

One

EVERYTHING STARTS WITH IDEAS

How to think creatively

So you have this vague idea: 'I would like to be more, have more, do more.' You want to achieve certain results ... in a world of constant change. Change is inevitable. Change is opportunity. If you stay as you are, you stay where you are. The world belongs to those who are in love with the new. In such a world there is a strong relationship between the quality and quantity of new ideas and your success in achieving results. Business is all about the implementation of ideas which improve the life of your customer and could result in profit for you. You are a creative genius.

'Find out everything everybody else knows, and then begin where they left off.' – Thomas Edison

UNCORRECTED PROOFS

1 A DEFINITION OF CREATIVITY

Success is related to the quality and quantity of new ideas.

Creativity is the ability to improve. We all came into the world being creative, innovative, and inventive. Approximately ninety-seven per cent of children are highly creative at the age of five, thirty-six per cent are highly creative at the age of ten, with only twelve per cent scoring highly creative at age fifteen. Our birthright is to improve our condition. We all behave in a manner consistent with improving our condition. For most of us our creativity has lain dormant since childhood. We must all now learn to tap into our own creativity. We can all learn to tap into the creativity of others.

One of the mental laws which govern all our lives is the law of habit. The law of habit states that almost everything we do is habit. The ways in which we walk, talk, respond to situations and the ways in which we use our creativity are all habits. Make a habit of using your creativity. Make a habit of trying to improve situations by ten per cent. There are many ways in which we can improve sales by ten per cent, reduce costs by ten per cent, and increase profit by ten per cent.

Everything can be improved in some way. The success of the organisation is directly related to the quality and quantity of new ideas generated and implemented. Many companies have been saved by using the techniques in creativity discussed later in this chapter. In all aspects of the business there are ways of being better, cheaper and faster. The competitive advantage of our business is that we are better, cheaper or faster than our competitors in some way.

Furthermore, there are always ways in which we can be more pleasant in our dealings with customers, suppliers, bankers, etc. Being 'nicer' is the fourth way in which we can establish

Everything can
be improved
by at least
10 per cent.

competitive advantage. Continuous improvement through creativity is one of the keys to success in business.

2 DETERMINANTS OF CREATIVITY

‘The brain is a wonderful organ: it starts working the moment you get up in the morning and it does not stop until you get to the office.’ – Robert Frost

The world of success and failure in business is a mental world in which everything starts with ideas. Unfortunately, most of us have a strong tendency to stifle our own creativity or to dismiss our own creative ideas as worthless. For individuals, the level of creative activity and the value which an individual places on his or her own creativity tend to be determined by past experience, the present situation and the self-concept. We tend to be more creative if in the past we have worked in a positive environment where creativity has been encouraged. Creativity is encouraged by enthusiasm, excitement, love, joy and acceptance of responsibility.

Unfortunately, many of us have worked in negative environments where creativity was stifled by fear of failure, fear of rejection, self-doubt, self-pity, failure to accept responsibility, hate, envy and blame. If our present situation is dominated by positive emotions, then this encourages creativity. Finally, from the law of belief we know that we always behave in a manner consistent with our beliefs. If we believe we are creative, then we behave in a manner consistent with being creative.

We have a self-concept or belief about each aspect of our lives. Each individual has a self-concept level of income, a self-concept level of creativity, a self-concept as a manager, a self-concept as a sales person, a self-concept as a negotiator, a self-concept as a squash player, cook and lover. The self-concept is the bundle of beliefs an individual has about his or her ability. In short, if you

believe you are creative, you behave in a manner consistent with being a creative person.

The most exciting part of the law of belief is that beliefs are not based on reality. If you believe you are a Christian, you are a Christian. If you believe you can swim, you are a swimmer. If you believe you can ride a bicycle, then you will always behave in a manner consistent with being able to ride a bicycle. Make a decision to believe that you are a creative genius. Visualise, emotionalise, and affirm. Visualise yourself as a creative person. Imagine how well you would feel if you were a creative person. Finally, make a habit of the affirmation: 'I am a very creative person.' If you believe you are creative, then you will behave in a manner consistent with being creative.

So far as your organisation is concerned, happy, open, optimistic, encouraging environments stimulate creativity. Low levels of creativity are associated with a negative environment. Positive emotions are strongly associated with creativity. Managers should provide a work situation which is encouraging, enthusiastic and exciting. These are the great positive emotions. Finally, high self-esteem is strongly associated with creativity. Self-esteem is the extent to which an individual feels valuable and worthwhile. One aspect of a manager's job is to make people feel important, to make people feel valuable and worthwhile. We must all encourage others to repeat the affirmation: 'I am a valuable and worthwhile person.' Many people suffer from low self-esteem believing that their ideas are of little value. A high self-esteem environment is a creative environment.

3 STIMULATE YOUR CREATIVITY BY GOAL SETTING

Creativity is stimulated by clear goals with specified deadlines for achievement. Think about your business goals. Where would you like to be one year from now? Where would you like to be three years from now? What business would you like to be in at some specified future date? How much money would you like to be earning three years from now? What sort of a company car will you have? What are the skills you must acquire in order to achieve those goals? What

are your personal and family goals? Where would you like to be 20 years from now? What are your most urgent goals during the next 12 months? What are your three most pressing problems or challenges at this moment? At this stage you may have only a fairly vague idea that you would like to be more, have more, do more. We shall go for much greater clarity in Chapter 2.

We use the following exercise to stimulate the creativity of our audience, including the self-employed.

Career/business goals

In an ideal world, what business would you like to be in three years from now? What position will you hold in the company? What will your salary be? What level of sales and profits will you achieve? What sort of a company car will you have? Write down five career/business goals for achievement within three years.

Personal development plan

One of the simple truths we all have to face up to as adults is that wherever we are in life at the present time is where we deserve to be. If we had greater knowledge/skills and a more positive attitude then we would be in a better position. If we had less knowledge and a more negative attitude, then we would not even be where we are today. In order to advance in business, we must change in some way. We must increase our knowledge/skills and/or we must be more positive in attitude. Which additional skills must you acquire as a manager to be in the position you would like to be in three years from now? Do you need to be more creative? Do you need to learn more about strategy, marketing, sales skills, negotiation skills, finance, leadership? Be honest with yourself and write down five skills which you must acquire over the next three years to achieve your career/business goals.

Personal and family goals

Why do you want to be successful in business? What are the personal and family goals that drive you forwards? Do you want to be happily married with two children in private school? Do you want a beautiful home in the country? Do you want a trip around the world, an expensive motor car, status, admiration, your own private swimming pool? By focusing and concentrating on these goals, defining them with crystal clarity, and setting deadlines for their achievement, you will stimulate your own creativity.

GOALS

Set personal and family goals.
Set business/career goals.
Set personal development goals.
Stimulate your creativity.

‘The business of life is to go forwards.’ – Samuel Johnson

4 STIMULATE CREATIVITY BY IDENTIFYING ROCKS

What are the rocks that stand between you and achieving your desired goals? What are the limiting factors? What are your self-limiting beliefs? What are the negative emotions which are holding you back? There are always obstacles which stand between an organisation and the achievement of its goals. There are always obstacles which stand between you and achievement of desired results.

By facing up to the rocks, with a great deal of self-honesty, we can stimulate our creativity. What are the obstacles that stand between the organisation now and its ideal future? Define the ideal future, i.e. goals, and then identify the rocks. Use your creativity either to overcome the rocks or avoid them. What is the factor which is limiting the organisation in achieving its goals. Is it lack of finance? Is it lack of leadership? Is it lack of a coherent strategy? Is it failure

in marketing, selling, negotiating, people-skills? Is it lack of focus, poor advertising, poor human relations, lack of information, failure to maintain competitive advantage? As a manager, what are your own self-limiting beliefs? Do you believe that you are incompetent in leadership, in marketing, in selling, in negotiating, in strategy? Do you feel that you cannot achieve more because you are inadequately qualified, because you did not go to university, or perhaps because you are a woman? Which negative emotions are holding you back? Is it an inability to accept responsibility, a propensity to blame others for your condition, envy, self-pity, fear of failure, fear of rejection, jealousy, anger or self-doubt? Use your self-honesty and

Identify the rocks that stand between you and success. then your creativity to change your self-limiting beliefs and overcome negative emotions. Negative emotions can be replaced with the positive emotions of excitement, enthusiasm, love, joy and acceptance of responsibility.

These positive emotions can be stimulated by clear goals. Focus and concentrate on what you want. Focusing on your desires stimulates positive emotions and creativity.

‘The individual who is able to perceive a glimmer of possibility in a situation that seems, at first glance, full of insurmountable obstacles, is the one most likely to reap the greatest benefits.’

– John Paul Getty

5 CREATIVE AND UNCREATIVE THINKING

Mechanical thinking

Do you tend to see things as either black or white? Are you inflexible in your thinking? Are you generally pessimistic? Do you have fixed attitudes? Do you tend to blame others for your condition? If you do tend to indulge yourself in this kind of mechanical thinking, then you will also tend to be uncreative. Make the necessary efforts to change your thinking.

‘For most people, thinking is just a re-arrangement of their prejudices.’ – William James

Adaptive thinking

Do you tend to have an open mind on most issues? Are you flexible in your thinking? Are you generally optimistic? Is your thinking solution-oriented rather than problem-oriented? Do you generally suspend judgement until all the facts have been collected and analysed? Do you avoid attachment to one idea? If you can practise adaptive thinking rather than mechanical thinking, then you will be more creative. Do not take it personally if someone holds a different opinion from yours. Do not make a habit of justifying being exactly as you are. If you stay as you are, you stay where you are. The more you do of what you do, the more you get of what you have got!

‘Criticism is never inhibited by ignorance.’

– Harold Macmillan

‘Faced with the choice between changing one’s mind and proving there is no need to do so, almost everyone gets busy on the proof.’ – John Kenneth Galbraith

6 I AM A CREATIVE GENIUS

Intelligence is a way of behaving. If you behave intelligently, then you are intelligent. Alternatively, if you behave as an idiot, then you are an idiot – even if you have a university degree. Your IQ is a measure essentially of your verbal and mathematical skills. There are many different kinds of intelligence, which are more relevant to success in business than verbal and mathematical skills, e.g. intuitive intelligence, social skills intelligence. Use the affirmation: ‘I am a creative genius.’ This will become part of your belief system. Once

you believe that you are a creative genius, then the law of belief tells us that you will behave in a manner consistent with being a creative genius. The following four characteristics of genius can all be learned.

Clarity

Try to see the big picture. Try to identify causal relationships. Identify specific, measurable goals. Decision-making becomes much easier when the goal is clear. Be honest in identifying problems, rocks, negative emotions, self-limiting beliefs.

Focus and concentration

Focus on outcomes. Define the perfect outcome. Describe the perfect outcome. Focus and concentrate on the issue. All highly creative people have the ability to focus and concentrate on the issue. Avoid the butterfly mentality of those who consistently jump from one issue to another, resolving nothing. Make lists. Keep notes. Investigate all the possible routes.

Adaptive thinking

Avoid attachment to one idea. Be adaptive and flexible. Keep an open mind. Ask questions. Stand back and consider the ideas of others. Keep questioning your assumptions. Ask others who have faced the same problems. A different point of view from yours is not an attack on your integrity or ability.

‘There is a natural opposition among men to anything they have not thought of themselves.’ – Barnes Wallis

‘When a fixed idea makes its appearance, a great ass also makes its appearance.’ – Nietzsche

Use systematic methodology

Use the systematic methods of problem solving discussed in this chapter – the 20-idea method, the systematic method, brain-storming, finish the statement, the standard approach, lateral thinking and access the superconscious.

7 MAKING A NEW START IN CREATIVITY

Creativity is a skill which can be learned and developed. We can all make improvements, especially in those areas which are closest to us. Make a start as below.

- 1 *Desired goals.* Begin to focus and concentrate on achievable goals within a specific time period.
- 2 *Urgent problems/challenges.* Identify your most pressing problems/challenges, and focus and concentrate on those issues.
- 3 *Use focused questions.*
 - How can we increase sales by 25 per cent over the next three months?
 - How can we reduce our heating costs by 15 per cent?
 - How can we improve our customer care?
 - How can we make our advertising more effective?
 - In any situation what are our assumptions?
- 4 *Start being adaptive/flexible.* Make a habit of saying: 'I was completely wrong on that occasion'; 'I changed my mind completely'; 'I don't know anything about that'; 'I need a great deal of help in this area.'
- 5 *Bombard your mind.* Bombard your mind with the information which is consistent with being highly creative. Read books, listen to tapes, attend courses, and most of all, spend time with people who are creative. Form a mastermind alliance of creative people. We are very much influenced by the people around us, our reference group. If you spend time with very creative people, this will encourage you to be creative.

8 USE THE THREE TIERS OF THE BRAIN

The brain seems to be divided into at least three sections: the conscious, the subconscious and the superconscious. The conscious mind is where our daily thinking takes place in making decisions and trying to solve problems. The conscious mind can call up ideas, experiences and beliefs from the subconscious which is where all our experiences and beliefs are stored. The subconscious operates 24 hours a day and can handle any number of problems. One way to stimulate creativity is to consider all aspects of a problem, and then ask the subconscious to find the answer by 3 p.m. the following Friday, i.e. sleep on it! The subconscious can be used to solve problems or rise to challenges or instructions from the conscious mind.

The superconscious mind has access to knowledge and experience beyond one's own knowledge and experience. The superconscious is the source of creativity, excitement and intuition. The superconscious mind is stimulated by clarity, strong desire, solitude and strong emotions. It is maintained by some people that any desire that can be transmitted to the superconscious must be brought into reality by the superconscious mind.

Focus and concentrate on your crystal-clear goals. Drive those goals into the superconscious. Desire to achieve your goals in life. Reflect in solitude on goals, problems, challenges, opportunities. Drive a great deal of emotion into your desires. The superconscious will reward you with blinding flashes of the obvious, the people, information, and circumstances required to achieve your goals, and unexpected chance events which will enable you to get the results you require. Remember that any goal or desire which you can drive into the superconscious must be brought into your reality.

9 CREATIVE THINKING ALTERNATIVES

We do not all think in exactly the same way. Some people think in pictures, others in words, others depend on their emotions. Faced with a problem/challenge, those who visualise tend to draw or map out the possible solutions. They conclude: 'it looks good to me.' Those who

think auditorially talk through the various alternatives, using words, and conclude 'this sounds like a good idea.' Those who think kinaesthetically rely on their feelings about a situation and conclude: 'I feel this is the right way forward.'

In order to stimulate our creativity, we should each approach the same situation by trying to draw solutions, work out solutions in words, and examine our emotional responses to situations. We should also try to understand that we may be able to see an answer, but others need to have it spelt out in words. Try not to be too hard on those who cannot see or even work out the answer verbally. Some people need to feel it is the right way forward. You can stimulate your creativity by trying an approach which does not come easily to you.

10 THE STANDARD APPROACH TO PROBLEM-SOLVING

Faced with a problem, many people do not know what to do. Those who think they know what to do often stick to the one obvious solution. Many of us suffer from identification in that we take it very personally if somebody offers an alternative. Many of us continue to justify making the same mistakes we have always made. The following standard approach solves many problems:

- 1 Define the problem with great clarity. Simply defining the problem precisely is believed to solve about 50 per cent of problems.

PROBLEM-SOLVING

It's a challenge/opportunity.

Keep defining the problem.

Most problems are solved by clear definition.

'A problem is a chance for you to do your best.'

– Duke Ellington

- 2 Collect information. Collect all the facts together, not just the convenient facts. Avoid identification, i.e. taking it personally if some of the facts do not fit with preconceived solutions. Practise detachment, i.e. separate people from the problem. Detach yourself from the personalities involved, and focus on the problem.
- 3 Ask others for advice. Tap into the creative genius of others. Tap into the experience of others. Do not be afraid to ask your way to success.
- 4 At first, try to find the conscious solution. If a conscious solution cannot be found, then feed all the information into the subconscious/superconscious sections of the brain. Demand a solution by 3 p.m. next Friday. Express the desire with great clarity, desire a solution with intensity, use solitude and put a tremendous amount of emotion into the desired goal. Wait for a blinding flash of the obvious.
- 5 Go through the problem, information, desired outcomes, etc., last thing at night before sleeping. The answer could appear in the middle of the night or first thing in the morning. If the answer occurs at 4.30 a.m., then catch the idea on a tape, or jot it down in a notebook. Always keep a notebook or a dictaphone at hand on journeys and at night. Many blinding flashes of the obvious will occur to you when you are extremely tired or fast asleep. You must catch the moment. The answer which is obvious at 4.30 a.m. may be unavailable at breakfast.

CATCH THE MOMENT

Always write down or tape record useful thoughts,
new ideas, blinding flashes of the obvious.

11 ASK FOCUSED QUESTIONS

In business we face many problems/challenges/opportunities often associated with increasing sales, reducing costs and increasing prof-

its. In any situation, we should ask a series of focused questions along the following lines:

- 1 What is the perfect outcome?
- 2 What exactly are we trying to achieve?
- 3 How are we trying to achieve the perfect outcome?
- 4 How else could we achieve the same result?
- 5 Is there a better way of achieving the same outcome?
- 6 What are our assumptions?
- 7 Could our assumptions be wrong?
- 8 What would be the effect if our assumptions are wrong?
- 9 Who else has faced the same problem?
- 10 What are the alternatives?
- 11 What do our competitors do?
- 12 Can we ignore the problem?
- 13 Has anyone else achieved a better result?
- 14 What mistakes have we made in the past?
- 15 What mistakes have others made in the past?

12 A ZERO-BASED APPROACH

A very simple way of looking to the future is to take what happened last year and add on a few percentage points. This approach has been found to be unsatisfactory in a dynamic economy. A different approach is to assume a zero base and then justify all future activities. One way of approaching zero-based thinking is to ask the question: 'knowing what we know now, would we ...?' For example, 'knowing what we know now, would we have launched this product?' If the answer to the question is 'no', then make a decision to drop that product and take the necessary action. Sell it, franchise it, close it down, but get rid of it.

- Knowing what we know now, would we have opened this department?
- Knowing what we know now, would we have entered into the joint venture?

- Knowing what we know now, would we have started legal proceedings?
- Knowing what we know now, would we have employed this person?
- Knowing what we know now, would we have entered into this relationship?

If the answer to any of these questions is in the negative, then make the necessary decision, take the necessary action, to bring the matter to a close.

13 SOLVING PROBLEMS USING THE SYSTEMATIC METHOD

- How can we increase sales by 25 per cent over the next six months?
- How can we make our advertising more effective?
- How can we gain an extra 5 per cent market share?
- How can we double our effectiveness in selling?

The systematic method is a very powerful tool in fighting off threats, solving problems, rising to challenges and taking advantage of opportunities.

- 1 Assume that there is a logical, workable solution and confidently expect that you will find the answer.
- 2 Use positive language, i.e. avoid the words 'threat' and 'problem', and use the words 'challenge' and 'opportunity'. At least use the word 'situation' which is neither positive nor negative.
- 3 Define the situation with great clarity. Make notes. Make lists. Make use of paper.
- 4 Identify and list all the possible causes of the problem. A great many problems are solved simply by identifying the causes.
- 5 List all the possible solutions, not just the obvious solutions, but all the solutions. Even after finding the right answer, make the necessary effort to find a second right answer. At this stage, focus and concentrate on the solution and stop focusing on the prob-

lem. Many people can never solve a problem because they insist always on talking about the problem. In fact, many people fall in love with their problems and seem at times to talk about nothing else. Winners focus on solutions, talk about the future, focus on opportunities. Losers fall in love with their problems, talk about the past and blame other people for their condition.

- 6 Make a decision or set a deadline for making a decision. Remember, making a decision is much better than making no decision at all. Indecisiveness is a major cause of stress and anxiety. Most problems are solved at this stage, but even if you only set a deadline, then the superconscious should come up with a solution at the appointed time.
- 7 Assign responsibility for taking the necessary action which will give the desired result. Only action gets results. Making a decision is not enough. Somebody must accept 100 per cent responsibility for taking the necessary action. Many problems remain unsolved because nobody takes the necessary action after a decision has been made.
- 8 Set a deadline by which the necessary action must be taken. Use deadlines
- 9 Take the necessary action. Only action gets results. on yourself and others.
In order to take action, we need to make decisions. In order to make decisions we need information. The sequence is: information–decision–action–results. A manager's job is to get results.
- 10 Inspect what you expect. What gets measured gets done. We must develop the habit of inspecting what we expect from other people. We must find a way of measuring the key result areas of employees. If it does not get measured, then it probably will not get done. When assigning responsibility for action to somebody else, this is delegation not abdication. As the manager or proprietor, you are still responsible for the result, even if somebody else is taking the appropriate action.

The answer to most problems, worries, anxiety, boredom is
PURPOSEFUL ACTION.

14 THE 20-IDEA METHOD (MIND-STORMING)

Of all the techniques for solving problems, rising to challenges, taking advantage of opportunities, the 20-idea method is probably the most powerful and most widely used. There are 20 ways of increasing sales by 25 per cent over the next six months; there are 20 ways of getting to work everyday; there are 20 ways of making our advertising more effective; there are 20 ways of doing just about anything. The key to using this method is to force yourself to come up with 20 ideas. Managers often find that ideas 17 to 20 are the best ideas. Clearly, you have probably already considered 1 to 6. These obvious ideas, which you have already decided are inappropriate, can be quickly dismissed.

You can use this method alone or in groups. This method is used by many wealthy and successful people.

- 1 Write down the problem/challenge/opportunity.
- 2 Generate 20 possible answers. Force yourself to go the distance and create 20 solutions; not 10, not 16, but 20. It is usually the last few ideas which are the best ones.
- 3 Select the appropriate answer and take immediate action.

THERE ARE 20 WAYS IN WHICH YOU CAN:

- improve quality (better)
- improve on price (cheaper)
- make buying easier (faster)
- improve customer relations (nicer).

15 BRAIN-STORMING

TAP INTO THE CREATIVITY OF OTHERS

Thousands of businesses have been transformed by ideas from employees.

‘Many ideas grow better when transplanted into another mind than in the one where they sprang up.’

– Oliver Wendell Holmes

Many companies use this method on a regular basis to achieve goals and solve problems. Quality circles meet on a regular basis to improve quality, solve other specific problems and rise to other specific challenges.

- 1 The group should consist of four to eight people meeting in a spirit of co-operation.
- 2 Define the question/problem with clarity, e.g. how can we increase sales by 25 per cent over the next six months?
- 3 The group should be given 50 to 60 minutes to generate a recommendation.
- 4 The leader should encourage the group in the first instance to generate as many ideas as possible. Quantity is more important than quality at this stage.
- 5 Every idea must be recorded by the facilitator/leader.
- 6 The leader should allow no criticism or ridicule of ideas.
- 7 The appropriate decision should be made selecting the best course of action which may well be a superconscious solution from one of the participants.
- 8 Assign responsibility, set a deadline, and take the necessary action as listed earlier under section 13.

USE QUALITY CIRCLES

to exploit opportunities
to rise to challenges
to improve situations
to solve problems
to overcome threats.

‘A good idea is the enemy of a better one. You stop looking for alternatives.’ – Tudor Rickards

16 FINISH THE STATEMENT (ORGANISED BRAIN-STORMING)

One of the most effective ways of generating ideas is to make statements which need to be finished.

- We could double our sales over the next 12 months if ...
- We could reduce our distribution costs by 15 per cent if ...
- We could double our profits next year if ...
- We could reduce the time it takes to grant a loan by 15 per cent if ...
- We could double car-parking facilities if ...
- We could get 50 per cent more output from our existing facilities if ...

The results of this simple technique can be astonishing. We are forced to be creative. We come up with superconscious solutions. The technique can be very powerful used with small groups of people.

FINISH THE STATEMENT:

I could be successful in business if ...

17 LATERAL THINKING

Instead of trying to solve the same old problem using the same old method, why not try a completely different approach? Why not *step out of the box*?

Reversal

Instead of thinking of the problem as a problem, think of it as an opportunity. An opportunity is something from which we benefit. What benefits can we generate from this situation? How can we use this situation to increase sales, reduce costs, increase profits? Losing

your biggest customer sounds like a major problem. It is really an opportunity to demonstrate that you can replace that customer with three new customers of equal size to the greater benefit of your business.

You have just lost your job. Your husband has walked out on you – with your best friend and the kids. The house has burned down and your insurance policy has lapsed. The company keeps the car.

- Write down 20 reasons why this is the best sequence of events that ever happened.
- Write down 20 lessons that you have learned from this experience.
- It's a challenge, an opportunity.
- It's not a threat or a problem.

Random association

'Our business is like a tree because ...', 'Our business is like an apple because ...', 'Our business is like a fairground because ...', 'Our business is like a motorway because ...', 'Our business is like a helicopter because ...', etc. This mind-stimulating exercise allows us to see the business in a completely different light. It stimulates our creativity. We make mental connections which we are not in the habit of making.

Shift the dominant idea

We are often asked the question: 'why should only ten per cent of the market buy our product?' We could ask a different question: 'why should 90 per cent not buy our product?' Instead of asking the question: 'how can we increase sales by 25 per cent over the next six months?', we could ask the question: 'what action would we have to take for us to lose 25 per cent of our sales during the next six months?' Doing the complete opposite of what we would have to do

to lose sales helps us to generate ideas about what we should do to win sales.

We have been advising a supermarket chain which has only 2–3% market share. They keep asking the question: ‘How can we increase our market share to 4, 5, 6%?’ This has proved to be a tough question. We recently asked the same question, but in a different way: ‘Why do 97–98% of housewives not shop at your store?’ Managers immediately respond: ‘because our stores are pretty unpleasant places to be, we do not carry a wide enough range of products, and we simply do not have enough stores to cope with 5–6% market share.’ Our advice to the company is to make it a more pleasant shopping experience, carry a wider range of products, and open more stores.

Argue the case for the opposition

If only lawyers would learn to do this, there would be far fewer appearances in court. Use your creativity to generate an argument from the point of view of the competition or adversary. This gives greater understanding of the situation and can tell us exactly what we must do to win.

Fantasise

Instead of trying harder and harder to solve the problem, ask the question: ‘if I could wave a magic wand in this situation, what would be achieved?’ By fantasising, waving the magic wand, visualising the perfect outcome, we can use our creativity to find a way forward. We can imagine that the problem is already totally solved and then ask the question: ‘how did we actually get to this perfect solution?’

18 ASK INNOVATIVE QUESTIONS

Stimulate your creativity by asking innovative questions relating to marketing, selling, etc. If our customers are buying products A, B, and C, which D, E, F products can we add to our product list? Which additional benefits can we provide for our existing customers? Where can we find additional customers for our present benefits? Can we put our existing products to other uses? How can we creatively imitate our competitors? Can we develop our product to make it more attractive? Can we reduce our product to make it more attractive? Can we make a substitute for our existing product? Can we combine our product with another product? How can we change our existing product to make it look like something else? Which additional products do our competitors sell?, etc.

Stimulate your creativity by asking innovative questions.

19 SOURCES OF INNOVATION

Unexpected events

Surprise events can lead to the demand for new products/services.

Incongruity

New products sometimes occur when the search for an answer to one problem results in the unexpected. The unexpected discovery can be a new product which results in benefits for customers.

Process need to overcome difficulty

Innovation sometimes becomes necessary when an organisation or an individual hits a rock which appears to prevent the achievement of a desired result.

Change in industry structure

When a major industry has to change its products, this can lead to lots of spin-offs for other businesses, e.g. the move towards smaller cars.

Demographic changes

The fact that people move in numbers from one area to another means that there is increased demand for all sorts of products/services in the newly-occupied territories.

Changes in values

Changes in customer values necessitate innovation, e.g. the move away from meat products to vegetarian products.

New knowledge

Research and development provides a constant stream of new knowledge. From this knowledge, new products in which customers see a real benefit can emerge. When managers find these sources of innovation, they should ask the question: 'how can this situation be used to produce benefits for which customers are willing and able to pay?'

20 NEW IDEAS

The world is full of new ideas. Very few of these ideas are ever turned into profitable products. When faced with new ideas, we should adopt the following approach:

- 1 Define clearly what the idea is.
- 2 What is the benefit it produces?
- 3 What does it do?
- 4 What does it cost?

- 5 Does it make at least a ten per cent difference to customers?
- 6 Why should anybody buy this benefit from me?
- 7 What else could produce exactly the same benefit?
- 8 What does the alternative cost?
- 9 How will our competitors react?
- 10 Will it do the job it is intended to do?
- 11 Is it at least ten per cent better than the existing alternative?
- 12 Is it a significant improvement?
- 13 Is it compatible with human nature?
- 14 Would you recommend it to your family and friends?
- 15 Would you buy it yourself?
- 16 Is anybody prepared to be a product champion for this product/ service?
- 17 Is it too soon for this product, or is it too late for this product?
- 18 Is it worth the expense?
- 19 Will people understand it? Can the benefit it provides be easily summarised in 20 words?

21 BENEFITS FOR CUSTOMERS

Remember that we are all in business to provide benefits for customers – at a profit. We are not in business to make products and provide services. The world is full of products and services in which customers see no benefit and for which they are neither willing nor able to pay. Benefits that customers seek include an increase in self-esteem, new knowledge, companionship, additional wealth, success, power, influence, self-expression, better health, better relationships, social status, popularity, self-actualisation, recognition, admiration, prestige, security, safety, self-preservation, a decent meal, a good laugh and excitement. Remember that customers are lazy, ignorant, selfish, greedy, impatient, disloyal, ruthless, irresponsible, unreliable and vain. Use your creativity to generate benefits which are consistent with customer characteristics.

Everything starts
with ideas.

CREATIVITY IS THE ABILITY TO IMPROVE.
CREATIVITY IS A SKILL.
USE THE IDEAS AND TECHNIQUES IN THIS CHAPTER
TO STIMULATE YOUR CREATIVITY.
SEEK AND YE SHALL FIND.

‘Imagination is more important than knowledge.’
– *Albert Einstein*
