

Get Fresh: How to Solve Wicked Problems by Scrapping Sameness



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“Problems cannot be solved by thinking within the framework in which they were created.” – Albert Einstein

This week I’ve been reading *Sticky Wisdom: How to Start a Creative Revolution at Work*. The first chapter of the book explores what the authors refer to as “the first law of creativity.” The essence of this law is that “the quality and uniqueness of stimulus in has a direct impact on the quality and uniqueness of ideas out.” The chapter offers tips for getting beyond conventional wisdom by getting ‘fresh.’

During NRM [consulting engagements](#) we occasionally encounter teams whose risk management programs are either stalled or in slow motion. In some cases, our diagnosis is that the client team is approaching complex risk issues with the same set of tools and approaches they use to tackle simpler challenges. Think risk registers and heat maps! We wrote about ways to get unstuck in [“Don’t Get Stuck in a Rut: Trust Your Gut.”](#) We also offered up ideas to update useless risk registers in [“Revamp Your Risk Register.”](#)

The authors of *Sticky Wisdom* offer up an interesting list of actions to inject “freshness” into your work. Drawn from their 10-item list of “topping up the freshness store cupboard,” here’s our version of 12 timely tips to freshen up your approach to risk.

Freshen Up your Approach to Risk

1. **Take a different route.** Take a new form of transport to work next week or plot a route you’ve never taken. Even if it takes longer!
2. **Make a new friend.** Dive into a magazine or newspaper or listen to a radio station or watch a TV program that you wouldn’t normally.
3. **Lunch with a new crowd.** Plan a monthly lunch with people from other parts of your organization—or affiliated organizations—that you don’t usually consult. Invite each attendee to talk about a tough issue they’re working on; invite the group’s perspective on your toughest risk issue.
4. **Relocate.** Resolve to get away and out of your normal environment for at least a half a day a week. Did you know that at least 70% of what you think is the result of what’s around you? Change your frame by mixing up the environment.
5. **Ask for help.** Ask your family (especially kids) to help solve a problem you’re working on.
6. **Double down.** Allocate twice as much time as you normally would to solving a problem. Make a

commitment to have at least three solutions before you choose one.

7. **Block and tackle.** Block out “freshness time” for you and your team once a month. Go somewhere you wouldn’t normally go together or do an activity you wouldn’t ordinarily do.
8. **Stroll and ponder.** Take a walk in the park during office hours. Change the pace of your thinking. Take time to ponder as you wander.
9. **Tune in.** Listen to everything on today’s music charts. Do you know who’s number one at the moment? What was surprising?
10. **Reinvent and evolve.** Reinvent your job role at least once a year, and make sure you’re including ambitious learning goals.
11. **Double-down on diversity.** Add a new perspective to risk deliberations this month and do the same next month. Wondering who wants to talk about the risks facing your nonprofit? Send a compelling invite to a wide audience. Wondering who’s missing? Ask: whose perspective is incredibly important to this discussion but missing from the team?
12. **Stop short.** Instead of adding to your already voluminous list of risks, shorten it up. Identify the top three issues your team will work on this month; archive the rest.

We all need help freshening up our routine, every now and again. Recently I’ve been intrigued by the many companies offering pre-measured, fresh-to-you meal subscription packages. I’ve spent many after-work hours trying to find inspiration at the nearest grocery store. By the time I get home I’ve lost interest in the assortment of ingredients that were appealing an hour ago. The subscription meal plans offer an interesting alternative to the traditional approach for making dinner; instead of winging it and hoping for the best, follow the proven recipe and enjoy dinner in 30 minutes. The idea of a meal kit may seem to run counter to the idea of stimulating creativity. But for me it changes my focus from shopping to cooking.

Preparing a meal reminds us that when seemingly disparate raw ingredients are mixed and integrated through heat, they become something uniquely different in flavor and texture. Cooking is a creative act, almost as nourishing as the food itself, in the feeling of accomplishment it can generate. Many people who are short on time, and otherwise might order takeout or microwave a frozen entrée, are finding the convenience of a meal kit brings them back into the kitchen. Cooking meals I thought too difficult or time consuming brings me more satisfaction than the task of shopping for a recipe—one I might otherwise become too overwhelmed to actually cook when I get home from the grocery store.

On the other hand, when there’s time, you may love shopping for ingredients, especially if there’s a good farmer’s market nearby. It’s all in the attitude (and change in perception) you create by changing things up—especially if it contradicts conventional wisdom. How do you plan to contradict conventional wisdom this week and freshen up your approach?

Melanie Lockwood Herman is Executive Director of the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. Melanie’s intuition and creativity shine through in her culinary skills, and her hunger for risk management wisdom. Melanie welcomes you to share your insights and resolutions based on this article at 703.777.3504 or Melanie@nonprofitrisk.org.