
A FREE SAMPLER

10 Creativity Exercises for Busy Leaders

A free sampler from *Unlocking Creativity:*
84 Exercises for Inspired Thinking

ARSALAN KHAN

arsalankhan.com

HOW TO USE THIS SAMPLER

Creativity is a discipline, not a personality trait.

Here's the uncomfortable truth about creative thinking: most leaders treat it as a personality trait — you either have it or you don't. That's wrong. Creative thinking is a discipline: a set of repeatable moves you practice until they become reflex, the same way you practice reading a balance sheet or running a meeting.

The leaders who consistently make the best calls aren't the most brilliant people in the room. They're the ones with the most options in the room — and options are a trainable skill.

This sampler gives you ten of the 84 guided exercises from my book *Unlocking Creativity*. Each one takes fifteen minutes or less. Do one per week, in order — they build on each other — and do them in writing, not in your head. Thinking feels like concluding; writing is concluding.

Ten weeks from now you won't just have ten new tools. You'll have the habit that matters most: generating options before you commit. That's what this book is really about — and that's what the full 84 exercises will drill into muscle memory.

- **One per week.** Ten exercises, ten weeks, three stages — they build on each other: first expand your thinking, then turn problems into opportunities, then decide and execute.
- **Fifteen minutes max.** If it takes longer, you're overthinking it.
- **In writing.** Thinking feels like concluding; writing is concluding.

WEEK 1 · STAGE 1 · EXPAND YOUR THINKING · EXERCISE 1 OF 10

The Ten-Option Rule

Most bad decisions aren't made from bad data — they're made from a short list. The first plausible answer wins because generating alternatives feels like delay. Force the list longer, and better decisions usually follow.

Try this:

Take one decision you're facing this week. Write down ten genuinely different options before you allow yourself to pick one — including two you think are absurd. Then choose. Notice how the tenth option changes the first nine.

YOUR TURN

Which option surprised you most?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

WEEK 2 · STAGE 1 · EXPAND YOUR THINKING · EXERCISE 2 OF 10

Make It a Method

Great problem-solvers don't rely on inspiration; they run a process. A repeatable method beats a brilliant moment because it works on your worst day, not just your best one. Write down the steps you take when you solve something well — that's the beginning of your method.

Try this:

Document your last three good decisions: what did you actually do, in order? Distill the common steps into a five-step checklist, and run your next decision through it on paper.

YOUR TURN

What step do you always skip under pressure?

WEEK 3 · STAGE 1 · EXPAND YOUR THINKING · EXERCISE 3 OF 10

The Constraint Box

Unlimited freedom doesn't produce creativity — it produces paralysis. Constraints are the walls a good idea bounces off of. Give a problem a smaller box — less budget, less time, fewer people — and watch the interesting options appear. For example: a \$2M transformation initiative, re-briefed at \$1M with the outcome unchanged — what survives the cut is usually the real strategy.

Try this:

Pick a stalled initiative and re-brief it with one brutal constraint: half the budget, or half the timeline. Write down the three ideas that only exist inside that box.

YOUR TURN

What idea only exists inside the smaller box?

WEEK 4 · STAGE 2 · TURN PROBLEMS INTO OPPORTUNITIES · EXERCISE 4 OF 10

Invent What's Missing

Innovation usually starts as a complaint: “why doesn't this exist?” Train yourself to hear complaints — yours and your customers' — as invention briefs. Every annoyance you tolerate is a product nobody built yet.

Try this:

List five things that annoyed you at work this week. For each, finish the sentence: “Someone should invent ____ that ____.” Circle the one you'd actually pay for.

YOUR TURN

Which annoyance would you actually pay to fix?

WEEK 5 · STAGE 2 · TURN PROBLEMS INTO OPPORTUNITIES · EXERCISE 5 OF 10

Complaint → Prototype

Ideas are cheap; the gap between “someone should” and “I built” is where value lives. A prototype doesn't need to be a product — it can be a sketch, a one-page mock, a ten-slide story. Make the idea tangible and it starts attracting help.

Try this:

Take your circled idea from last week. Sketch the ugliest possible version in fifteen minutes — a drawing, a paragraph, a rough outline. (Want the full workout? Give it a full hour, then show it to one person and write down their first three reactions.)

YOUR TURN

What did your one person react to first?

WEEK 6 · STAGE 3 · DECIDE AND EXECUTE · EXERCISE 6 OF 10

The Crossroads Memo

The hardest decisions aren't between good and bad — they're between two good paths with incomplete information. Ambiguity paralyzes because we wait for certainty that never arrives. Write the decision down and the fog starts to lift.

Try this:

Write a one-page memo to yourself: the decision, the two paths, what you'd need to believe for each to be right, and the cost of waiting one more month. Read it aloud, then write down the single assumption your choice hinges on — that's the thing to test first.

YOUR TURN

What single assumption is your choice hinging on?

WEEK 7 · STAGE 3 · DECIDE AND EXECUTE · EXERCISE 7 OF 10

The 2032 Memo

Most strategy extrapolates the present; that's why it keeps getting surprised. Scenario thinking forces you to live in a future first, then work backward. A vivid future makes today's choices look different — usually smaller.

Try this:

Write a memo dated 2032 describing your industry as if the biggest change you fear has already happened. Then list three moves you'd wish you'd made today. Do the first one this quarter.

YOUR TURN

Which of the three moves scares you most — and why?

WEEK 8 · STAGE 3 · DECIDE AND EXECUTE · EXERCISE 8 OF 10

The Green Brief

Sustainability gets filed under compliance, which is exactly why it's an untapped innovation prompt. Constraints around waste, energy, and materials force the kind of rethinking that produces entirely new products — and customers are already paying for them.

Try this:

Ask: what would our flagship offering look like if it had to be carbon-neutral and zero-waste? Write down five product or process ideas. One of them is a business.

YOUR TURN

Which of the five ideas is a business, not just an improvement?

WEEK 9 · STAGE 3 · DECIDE AND EXECUTE · EXERCISE 9 OF 10

Founder for a Day

You don't need to quit your job to think like a founder — but you do need to borrow the founder's question: “what would I build if I started from zero?” Incumbents lose to startups because startups have no legacy to protect. Temporarily drop yours.

Try this:

Imagine you're founding a competitor to your own team, starting tomorrow. Write the pitch: what would you do differently, what would you steal, what would you kill? Bring one insight back to your real roadmap.

YOUR TURN

What one insight are you bringing back to your roadmap?

WEEK 10 · STAGE 3 · DECIDE AND EXECUTE · EXERCISE 10 OF 10

The One-Page Creative Plan

Creative work dies in vague intentions. A plan doesn't kill creativity — it protects it, by turning “someday” into dates and owners. One page is enough: the goal, the first three moves, the deadline, and the person accountable (probably you).

Try this:

Take the strongest idea from these ten weeks. Write the one-page plan: outcome, three next moves with dates, and what “done” looks like. Start move one within 48 hours — momentum is the whole game.

YOUR TURN

What does “done” look like, in one sentence?

Ten weeks down. Now make it permanent.

These ten exercises are a sampler — one per week. The complete workbook holds 84 guided, one-page exercises: a full year of turning creative thinking from something you admire into something you do, fifteen minutes at a time.

Get the book

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0CSCXNMGQ>



**Keep reading on the blog — essays on creativity,
strategy, and transformation**

arsalankhan.com

— Arsalan Khan · arsalankhan.com