

# Bright ideas

Sometimes the simplest ideas are the best and most effective way of solving a problem, particularly for developing countries where money and resources can be scarce. Bright ideas often take the local conditions into consideration and work with local constraints.

One example of identifying a problem and finding a simple solution was the wind-up radio. Trevor Baylis got his inspiration in 1993 from watching a programme about the spread of AIDS in Africa. He realised that in many areas of Africa, people's only means of communication was the radio, but that batteries or electricity were either too expensive or too difficult to find. He realised that what was needed was a radio that could work without batteries or electricity. He then experimented and designed a clockwork radio that only needs winding up and plays while the spring is winding down. This award-winning solution was so simple and effective that it transformed people's lives.

Another example of thinking 'outside the box' is Marc Koska's self-destructing syringe. He was inspired by a video of children and babies being injected with used needles, a highly dangerous practice. The problem was how to stop people reusing syringes. His innovative idea after many years of research was a design with a plunger which simply breaks if reused. This could help save over a million deaths annually because of the reuse of syringes.

One of the most recent innovations is a truly 'bright' idea for shanty towns, where houses are so close that they don't get much sunlight. It's a light bulb made from a plastic bottle filled with water and a little bleach. A hole is cut in the metal roof and the bottle is inserted half way through. A simple hole in the roof would only provide light directly below the hole, but when light hits the water it spreads light in all directions. A litre bottle light provides the equivalent of a 60 watt light bulb. It uses local materials, costs about two or three dollars to make and lasts for about five years. This is already making a life-changing difference to people in Brazil and the Philippines.

Coming up with a bright idea to solve a problem requires a lot of dedication and the ability to bounce back when things don't work out. As the old saying goes: 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.'

**1** Read the text and rate the importance of the three 'bright' ideas from 1 = the best idea to 3 = the third best.

**2** Read the text again and complete these sentences below with the correct 'bright' idea.

wind-up radio	self-destructing syringe	bottle light
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- 1 This could help prevent the deaths of more than a million people a year. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 It uses local materials. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 The inspiration came from watching a video featuring children and babies. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 This product won an award \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 The product only costs a few dollars to make. \_\_\_\_\_
- 6 The inspiration came from watching a programme about the spread of AIDS. \_\_\_\_\_
- 7 It can't be used more than once. \_\_\_\_\_
- 8 This product is very useful in areas with tightly-packed houses. \_\_\_\_\_
- 9 This product solved a problem with communication. \_\_\_\_\_

**3** Complete the table of words from the text with the missing forms.

verb	noun		verb	noun
	constraint		identify	
	inspiration		realise	
	communication		inject	
	dedication		provide	

**4** Which verbs from exercise 3 have the following meanings?

- 1 give someone something that they want or need \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 begin to understand something that you did not know or notice before \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 give someone the enthusiasm to do or create something \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 recognise something and understand exactly what it is \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 express thoughts, feelings, or information to another person \_\_\_\_\_
- 6 put a drug or another substance into your body through the skin, using a needle and a syringe \_\_\_\_\_
- 7 spend your time and effort doing something \_\_\_\_\_
- 8 limit someone's freedom to do what they want \_\_\_\_\_

**5** Use the correct form of a noun or verb from exercise 3 to complete the sentences.

- 1 The \_\_\_\_\_ for a new idea can be the \_\_\_\_\_ of a problem that needs solving.
- 2 The video Marc Koska saw included someone giving \_\_\_\_\_ to several people with the same syringe.
- 3 Major charities are often in charge of the \_\_\_\_\_ of emergency relief.
- 4 Marc Koska \_\_\_\_\_ that many people were dying because of the reuse of syringes.
- 5 You need to \_\_\_\_\_ a lot of time to research and \_\_\_\_\_ your ideas clearly to others.
- 6 Lack of money can \_\_\_\_\_ what you are able to.

**6** Find the expressions below in the text and match them to the definitions below.

bounce back	come up with	take into consideration
	think outside the box	work out

- 1 find new ways of doing things, especially of solving problems \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 think about a particular fact or detail and allow it to have some influence when you are making a decision \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 think of something such as an idea or a plan \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 become healthy, happy, or successful again after something bad has happened to you \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 be successful, or to end in a particular way \_\_\_\_\_

**7** Choose one of the three bright ideas from the text and prepare a mini-presentation to 'sell' your product to the government of a developing country.

**Glossary**

**bleach** (*noun*) – a strong chemical used to kill harmful bacteria or to make coloured things white

**innovative** (*adj*) – new, original, and advanced **innovation** (*noun*)

**scarce** (*adj*) – if something is scarce, there is not very much of it

**shanty town** (*noun*) – an area where very poor people live in badly built houses made from sheets of wood, metal, or other thin material

**spring** (*noun*) – a long thin piece of metal in the shape of a coil that quickly gets its original shape again after you stop stretching it

**syringe** (*noun*) – a needle fitted to a plastic tube, used for taking blood from your body or for putting medicine or drugs into it

**transform** (*verb*) – change, usually for the better