

The Write Stuff

Paper helps foster creativity and productivity in the workplace

Jason Fried, the founder and CEO of Basecamp, may run a business focused on building tech tools, but most of his products get a decidedly low-tech start.

"I almost always sketch software ideas on paper first," Fried says. "Sometimes I use an iPad, but the first version is almost always on paper. I find ideas flow better, they're less precious and they're more honest. I always use a thick Sharpie marker so I can't focus on the details, too. Broad strokes are perfect when starting something new."

In his book *Rework*, a how-to guide for entrepreneurs, Fried and co-author David Heinemeier Hansson advise readers to do the same, drawing their ideas as a means of minimizing abstraction and making sure they're literally on the same page as coworkers or collaborators.



"Grabbing an iPad, then finding the right app, then launching it, then getting into it just feels like way too much overhead when you can do the same thing on paper, instantly, and without ceremony," Fried says.

That's why no matter how high-tech businesses become, you'll likely always find pads, markers and notebooks in the supply closet. Such materials remain affordable, instant, and versatile—and require no special training to use.

Fried isn't the only business leader who sees paper as an essential ingredient to success. High-profile executives like Richard Branson, Sheryl Sandberg and Indra Nooyi all reportedly keep a notepad close at hand at all times.

A 2015 survey by smart-pen developer NeoLab Convergence found that three-quarters of workers preferred to take notes during meetings with a pen and paper.

Paper represents the perfect blank canvas for employees to use when brainstorming or problem solving. Distraction-free, paper provides the foundation to launch new ideas, map new solutions and solidify new learning.

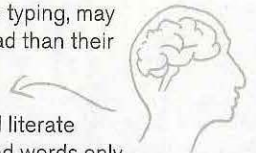
That's a concept that can even be seen among children just learning to write. Research by Karin James, Ph.D., a psychologist with Indiana University, shows that kindergartners who learn to write their letters by hand, versus typing, may be better primed to learn how to read than their peers.

"The systems in the brain that all literate individuals use to process letters and words only become active in these children after they've printed the letter [by hand], and not after they've typed them, and not after the see-and-say method, either," James says.

Even as adults we process information differently when we read or write it on paper, versus on a screen. Research shows that taking notes on paper can lead to a better grasp of the concepts at hand and that reading text on paper is less taxing on the brain than reading text on a digital display.

To stimulate creativity, Mary Anne Hansan, President of the Paper & Packaging Board, encourages the simple act of taking out a pen and paper and start writing down your thoughts.

"The beauty of writing is that it doesn't limit you to a straight line of type," says Hansan. "Writing lets you bring your thoughts together in words or drawings—the visual connections can be endless." ■



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