

## Uncover Great Concepts

By [GLORIA LAU](#), Posted 3/22/2011 01:43 PM ET

You've been doing well for a while at work, but that next promotion doesn't seem to be coming. What can you do to continue your ascent? "New ideas will take you further," Andy Boynton, dean of the Carroll School of Management at Boston College, told IBD. "You're associated with the quality of your ideas — when you propose changes or different ways to approach problem solving."

How and where do you find new ideas? He says it's not a matter of genius, but about developing the right habits.

- **Put them on trial.** "Test your ideas early and often," said Boynton, co-author of "The Idea Hunter." "Never sit on them. Let yourself fail frequently in a controlled setting. Learn from (mistakes) and try again."

Take Thomas Edison, a famous inventor by the late 1800s. When journalists asked how he achieved success, he led them outside to a pile of garbage, the result of all his experiments. "Nothing is more valuable than testing ideas," said Howard Weinberg, a principal at Deloitte Consulting in New York. "You can test ideas in conversations with experts, friends, colleagues, and you almost always get valuable feedback."

Weinberg, who leads Deloitte's growth and innovation strategy practice, advises writing down new proposals.

"Put down your idea in three sentences or draw a diagram," he said. "Make it concrete. People can't test an idea unless it's down."

- **Manage risk.** If you wait until the end of your project to unveil your conclusions, you won't know if your answer is on target until it may be too late, Boynton says. Reveal early, seek feedback from experts and calibrate your solution.

- **Seek new outlooks.** "If you're an investment banker hanging out with bankers all day, you're just cycling the same ideas over and over again," Boynton said.

Instead, schedule lunch meetings with people outside your business once or twice a month. Go to each event with a purpose. Ask for opinions on the issues you're facing.

"Get their perspective on all sorts of things," he said. "What do they do in their organizations? What do their customers care about?"

- **Open your mind.** Look for lessons in other fields.

Warren Buffett knew early on that he wanted to be a great investor. He was a baseball fan, so he studied Ted Williams, the great hitter.

"Williams systematically divided home plate into 40 blocks," Boynton said. "He only swung at the middle spaces, where he had the greatest chance for success. Buffett decided to do the same — to only consider investments in the middle. He doesn't invest in any technology he doesn't understand."

- **Set aside time.** "Invest in your own future by selling yourself the best hour of the day for reflection and idea hunting," Boynton said. "Don't wait until the end of the day when you're exhausted."

Read often and mull over what you've learned each week.

- **Map the flow.** Figure out how good ideas enter your organization and how value gets added to them as they move from concept to moneymaking products.

"A lot of times good ideas die," Boynton said. "They don't go anywhere. They're often carried by people no one pays attention to. It's worth thinking about if you're a manager: Who can move good ideas?"