

Why Your Best Ideas Happen In The Most Unusual Places

by Carolyn Gregoire

Last month, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg shared some questionable advice on how to become successful at work: Don't go to the bathroom.

"I always tried to be the first one in in the morning and the last one to leave at night, take the fewest vacations and the least time away from the desk to go to the bathroom or have lunch," Bloomberg said on his weekly radio show. "You gotta be there."

It wasn't the first time the mayor has suggested that chaining yourself to your desk is the way to get ahead. In 2011, he told TechCrunch, "Don't ever take a lunch break or go to the bathroom, you keep working."

But Bloomberg's bladder-holding approach may not be as conducive to productivity and success as the mayor would like to think. A number of incredibly successful people have had their most brilliant ideas in the bathroom, and research actually supports the idea that being in the shower could boost your powers of innovative thinking.

According to Harvard psychologist Shelley H. Carson, author of "Your Creative Brain," little distractions like going to the bathroom can actually be a good thing when it comes to creativity. She explains that interruptions and diversions can lead to a creative "incubation period."

"In other words, a distraction may provide the break you need to disengage from a fixation on the ineffective solution," Carson told the Boston Globe.

Looking for your next big idea? Here are six people who found inspiration in unexpected places -- in the bathroom and beyond.

Woody Allen

The writer, actor and director regularly takes showers for inspiration, sometimes standing in the water for close to an hour to get his creative juices flowing.

"In the shower, with the hot water coming down, you've left the real world behind, and very frequently things open up for you," Allen said in a recent interview with Esquire. "It's the change of venue, the unblocking the attempt to force the ideas that's crippling you when you're trying to write."

Archimedes

One of the most famous "aha!" moments in history occurred in a bathtub. Archimedes came up with the principles of density and buoyancy when watching water flow as he drew a bath, and realized that he could determine density by submerging an object in water and examining how much water had been displaced.

Legend has it that the ancient mathematician jumped out of the bath and ran through the streets yelling "Eureka! Eureka!"

Gertrude Stein

Gertrude Stein's best ideas came to her in the car -- while she was looking at cows. She would write for only 30 minutes a day, driving around a farm and stopping at different cows until she found the one that most inspired her.

John Lennon

Rock and roll legend has it that John Lennon suddenly got the idea for "Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite!" from looking at an interesting poster in an antique shop.

"John got the idea for 'Mr. Kite' when... we had a lunch break, and we went in an antique shop on the way to the restaurant," bandmate George Harrison said. "We were looking at what they had there and John pulled out this thing that we found ... a little poster which had more or less the whole lyric of the song 'Being For The Benefit Of Mr. Kite!' on it ... I think he was just advanced in his awareness of putting everything in a song."

Nikola Tesla

Nikola Tesla had many great ideas, but one of his best occurred to him far from the laboratory: the inventor came up with his idea for alternating electric currents while out on a leisurely stroll. According to the Science Channel, he used his walking stick to draw a picture explaining how it would work to his partner.

J.K. Rowling

The British novelist got her idea for "Harry Potter" while on a crowded train. She didn't have a pen to write the idea down and was too shy to ask for one, so she pondered over the concept for the remaining four hours of the train ride in order to lock it into her brain.