

BLACKMON'S RULES

1. **Trust.** Group creative thinking takes trust. Consider each idea as initially valid. A blind alley may cause another thought from someone else.
2. **Be positive.** Avoid pooh-poohing ideas during creative stage – or ever.
3. **Take risks.** If it's worth doing it's worth doing wrong a few times.
4. **Cast a wide net.** Seek ideas broadly. Avoid paranoia. You don't have to go it alone. Get more claims with co-inventors; if you don't, competitors could.
5. **Encourage.** Innovation lies outside their comfort zone for some. Even if they have good ideas, they may not act. But not playing guarantees you won't win. Encourage, ensure fairness and give away credit with both hands.
6. **Recognize.** Recognize innovation, celebrate patents, write articles, mount plaques in high visibility areas, etc.
7. **Reward.** Provide innovators with bonuses, promotions, royalty shares, etc.
8. **Measure.** Display useful metrics (disclosures, patents, licenses, royalties, products, patents per dollar invested, etc.) as trend plots. How do you stack up?
9. **Share.** Meet and talk in groups of three to five or so for about an hour. Avoid being judgmental. Have fun (Girl Scout Cookies and coffee). Laugh – really.
10. **Mind Map.** Suspend criticism. Jump from one idea to another. Facilitator should jot down all comments; this encourages more. Avoid outlines, they come later. Second-graders learn Mind Mapping. So can grownups.
11. **Try the opposite.** Literally try the exact opposite of the conventional approach.
12. **Think evolution.** Broaden the application. Add two ideas to get a third. Multiply ideas (e.g., single barrel rifle to double barrel to over-and-under to Gatling, etc.).
13. **Think revolution.** Try disruptive ideas, even if only good for a laugh.
14. **Question.** Use open questions initially: What do you think? Use directive questions later: How will that reduce cost?

15. **Critique.** Once ideas are well-formed, begin to drill down. What are the costs, benefits, risks, improvements, processes, competition, etc? How do you define success and failure? Did you include all applications?
16. **Protect.** Use nondisclosure agreements. Describe/sketch and witness ideas in a bound notebook with no blank spaces. Then it's evidential. Don't just store on a computer. Consider lower-cost provisional patent. If it's abandoned after a year, you still protect ideas so you could file a utility patent later.
17. **Track.** Document and circulate among others to improve claims, revisions, etc. Assign action items and track status. Stay in touch. Don't forget about it.
18. **Support.** Participate in the patent filing process. Help with the patent search; you may learn a lot. Review the application. Respond to the Examiner's findings thoroughly/comprehensively; you can often get claims that are initially denied.
19. **Pedal to the metal.** Execute quickly; it's "first to file," not first to invent. Short time to market really increases return on investment. Don't dawdle.
20. **Form alliances.** Band together to increase innovation and spread risk. Clear goals, mutual respect, trust, compatibility, communication, flexibility, consensus, scope, etc., are all important to the process. The main thing is results.
21. **Buy it.** Organizations acquire, merge, etc. for market share, cost reductions, economies of scale, etc. – and for more innovation. Then encourage the newcomers, too.
22. **Hang in there.** It can be a long process. It may pay to wait for better market entry or a better moneymaking period of a patent. But be wary, delay could hurt.
23. **Learn from others' mistakes.** Be aware of missteps, including unprotected disclosures, legal bars, applications too narrow, drawings too limiting, etc.
24. **Think like an achiever.** Be optimistic, committed, confident. Don't self-limit. Lots of brilliant people never made it big with innovation, and vice-versa. Brush off failures. Be patient; ideas can occur in seconds after weeks of dry spells. Have a "can do" mentality. If you've had an idea, you'll have many more.
25. **Keep improving.** Polish your technique as a way of life.