You Should Patent That Idea

Summary
The world is full of good ideas but most of them are trapped inside people's brains. This activity will encourage your creativity and resourcefulness by having you apply for a patent.

Primary Workplace Readiness Skill
Creativity and Innovation

Secondary WRS Skills
Critical Thinking and Decision Making
Information Literacy

Vocabulary

- Creativity
- Patent
- Ideas
- Improving products
- Intellectual property
- Innovation
- Design
- Original
- Synthesis

- Assimilation
- Discipline
- Unique
- Self-doubt
- Improving procedures
- Diligence
- Sustainability

- Recycle and re-use of resources
- Costs
- Discovery
- Curiosity
- Research
- Edit
- Revision

Context Questions

- How can creative thinking set you apart from your peers or coworkers?
- How can you demonstrate your experience with creativity and innovation in a job interview?
- How is being a creative employee beneficial to your employer?
- How is being an innovative employee beneficial to your employer?
- How do creativity and innovation interrelate? How do they differ?
- What are some ways to increase or exercise your creativity? Can creativity grow?
- What are some common examples of being creative and innovative in the workplace?
- Why are patents for workplace ideas important?
- What steps in an innovative business model can affect a business's financial bottom line?

Guidelines
You are working a job in your career path (based on your CTE program) and the company has required you to propose a new product or way of doing things that will help the bottom line (either it will make the business more money by increasing productivity or sales, or reduce current costs/expenses). The winning proposal will be made into a patent application. The author of the idea will work on the final patent and will receive a promotion. The patent requires the following:

1. The name or title of the patent, identified as "product" or "process."
2. Describe a workplace scenario that is problem based. May involve customers.
3. Two parts: A concise description of what the product is or what the process does and how it will affect the bottom line.

4. A drawing or diagram of the product or listing of process steps and personnel involved. Or this might be an illustration of the problem.
5. Address it to the person or persons who would receive this idea first.

Evaluation (see rubric)
One proposal will be chosen and the choice will be based on the following criteria:
1. **Clarity** of proposal/presentation. Vague or incomplete proposals will not be selected, even if the idea is great. Can you get your idea down to its simplest terms?
2. **Originality**. New ideas will go to the top. If you borrow parts of your idea from somewhere else, you must cite your source.
3. **Potential**. Ideas with the highest impact and submitted to the right person will go to the top.

Reflection after Completion (may be a questionnaire)
- What was the most difficult part of creating your idea?
- What steps did you take to come up with your idea? Did you use research?
- What did you think about your proposal? In what ways did it succeed or fail? What were the unknowns in your proposal?
- Did your original idea help you create additional ideas?
- What else did you learn from this activity?
- What are the benefits of filing a patent?
- If this were a real patent application, what are the steps in filing it? Are there steps in filing a formal recommendation for improvement in the workplace? How would you discover these steps? Why might you want to follow company procedures?

Notes:
This activity is not about how to write a patent. The emphasis should be on how to create ideas and process them appropriately in the workplace. Most students will immediately want to invent a new technology, but they might be encouraged to invent a scenario and offer ways to save employer costs/expenses or improve the working lives of employees, which ultimately increases productivity. One way to get students to focus on the latter is to look at the other WRS and create a scenario in which the selected skill is *not* being performed by coworkers.

A teacher might provide a specific scenario based on his/her course and allow students to create solutions for the problem. The process is the same with either, but in the self-directed exercise, students are required to come up with their own workplace problem/scenario.

Example: Due to recent expansion, there are not enough parking spaces, and public parking costs are very high and too far away from the workplace. As an entry-level employee, or even one of the new employees, you might propose to begin a car pool. Emphasis should be on how this helps the employer. In this case, easing the financial strain on employees might help morale and worker satisfaction. It's a good idea, plus you are resourceful in the way you adapt to changing circumstances (i.e., expansion). The "patent" would include the scenario, solution, and some details about how much this would save employees and the employer. Additional benefits could be listed. The graphic might illustrate the current lot, area lots for public parking, and the number of new employees competing over limited spaces.

In many workplace settings there are formal channels established to be used to make recommendations. Real patents follow a rigorous process that often takes years and involves precise, legal wording to succeed. Informally, professional courtesy, timing, and awareness of workplace climates and conditions can influence how suggestions or recommendations are made and who can make them. This activity was set up as a contest of sorts, however, ideas are not typically mandatory and may not always be encouraged. It may not be a part of the job description, but ideas that benefit the employer are the responsibility of each employee. Documenting and potentially sharing and even protecting one's ideas are all vital parts of creativity. There is, after all, a good reason to patent an idea.

Treat the patent concept with a lot of flexibility. The "idea" does not necessarily need to be truly original. Many "new" ideas simply modify existing ones. And don't forget the option to emphasize sustainability as a main component of resourcefulness. Most employers want environmentally responsible workers and one's ability to demonstrate a sustainability plan can address both sides of this skill area.

There is another great big issue with creativity and why most people say that they aren't creative: fear of failure and rejection. To create anything is to take a chance by proposing a change. Change is frightening because it makes most people uncomfortable by putting them in an unfamiliar situation. Therefore, ideas are frightening. One must also take personal responsibility for an idea and see it through, if possible. And if one idea fails, employees must learn to accept it and move on and not let the defeat interfere with the creative spirit. Even if the idea isn't accepted, the company might still see the idea-maker as someone who cares about the success of the enterprise.

Options:
Students may work independently or in teams. Students might use the example scenario provided, one of their own, or one supplied by the teacher. Instructors should review and judge the ideas and offer feedback.

Differentiation:
1. Technology use—use word processing and graphic design software to create the proposal
2. Multisensory options—include online research, project finished drawings/images
3. Community connections—identify some inventions used every day in the community
4. Small-group learning—brainstorm ideas, research a completed patent and present findings
5. Vocabulary strategies—word wall and matching, match words or phrases under each term in the skill area, "creativity" and "resourcefulness"
6. Student organization of content—final product should produce an organized, 3-part document.

Resources:
- USPTO, The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office: https://www.uspto.gov/
- Creative Development and Teaching Creativity from Creative Minds: http://www.exquisite-minds.com/creative-learning/
- Framework for 21st Century Learning, p21, Creativity and Innovation Resources: http://www.p21.org/about-us/p21-framework/262
- A Creativity Rubric: https://grantwiggins.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/creative.pdf
- How to Find Killer Ideas, Shark-Tank Style, The high-pressure pitch game isn't just good TV--it's also a pretty good model for surfacing your employees' best ideas, By Jeff Haden, Contributing editor, Inc.: http://www.inc.com/magazine/2014-2/jeff-haden/shark-tank-killer-idea-competition.html

- Creativity exercises from HowDesign.com: http://www.howdesign.com/30-creativity-exercises/
- Is Creativity Teachable? by Adam Bow: https://www.quora.com/Is-creativity-teachable