



The Deliberate Creative Podcast with Amy Climer Transcript for Episode #005: Creative Problem Solving Stage 2 - Ideate

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Amy Climer: In today's episode, you're going to learn new techniques for coming up with lots of ideas.

Welcome to [episode #5](#) of the Deliberate Creative Podcast. On today's episode, we're going to talk about the second stage of the Creative Problem Solving Process, which is the Ideate Stage. First, I want to share with you a personal story. I record the Deliberate Creative Podcast ahead of time and set it all up. It's not recorded live as you probably already know. Earlier today, I recorded the entire episode and transferred the file to my computer only to realize I didn't plug in the mic! I had a 45-minute file of complete silence. It was quite entertaining. So here we are, round two. Hopefully, this will be a good one and I'm excited because I love the Ideation Stage.

In the previous episode, we went through the Clarify Stage of the Creative Problem Solving Process, which is the first step to generating and coming up with innovative ideas and innovative solutions. If you followed along, you should have a challenge statement at this point and you're ready to generate lots of ideas to come up with an innovative solution. In this episode, I'm going to explain three different techniques to generate ideas and we're going to move beyond that typical brainstorming process. In the end, you'll have dozens, if not hundreds, of new ideas. To help you move to this process, I have put together a free workbook for you all and you can download that workbook at ClimerConsulting.com/005. All right, are you all ready? Let's ideate!

The first thing you need before diving into an ideation session is you're going to need a few supplies. You'll need these supplies if you're generating the ideas alone or if you're with a team. We're going to talk through which supplies you need for which situation. If you're working alone, you need lots of Post-it notes. You can just use the typical 3 x 3-inch, any color, it doesn't matter. If you don't have access to Post-it notes, you could just use a bunch of scrap paper, maybe take some regular paper and just cut it into smaller pieces so you don't have to use as much, but you're going to want a lot of small pieces of paper.





You also want to just have several sheets of regular computer paper, just some blank paper for doodling. They could be scrap paper. If one side is used, that's okay but you just want to have several sheets ready or maybe a notebook. You also want to have some markers and in this case, the markers I'm talking about are fine point Sharpies. They work well or something where you could write on a Post-it note. Not the really big fat markers but also not the really skinny ones, something in between there. Fine point Sharpies works well.

You're also going to need a source of images. I recommend buying a deck of Climer Cards, but then again I'm biased because I created this deck of cards. I'll talk about those in a little bit. A deck of Climer Cards works really well. Also, you could look at cutting images out of a magazine, if you happen to have a lot of postcards, that's a great source, just something where you can spread a bunch of images out on a table. I'll talk more about that as we get to that point. If you're working in a group, you're going to need all the same supplies I just mentioned. You want lots of Post-it notes and in this case, I would plan for about 100+ Post-it notes per person. Also several sheets of blank paper per person again just for doodling and everybody needs their own marker. You also need flip charts or lots of dry erase board space, somewhere you can put those Post-it notes on, but also something where you could write on as well. For the flip charts or the dry erase board, it probably goes without saying, you're going to need markers to write on them.

Let me tell you about my favorite flip chart markers, really simple, Mr. Sketch scented markers. They seem to last really long time. They have nice bright colors. Sharpie also makes some really nice flip chart markers that are specific to flip charts and they don't bleed through. There are a lot of bad markers out there and there are some very popular brands that really barely last at all. I have to kind of wonder, "How did they even keep selling this product" because after you use it for one or two sessions, they are dried out and they are not writing well. Anyway, just a little pro tip, when you have a marker dry out, throw it away right away. I'm always sort of surprised when people are up there and they are writing with their marker and it's not working very well so they put it down and they pick up another marker but then two hours later, they pick up that messed up marker again. It's like, "Well, just throw it away. It eliminates the problem."

Unless you happen to have these fancy refillable Neuland markers, those are really nice. They are very expensive in the United States. They are made in Germany and so the shipping to the US makes them quite expensive, but if you live in Europe, they might be a little bit more reasonable. If you can get your hands on some Neuland markers, those are awesome. Anyway,



the point is, you want some decent markers for your flip chart or your dry erase boards. Finally, you also need a source or images such as images cut out of magazines, Climer Cards, your postcard collection, whatever. You'll need those for working with a group too.

Hopefully you have all your supplies gathered together. The next thing you're going to do is you're going to write out your challenge statement nice and big so that everybody can see it. If you're working alone, just write this on a piece of computer paper with a nice big marker, put that in the middle of your table so that you can read it. If you're working with a group, post this up on top of a flip chart or at the top of the dry erase board so that everybody can see it throughout the day. That's really important because people will forget, "What exactly was our goal again?" You want to keep that visual for everybody.

As you dive into coming up with ideas, if you're working with a group, you want to review with them the Divergent Thinking Guidelines. I really like to have these written out on a flip chart paper, set up on the side of the room so that people can refer to them throughout the day. It's hard for us to keep a lot of things in our head at the same time so I'm a big fan of just make it visual, make it easy for people. There are four rules that the group will need to follow while they are coming up with ideas. The first is to Suspend Judgment. Assure everyone that you will be able to judge the ideas later. Don't worry, just because an idea comes up and it might be a really bad idea or completely ridiculous or maybe it costs \$1 million and we could never do it, don't worry. Just let it go.

There will be time later where you'll get to judge that idea but during the divergent thinking phase of the ideation process, you're just suspending judgment and letting those ideas flow freely. The second rule is Seek Wild Ideas. We want the silly, the goofy, the crazy, the outlandish. We want all those ideas in the mix. The reason for that is rule #3, which is Combine and Build on Ideas. Maybe idea #4 and idea #8, somebody looks at both of them and says, "Oh, what if we combine both of those ideas and then we do blah, blah, blah," or perhaps an idea gets thrown out and somebody says, "Oh yes, what if we also did..." and they are building on that idea. That is encouraged. Morph and change the ideas as you go along into new ideas.

The fourth rule is you want to Go for Quantity. Quantity leads to quality. The more ideas you can get, the better. If you're working individually, I would aim for a few dozen ideas. If you're working with a group, I would aim for a few hundred. In three hours, can you get 300 ideas? I've done it before with a group. It's very realistic. You want to go for quantity. Just think of it, if you have 300 ideas and 10% of those ideas are good, that's 30 really good ideas that you



didn't have three hours ago. I would say that's worth three hours of time. Quantity leads to quality so go big.

You have your supplies, you've talked through the Divergent Thinking Guidelines, and now we're going to dive into the first process you're going to use, the first technique. This is just a basic brain dump. This is where you're going to start generating the ideas. Anything that comes to your head, you're going to get those initial ideas down on paper. If you're working alone, I would say spend about 10 minutes and write down your ideas as fast as you can. You're going to write down one idea per Post-it note using a thin marker. The reason for the marker is significant. You can only write so much with a marker on a Post-it note. If I get out a pen, a ballpoint pen, I can write a lot more detail on that Post-it note but I don't want that much detail at this point. I'm just trying to get the ideas down to the high level and put them up there.

The nice thing about using a marker with a group is then people can see them. They could read the ideas from a fair distance away whereas if it's a ballpoint pen, you got to get up pretty close within a couple of feet to be able to read what it says, so one idea per Post-it note. The other thing that's nice about the Post-it notes is then later you can easily sort and cluster your ideas, which we'll talk about later in the episode. If you're in a group, you're going to do the same process. Just as fast as you can, have people write down ideas, one idea per Post-it note but with a group, we need a clear way to share those ideas so that everybody hears all the ideas. Here's what you're going to do.

There are a couple different techniques and I'll explain them both. First is give people three to four minutes to just start quietly writing ideas down. This is really nice especially those introverts that just want to quietly think and process. Give them a few minutes to write those ideas down. It's also nice to give people a chance to come up with ideas without listening to other people. You just write in those ideas down and then after you've noticed, okay, everybody seems to have 2-4 ideas, 2-4 Post-it notes, then you're going to start sharing the ideas one at a time and posting those ideas in a shared place.

There are a couple of different ways to share them. One is if you have no qualms at all about anonymity and you're just like, "Yup, it's totally fine if people know where the ideas came from," then as somebody writes on an idea, they hold up their Post-it note and they read their idea out, they pass it to the facilitator. The facilitator puts it on the wall or maybe they go up and put it on the wall themselves. That works making sure that everybody's ideas are verbally heard. However, that doesn't really allow for much anonymity and so if you have a group where you



just want to make sure that people can freely dump ideas and not being afraid of having the idea connected to them then you're going to do a similar process where after everybody writes down ideas, they just start putting them up on the wall.

As the ideas are put up, you could, as a facilitator, read those ideas out loud or you could ask the group to come up and just quietly read through them or ask somebody in the group to just read a bunch of them and take turns reading them. You want to again make sure that those ideas are heard by everybody or read by everybody. As they are listening to ideas or as they are reading them, let them keep coming up with more ideas. You never want to stop that ideation process while we're in this phase. Keep going through this method of just brain dumping. Whatever comes to your mind until it seems like the ideas are really slowing down, and when the ideas start to slow down, then you can transition into the next technique.

Before we talk about the next technique, I want to explain this concept of an idea bucket. This really helps me think about why we use multiple techniques in coming up with different ideas. I want you to imagine a bucket. Your goal is to fill this bucket with ideas. Imagine the bucket is divided into three horizontal thirds. On the bottom of the bucket, these are your initial ideas. These are the really familiar ideas. They are easy to generate. That is usually what comes out in that first stage, that brain dump stage. I know a lot of listeners have situations where they need to do some marketing of their products or of their services so we're going to use the marketing example through the rest of this episode.

I think of like the first third of these ideas might be just really generic like, "Oh, we could post more in social media. We could start a blog. We could start a podcast." These are pretty common general ideas. They are not bad ideas at all. They are just not wildly creative. Anyway, you get those first third out. The second third in the idea bucket: these are the silly, wild ideas. I'll give some more examples later as we go on but these are just the outlandish, crazy ideas, maybe they are going to cost \$1 million. It might even be something that's illegal. It doesn't matter. You're just going to get those ideas out.

Again, just because an idea is mentioned doesn't mean it's actually going to be done. You get these silly ideas out and then the 3rd third of the bucket tends to be these breakthrough thinking ideas. These are what we're aiming for. The way you get to those breakthrough ideas is to keep going. When you feel like, "I don't know. I can't really think of anything else," keep going. I'm going to give you some techniques to help with that process.



The next two techniques that I'm going to explain to you both involve using Climer Cards or another similar type of tool. Let me explain what Climer Cards are. They are just a small deck of cards. They look like playing cards. There are 52 images in there, 52 cards. Each of the 52 cards has an image on it that's actually a painting, a watercolor painting that I've done. The images were specifically chosen for their metaphoric value. For example, there's a giraffe, there are some flowers, a telephone. There are birds on a wire. There's a car. There's an image of some thread. There's a card of a sewing machine, just all sorts of these different images and there's hundreds of ways to use these cards.

They are specifically designed to be used for creativity, idea generation, or even clarifying your problem. It can also be used for team development. What has been really cool, because these were developed in 2012, people have emailed me with all these different ways that they have invented to use Climer Cards, which I absolutely love. If you're listening to this and you've invented a new way to use them, send me an email. I'd love to hear about it. One of these days, I'm going to write a full length book about Climer Cards but in the meantime, I have a free ebook for you. It's a 12-page book that has a number of different tools and techniques that you can use with Climer Cards. You can get that book and order a deck of cards at ClimerCards.com. Each deck is only \$20 but at the very end of the episode, I'm going to tell you how you can win a free set of Climer Cards. Stay tuned for that.

I'm going to walk you through two more techniques and both will use Climer Cards or something else. You don't have to have those cards. You can use, like I said before, magazines, your postcard collection, whatever. I'm going to use this example. I mentioned earlier, we have a number of people who have marketing challenges. There's one organization I'm thinking of in particular where they have like these ropes course team building type of program. Their challenge statement is "What are all the ways we could attract more clients to our teambuilding program?" I'm going to use that example in the next two techniques.

The next technique is called Unrelated Detour. What you're going to do is you're going to take your deck of Climer Cards and just randomly draw one. I happened to draw the sewing machine. If you don't have a deck of Climer Cards, just look around the room and randomly select an object. It could be a stapler, box of Kleenex, broom that is sitting in the corner, whatever it is, randomly grab an item, bring that to the group, and then on a piece of scrap paper, you're going to, as a group, list out all the attributes of that item. For instance the sewing machine that I have selected, some of the attributes are: it creates stitches. It can be used to connect two or more things together. It could be portable. It could be programmed especially if



you have one of those fancy new ones. It works with fabric and thread. It uses needles. A sewing machine needs to be cleaned regularly in order to work well. Those are a few attributes and maybe aim for 10 or 15 attributes of the item that you've selected.

You're then going to look at that list of attributes and you're going to use that list to spark new ideas. For instance, again my challenge is how to attract more clients to our program, what is a solution that might involve needles? That's getting a little awkward - needles with clients - but you might think of, there's the obvious sewing machine needle of course. There's even medical needle or maybe a tattoo needle. The tattoo needle, that makes me think of what if we have these temporary tattoos of our logo and at the end of the program, everybody got a tattoo and it will just be a fun way for them to then share about their experience at the dinner table with their family. One thing leads to the other.

Here are some other questions you might ask - what idea might we generate that would be portable? What ideas would involve connecting two things together? How could thread help solve our problem? That one sparks this idea of, what if I set up this activity where I'm out on the high ropes course. For those who don't know what a high ropes course is, it's like this big obstacle course usually about 20-30 ft in the air. People are wearing harness and a helmet, there are ropes involved. They are climbing and there are safety systems in place so that it's actually much safer than driving, to be honest.

Anyway, what if you set up this technique or this separate activity where everybody got a 12-inch square of fabric, you hang the squares up in the ropes course and they had to go up and get their squares. While they are up there, each person had to stitch their square to somebody else's square. Everybody brought these squares all to one location on the course and at the end of the day, you had this pieced quilt. Who knows if you're actually going to use that idea? It doesn't matter. By the way, that idea is out there. If you want to go and try and implement it, that would be awesome. Send me a photo. You get the idea, we're coming up with these crazy, silly, outlandish ideas and maybe that will spark another idea.

Unrelated Detour is about listing attributes of an object and then using those attributes to spark new ideas. I would say spend 20, 30, 45 minutes on this depending on the energy in the group. After you do this for sewing machine. Spend 10-15 minutes on that. Pick another card. The next card I've picked up here is the padlock. There's a padlock connecting some chains together. Great. Write out the attributes of the padlock. There's another one here of a fishing pole and a fish on the end of it. You get the idea. Look around the space that you're in and



come up with a different object and list the attributes. Do this 3-4 times and see what you get, and hopefully, you'll generate some pretty funky, crazy, fun ideas.

The next technique we're going to use is Forced Connections. This is similar to the last one. There are just some slight differences. This time, you're going to take the deck of cards and you're going to spread them all out on the table. You're going to use the images as sources of inspiration for more ideas. Again looking at that same challenge statement – what are all the ways we can attract more clients to our program. I'm looking at all the cards and one of the cards that jumps out to me is the elephant. That sparks an idea for me. What if you did some sort of collaboration with the circus?

I happen to live in Madison, Wisconsin and about an hour north of us, in Baraboo, Wisconsin, is the Circus World Museum. I know that they have elephants there. What if you came up with some sort of team building program where you're doing something with the elephants, where the team got to interact with the elephants? What if you brought the elephants to the ropes course and the way that people got up on the ropes course is they climbed on top of the elephant and then from there stepped on the ropes course. What if once you climbed up the ropes course, the elephant handed you something with his trunk that would help you continue on your journey? What if you used all of these experiences and you have this huge social media campaign and you're connecting the ropes course to the circus, and talking about the team, the importance of teams in the circus. You can go on and on and on, but the idea is to use these cards to spark something else.

Now who knows again if you're actually going to have an elephant come to your ropes course? By the way, if anybody has done that, please tell me because that is super cool, but this idea of, "Oh, could we collaborate with some different people that might help bring some more clients to our team building program?" That's Forced Connections. I would say spend, I don't know, 20, 30, 45 minutes again on the Forced Connections tool and sort of see what the energy is, see where that takes you. By now, you should have lots of ideas and in fact, it might even be a bit overwhelming because you have so many ideas. If you're working alone, hopefully you have 50-75 ideas. If you're working with other people, hopefully you have 200-300 ideas.

Now we're going to move away from the divergent thinking and we're going to move into convergent thinking. This is where we start evaluating and selecting the best ideas that we will take into the next phase of the Creative Problem Solving Process. First, I want to review the convergent thinking guidelines. Just like divergent thinking, there are some specific rules that



are very helpful to follow. The first is Be Deliberate. Be conscientious and thoughtful about what you're selecting about the way you're handling the ideas. The second is to Check the Objectives. It could be that during the divergent thinking phase, you were all over the place and you kind of got off track a little bit, that's fine. That's part of the process. But now, we want to check our objectives and make sure, "Okay, is this an idea actually related to bringing in new clients or is this something completely different and we want to maybe set it aside for something else. We're just going to check the objectives.

The third and the fourth are connected. You're going to Improve the Ideas and Be Affirmative. Sometimes I think it's easy to look at the ideas and just start chucking them out. You'll be like, "Nope, that one won't work. That one won't work," but instead, you're going to look at the ideas and you'll be like, "How can I improve that idea to actually make it work?" In that regard, you're being affirmative with the ideas. The fifth thing is Consider Novelty. If the whole idea with this, the whole purpose of this process is to be creative and innovative, then look at what are the ideas that are really different, unique, and novel. Not that the other ones aren't any good. It's just maybe those aren't the ones you're going to focus on right now.

You have all these ideas. You've reviewed the convergent thinking guidelines and now we're going to cluster the like ideas. You're going to take the ideas that are similar to each other and you're going to put them into groups. You might have anywhere from four clusters to maybe 10 clusters. There's not a set number that's ideal but at the same time, 30 clusters might be too many to focus on all at once. See if you can get down to 4-10 different clusters. For instance, if you again are looking at marketing or bringing in new clients, there's probably a cluster that involves social media, maybe another cluster that involves your website. Maybe those are the same cluster, maybe they are different. It kind of depends on how many ideas you have for each of those.

Maybe you have another cluster that involves collaboration with some other organizations. You're going to look at all the hundreds of ideas you have and then you're going to try to cluster them. You could do this a couple of different ways. If you have a small team that's working together, have them all cluster as a group, just everyone crowd around and move your Post-it notes around. If you have a really large team, even if you have, say, 12 people, you might only need 3-4 to actually do the clustering and then they can just do a quick check-in with everybody else. "Hey, does this look good to you all?" Having all 12 people cluster can be a little challenging.



The other thing you're going to do once you cluster the ideas is you want to develop some criteria. This may be something you already did in the Clarify Stage, which is great, but if not, you're going to develop some criteria of how are we going to decide which of these ideas are the best ones. You just want 3-5 pieces of criteria. For instance, one piece of criteria might be, "We have a budget, we have a limited budget." If the idea is going to cost \$1 million, well, that's not the idea that we're going to select.

Come up with 3-4, maybe five pieces of criteria that you're going to judge these ideas against. Put those criteria visually up on the wall or on the middle of the table for everybody to see and now the next thing is you want to think about who decides which ideas we use? Sometimes you have a situation where even though a team is working on the ideas, you have only one or two people that are actually going to make the final decision. That is completely okay as long as you're upfront about that with your team.

There's nothing more demoralizing than having the team come up with ideas, having the team select the best ideas that they think are most appropriate, and then have somebody else say, "Oh, yeah, you all actually don't get to decide the ideas. We're going to do that for you." That's totally fine to tell the team. Just tell them before they have selected the best ideas. If you do have those one or two people that are making the decision, have them sort through the ideas and select the best one. It's actually very helpful if they are part of the process, either as a participant or just as a listener in that divergent thinking phase.

Let's say that the whole team gets to make the decision and they all have essentially an equal say in what ideas are selected, then you can use something called the Dot Voting System. You can give everybody in your group some little stickers, like little round stickers, little dots, and I would say give everybody about four or five dots depending on how many ideas you have. Each person gets to vote with their dots. Let's say you have five ideas. Think of this as you have \$1 to spend and each of those dots represents 20¢. You can give 20¢, one dot, to five different ideas or if you really love an idea and you really want it to happen, you can put all five dots there, three dots, or whatever you want. You don't have to necessarily just vote one dot per item.

Once everybody has voted, you can do a scan and decide, "Okay, it looks like we have these 3-5 different ideas that we want to further develop. Important note here is that you're not making a decision about which ideas to implement. You're making a decision about which ideas to further develop. From those developed ideas, of course, one or more of them will be implemented but it could be an idea where you're like, "Well, this could be kind of cool but I'm



not really sure what this would look like so I'm curious to explore this more. I'm going to vote for this idea."

If you're working by yourself, you could use the Dot Voting System if you wanted or even just a put little marker circle next to your favorite ideas, or you can just pick one, two, or three. The goal at the end of the Ideation Stage is that you have maybe 2-4 ideas that you want to further develop and you're curious about possibly implementing. You're going to use those few ideas to move into the development stage, which we're going to talk about in the next episode.

Let's just have a quick summary here. We have talked about a lot today. The main thing is I presented to you three different ways to generate ideas. There's the Brain Dump, Unrelated Detours, and Forced Connections. All of these are in that workbook that you can download for free in the show notes. We also looked at important factors for converging your ideas into the top ones and gave you that technique of the Dot Voting and the clumping of sorting ideas. In the last couple of episodes, I've given you a weekly challenge at the end of the episode. I'm going to do that the same today and try to do that as we move forward. I think that it seems like some of you are really enjoying that.

The weekly challenge this week: generate lots of ideas for your problem. Whatever problem you came up with last week, your goal this week is to generate as many ideas as possible. That brings to a point that you don't have to do all these activities at the same time. In fact, it actually can work really well to do one activity per day. Sometimes that time that you have in between activities and in between ideation can help you generate even more ideas. Researchers call that incubation. That incubation just makes me think of like a little egg in an incubator. It's cooking and eventually, it hatches. Let the ideas incubate in your subconscious if you have the opportunity, if you have the time to do that. It can be very powerful.

All right, some resources for you all. The workbook is listed in the show notes, which is ClimerConsulting.com/005. You can also order a deck of Climer Cards at ClimerCards.com. You can go there. At ClimerCards.com, you can also get the free ebook that has a list of different techniques on how to use the cards. I'll put all these in the show notes. I mentioned earlier in the episode that there is a way you can win a free deck of Climer Cards. Starting today, June 25th, I am launching an iTunes review contest. Here's how this works. Any review that is under the Deliberate Creative Podcast in iTunes by Sunday, July 12th, by the end of the day, will be eligible to be randomly selected to get a free deck of Climer Cards. I'm going to give away two



decks so there will be two winners. I'll just take all the reviews, randomly draw a number and then that person will get a free deck of cards. I'll mail them to you.

On top of that, I'm offering a free coaching package to the person that writes the best review for the Deliberate Creative Podcast. The free coaching package includes three 45-minute coaching sessions. You can use those coaching sessions really however you want. We'll talk through some ways to see what's the best use of your time. The idea is to help you become more creative in your own life and we can also focus on how you can lead a team to be more creative and innovative. If you want to explore how you would better facilitate a team, we can talk about that. There are a lot of flexibility and freedom but basically, you get 45 minutes of my time three times, three coaching sessions. If you want more information on any of this, more details, You can head over to the show notes, again, that's www.ClimerConsulting.com/005 and the winners will be announced from the July 16th podcast and on the Climer Consulting website.

I hope you all participate. I absolutely love reading the reviews. I read every single one of them and they really motivate me. They get me excited and they also help other people figure out if this podcast is a good one for them to listen to. The reviews are really valuable and I hope you'll consider submitting your review. There will be directions on how to do that in the show notes but you can also just go right to iTunes, go to the Deliberate Creative Podcast, and click on reviews.

All right, y'all, have a great week. Shoot me an email if you have any questions about generating ideas. I'll be happy to talk with you about it. Okay, talk to you later. Bye.