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# In Search of “Aha” Moments that Lead to New Ideas for Your Business

**By Catherine Kaputa**

Today, there is a constant drive toward innovation – and not just from the product development folks either. In today’s companies and especially if you’re an entrepreneur, you feel the pressure not just execute well in the present but to help come up with innovative ideas to keep your business on top tomorrow.

Historically how to get innovative insights eluded scientists. Of course, we’ve all had our “Aha” moments, but some people seem to be better at coming up with innovations and creative solutions. Is there a way to cultivate an innovative mindset?

New breakthrough research using MRI and EKG technology is shedding light on Eureka moments and how they occur. [Here](#) is a link to the June 19, 2009 WSJ article summarizing the recent findings.

Here’s a top-line on what scientists now believe you can do to encourage business innovation and other types of insights:



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### **Let your mind wander.**

Archimedes had his Aha moment in the bathtub and Descartes had his while watching flies on the ceiling. Not surprising in light of new research that reveals that daydreaming is a rich environment for insights.

Previously, scientists thought that not much was happening in the brain when your mind wandered. Now, research supports just the opposite. In fact, a new brain-scanning study suggest that “our brain may be most actively engaged when our mind is wandering and we’ve actually lost track of our thoughts.” Scientists suspect that a wandering mind may catch new ideas and unexpected associations better than a methodical analysis of the facts.

### **Cede control.**

Because Eureka moments occur in the unconscious when we aren’t consciously trying to solve a problem, they are not something we can control. Most of our creative thought is the product of neurons and nerve chemistry outside our awareness and beyond our direct control. “We often assume that if we don’t notice our thoughts, they don’t exist,” says Dr. Cristoff in Vancouver, “When we don’t notice them is when we may be thinking most creatively.

### **Think positive.**

Insights and innovative ideas are more likely to occur when people are in a positive mood and open to ideas according to researchers at Drexel and Northwestern. It won’t help if you are anxious and negative about coming up with a solution.

### **Set the stage.**

Be prepared by doing your homework and studying the problem. As one scientist pointed out, “Insight favors the prepared mind.” Then let your mind



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wander. Sleep on it. (My most fruitful time for breakthroughs is early in the morning when I'm half asleep.) Take a walk. Soak in the tub. Scientists believe the big breakthroughs seem to come out of nowhere when we're doing something else.

**Pay attention when the lightbulb goes off.**

Interestingly, a "lightbulb" does go off in the mind when you come up with an insight. Studies show that there is "a distinctive burst of gamma waves bursting out from the brain's right hemisphere that is involved in handling associations and assembling elements of a problem." The only difference between you and I and innovative business people is that they have the courage to entertain these bursts of insight.

See if you can set aside some time to let your mind wander toward insight and innovation. And let me know how you get your innovative ideas.