

Pure Invention

by Matt Alt

A printable to-do list of the most effective habits from this book. Check one off each day you do it.

MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT SUN

- 01 Find one 'obvious' problem in your daily life and question why it exists**
What do you do every day without thinking? Why do you do it that way? Is it actually the best way, or just the way it's always been? Pure invention starts with challenging the obvious. Spend 10 minutes documenting one habit or process you take for granted. Could it be reimaged? What if you approached it from scratch?
MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT SUN

- 02 Practice 'imagine worse' thinking**
Before imagining something better, imagine something worse. This flips your creative perspective. Instead of 'how do I improve X?', ask 'how could X become more frustrating?' This absurdist thinking breaks you out of incremental improvement and into radical reimagining. Try this with a tool, a process, or a design you use
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- 03 Learn the history of one invention you use daily**
Pick something you use automatically—a smartphone, a chair, earbuds, a game controller. Research why it was invented, who invented it, and what problems it solved. Understanding the 'why' of an invention teaches you how constraints led to creativity. You'll see the human reasoning behind the design.
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- 04 Embrace a constraint for 30 days**
Post-WWII Japan turned scarcity into creativity. Your challenge: choose one artificial constraint (write only on paper, use only 5 colors, create with only recycled materials) and work within it for a month. Track how the constraint forces unexpected creative solutions. This is how pure invention happens.
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- 05 Run a 'sketch storm' with collaborators**
Gather 3-5 people and choose a mundane object (a door, a pencil, a cup). Everyone sketches 10 different ways that object could exist. Don't judge, just create variations. After 15 minutes, discuss what you found. This exercise shows how constraint + collaboration + quantity leads to unexpected innovations.
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- 06 Prototype something this week**
Don't just ideate—make something. It can be terrible. It can be wrong. But building forces you to solve real problems that thinking alone never reveals. Following Matt Alt's themes: the gap between idea and invention is action. What will you build this week?