idea we had yesterday. Many people we would consider famous inventors collected their ideas, and you should do the same. This way you can get the creativity flowing to find your perfect idea. It should also be noted that you cannot let negative comments kill an idea, instead take the negative comments and translate it to creative criticism.

Everyone can come up with a new idea

Never think that you are not smart enough to come up with a new innovative idea. High IQ and the ability to see a simple solution to even the most complex problems have no correlation. We will talk about a few ways to come up with a new idea.

One way to approach this is to look at this process in three steps and comes from How to Transform Your Ideas Into Tomorrow’s Innovations by Rivkin, Seitel, and Fraser.
1. **Preparation.** Start obsessing over a problem. This means collect information, data, and opinions. Tell your brain to get to work.

2. **Incubation.** While you’re busy doing other things, a part of your unconscious mind is swirling. Your brain compares thoughts and funnels concepts together.

3. **Illumination.** A new and reasonably complete idea surfaces, seemingly out of nowhere.

**Brainstorming**

An article by Kate Matsudira titled *How to Come Up with Great ideas*, helps us get a better understanding about brainstorming new ideas. Think about products that you enjoy. Why do you enjoy it? Start articulating what you like about products and then try and find a pattern in understanding what makes these products great, and what’s the motivation with this product?

When you understand what motivates users, it can help you discover methods and patterns that you can apply to your ideas.

The biggest take away from brainstorming, is the quantity of ideas. That means ignore the quality of each idea, and just come up with as many ideas as you can. You can even pick a topic, and brainstorm ideas around that topic.

The next thing to think about is to listen and observe. This means, viewing people in their natural habitat can help you generate ideas. This way you can see things that could be improved. For example watching people walk by with their suitcase, think ‘how could that design be improved’.

Be curious and ask a lot of questions. This means, do you know how things really work? Think of products you use daily, do you really understand how your Wi-Fi works? Take time to really understand how things work, that way you will know where the faults are or you can get an idea on how to make something better.
Embrace more of your ideas. Talk about your ideas with other people. This is a way to have an idea grow into something great. Get your creative juices flowing to come up with an idea that can grow. Make sure that the friends you talk to are ones that will support you, rather than be closed minded and tell you all of the reasons it wouldn’t work.

**Borrowing an idea? That’s fine**

What if you can’t come up with a brand new idea? That’s fine. Borrowing an idea, and adapting it to your problem is a way that many new inventions have come to be. An example comes again from Rivikin, Seitel, and Fraser, in an example of who how Dr. Rene Laennec was looking for a way to help diagnose his patients. He was inspired to invent the stethoscope when he saw children sending signals to each other by tapping on either end of a hollow log. This means that it is a great idea to look around while going places, you never know when inspiration will hit you. However, you will first need a problem. But once you have that problem here is a way to look at it.

- Break the problem into bite-sized pieces that are easier to handle
- Work on problem solving both individually and with others
- Assume that most solutions will come from an association of ideas
- Understand that existing ideas can be modified in dozens of different ways

**Design Thinking**

Design thinking is structured into five phases. For example, the five phases in Design Thinking for Educators are discovery, interpretation, ideation, experimentation and evolution. However, you can modify the five phases to fit your needs. This information comes to us from Smaagaard’s *Design Thinking for Marketing and Entrepreneurship*. 
• Discovery: Understanding the challenge, preparing research and gathering information.

Step out of your comfort zone and explore and connect your problem(s) in areas you might not have thought about.

• Interpretation: Search for meaning and frame opportunities to establish a clear direction.

Tell stories that relate to the problem at hand, and find common themes. Challenge yourself to think about political factors, economic climate, technology factors, customer needs, and uncertainties. Explore possibilities and inspire ideas.

• Ideation: Refine ideas and come up with solutions. Encourage wild ideas while not being judgmental. Build on each other. One conversation at a time. Be visual, draw ideas because sometimes pictures speak louder than words. Go for quantity, set outrageous goals and then surpass it.

  o **Once you have found the idea you want to go with**
  
  o Select a title for the idea concept.
  
  o Capture the essence of the idea concept in one sentence.
  
  o Sketch the idea concept.
  
  o Describe how the idea concept will work.
  
  o List opportunities the idea concept will address.
  
  o List all stakeholders involved both in creating and using the idea concept.
  
  o Describe what will be learned through prototyping the idea concept

• Experimentation: Produce prototypes, graphs, diagrams, storyboards, and/or advertisement. Anything to put your idea into a tangible solution.

• Evolution: Improve on your product, service or idea. If you make it past the first round, you will get feedback and assigned a mentor. This will give you the tools to evolve your
product into a better product, service or idea. Set goals that fit inside the business plan and ask questions the whole time.

**Things to think about**

Is there a way to substitute a product and put your idea in its place? An example of this is backpacks. There is the standard backpack, but someone had a problem when it rained that their books would always get wet. Thus the waterproof backpack was invented and is the preferred backpack options in rainy states like Oregon. Or is there a way to substitute labor with technology? The possibilities for substitutes are endless.

Another thing you can do is combine products or concepts, to solve the problem. You can piece together thing that are in your life, and combine them into a new idea. This can even be combining an idea, and pairing it with a website, or an app.

When coming up with an idea, maybe think about changing the size of something to make it better. Think about phones for example, the trend used to be trying to get phones as small as possible, but then look at some cell phones now they’re huge! Or look at laptops, they are now a lot less bulky than they used to be.

When you feel like you’re stuck, look at an object and ask yourself ‘what else could this be?’ Could just a random object be useful in a way that is not automatically thought of? Think ‘what is a new way we could use this thing, as is’ and ‘how could this thing be modified to fit a new use’ (Rivkin, Seitel, Fraser 2002).

Think about what products have disappeared in your lifetime, or before your lifetime. What can you breathe new life into? What can you bring back, and make it better?
If working in a group, here are some steps to effective brainstorming once again supplied by How to Transform Your Ideas Into Today’s Innovations.

1. Invite people who want to be there
2. Build a comfortable environment
3. Make it fun
4. Keep it small
5. Aim to do it in daylight
6. Set a time limit
7. Clearly define the problem and set parameters
8. Keep it upbeat
9. Move and touch. Some people think better while walking around, and others think better with something in their hand.
10. Encourage piggybacking and ricocheting. Build ideas off of each other.
11. Record everything. Remember, your memory is not as good as you think it is.
12. Generate ideas first, judge later.

When getting around to finalizing the idea. Here are some things to consider.

1. Define the problem
2. Analyze potential causes
3. Identify possible solutions
4. Select the best solution
5. Develop an action plan
6. Implement and evaluate the results.