

WHY NOT?

How to Use Everyday Ingenuity to Solve Problems Big and Small

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The Web site for this book is at www.whynot.net.

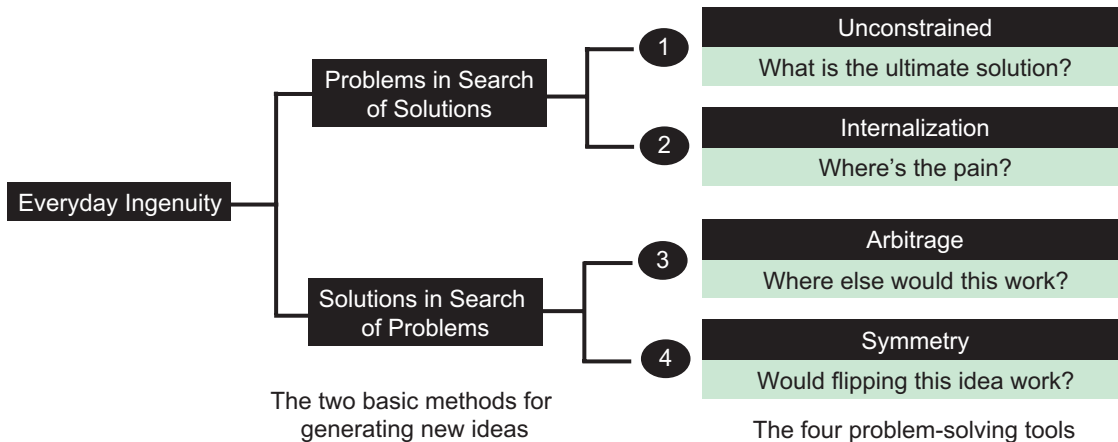
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MAIN IDEA

“The whole of science is nothing more than a refinement of everyday thinking.” – Albert Einstein

Innovation doesn't have to be as high-tech and complicated as you might suspect. Loads of very good commercial ideas can be developed and implemented which are actually simple refinements of everyday thinking. In other words, the old-fashioned style of American ingenuity centered around finding practical solutions to common problems just may not be as out of date as you think. There are loads of great solutions which are right in front of us every day, if we can just take the time and effort to notice them.

The process of generating real-world innovations can be visualized in this way:



“There is a myth of genius surrounding innovation: This is a job for rocket scientists and creativity gurus. While we don't dispute that Edison and Einstein were cut from a different cloth, if we focus on innovation outside the technology arena, it no longer looks like rocket science. Our goal is to help individuals be more creative. The trick is to give people guidance on where to look.”

– Barry Nalebuff and Ian Ayres

1. The two basic methods for generating new ideas Pages 2 - 3

There is a simple and recurrent structure to being able to “think outside the box”. Most new ideas aren't completely original in and of themselves. Instead, most new commercial innovations are a hybrid mix of problems in search of solutions or solutions in search of problems to solve. The trick lies in knowing when and how to use these two basic methodologies of innovative thinking.

2. The four problem-solving tools Pages 4 - 7

Tool#1 – Unconstrained – What is the ultimate solution?

This tool visualizes how an exceptionally rich consumer would go about solving a problem. It says that if money is no object, what would be the ultimate solution? The challenge is then to think of ways to make this solution more affordable for the masses.

Tool #2 – Internalization – Where's the pain?

This tool suggests that original ideas can come from watching what people do wrong. More often than not, this situation arises because people are given the wrong incentives. They then pursue one objective at the expense of all other equally important objectives. Find the misguided incentives and you have a chance to come up with something better.

Tool #3 – Arbitrage – Where else would this work?

Sometimes, it isn't helpful to start with a problem first. There are times when you come up with a solution first, and then think about what additional preexisting problems this solution will also fix. In these cases, discovering a better way to do something provides a solution to a problem that nobody has really taken much notice of before. By searching for new applications for these solutions, you can develop some very innovative ideas.

Tool #4 – Symmetry – Would flipping this idea work?

For every good idea, going in the opposite direction may generate an even better idea. The commercial world is full of symmetries nobody has ever thought to try. Always be on the lookout for new markets that can be harnessed by doing something that is the complete antithesis of popular thinking. With a bit of luck, your new way of doing things may actually turn out to be much better.

3. Ideas on implementation Page 8

Coming up with an innovative new idea is great, but it's only half the battle. The real value of any idea won't really come into focus unless and until it is implemented successfully. To really change anything, you'll need to sell your idea to others and get them to buy in.

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