SCAMPER Technique

New ideas rarely appear out of nothing; most of them come from changing something that already exists. The SCAMPER technique turns this simple truth into a practical tool for creative thinking. It was developed by Bob Eberle in 1971, based on the checklist of idea-spurring questions created by Alex Osborn, the father of brainstorming. SCAMPER is an acronym of seven letters, and each letter is a different way to look at a product, a service or a process. In this title, Yasser, a manager at a coffee shop chain, uses SCAMPER to find new ways to win more morning customers.

1. S and C: Substitute and Combine

The letter S stands for Substitute: we ask what we could replace, such as a material, an ingredient, a person or a step. The letter C stands for Combine: we ask what we could join together, such as two products, two services or two ideas. Substituting one part can make a product cheaper, faster or more pleasant to use. Combining can create something new that offers more value than the parts alone. Many successful products are simply smart combinations of things that already existed.

Example: combining a camera with a mobile phone created a device that most people carry every day.

At work: Yasser replaces the paper loyalty cards with a simple app. He also combines coffee with a fresh sandwich in a quick morning offer.

2. A and M: Adapt and Modify

The letter A stands for Adapt: we ask what idea from another place, industry or time we could borrow and adjust to our situation. The letter M stands for Modify, and it also covers Magnify and Minify: we ask what we could change in size, shape, colour or feel. Adapting saves time, because someone else has often already solved a similar problem. Modifying means making something bigger, smaller, stronger or lighter to see what happens. Even a small change in size or packaging can open a new market.

Example: a clinic adapts the queue number system of banks to organise its waiting room, and a shampoo brand sells a small travel-size bottle.

At work: Yasser adapts the idea of ordering ahead from restaurants, so customers order on the app and skip the queue. He also offers a larger cup for customers with a long working day.

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3. P: Put to Another Use

The letter P stands for Put to another use. Here we ask how an existing product, material or skill could serve a different purpose or a different group of people. Sometimes the same thing becomes valuable in a new market without any change at all. Waste and by-products can also find a second life when we look at them with fresh eyes. This question helps companies earn more from what they already have.

Example: old glass jars are often used again at home to store spices, pens or small tools.

At work: Yasser's coffee shops are quiet in the afternoon, so he rents the seating area to small groups for meetings. The used coffee grounds are packed and given to customers as plant fertiliser.

4. E and R: Eliminate and Reverse

The letter E stands for Eliminate: we ask what we could remove, simplify or reduce without losing what the customer values. The letter R stands for Reverse or Rearrange: we ask what would happen if we changed the order of the steps, swapped roles or turned the idea upside down. Removing features often makes a product easier to use and cheaper to produce. Rearranging a process can remove waiting times and bottlenecks. Reversing an idea sometimes reveals a surprising solution that nobody had considered.

Example: in many restaurants, customers pay first and eat later, which reverses the usual order.

At work: Yasser eliminates rarely ordered items from his long menu, and service becomes faster. He also reverses the usual routine: instead of waiting for customers, his team delivers drinks to nearby offices every morning.

Conclusion

In summary, SCAMPER gives us seven questions to improve anything that already exists: Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Modify, Put to another use, Eliminate and Reverse. We do not need to use the letters in order, and not every letter will produce a good idea every time. The best results come when a team writes down all the ideas first and judges them later. Yasser's team now uses SCAMPER in a short monthly meeting, and it has become a habit. With practice, these simple questions turn ordinary thinking into creative thinking.

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