

Corporate Creativity

If You Haven't Got It, Here's How To Develop It

BY BOB GARNER

BACK IN THE 1920S A YOUNG MAN DECIDED he was going to do something that no one else had ever done — to make the first animated cartoon with sound. But not one motion picture company was interested in a movie about a rat named Oswald. A few months later this creative man changed the rat to a mouse and the name Oswald to Mickey. The rest is history.

In the 1960s, a student came up with the idea for an overnight air-freight service and wrote a paper about it for a class he was taking. His professor gave him a C and said the idea was impractical. That student, Fred Smith, ignored his professor's negativity and founded Federal Express. To encourage innovation in his own company, employees are offered rewards as high as \$25,000 for creative thinking.

What do these innovators and others like them have in common?

■ *They allow themselves the "luxury" of thinking.* In many corporations, thinking is allowed, but not appreciated. Many times the hierarchy frowns upon creative thinking because of the fear of change. Without change, however, there can be no creativity and no growth. As George Bernard Shaw eloquently stated: "Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything."

■ *They find a way to combat the immense negativity that greets new ideas.* Many ideas look foolish or impractical at the beginning. Continual discussions or demonstrations are sometimes needed before others begin to comprehend your idea. Swiftly delivered no's will destroy ideas that could create better service or products, enhance employee relations or increase company profits.

■ *They aren't afraid to make mistakes.* In most corporations, people are afraid of making mistakes for fear (there's that word again) of losing their jobs. A junior executive once gambled on an idea for a large computer firm and lost the company millions of dollars. Was this creative employee fired? No. Why? Because this company had just spent millions of dollars educating that young executive via his mistake. They believed that a company could learn and grow from its mistakes. Imagine, if that individual would have been fired, how many other employees would have dared to be creative.

Help Your Ideas Spread Wings And Fly

SO, HOW CAN YOU LEARN TO BE MORE CREATIVE? ONE OF THE PRINCIPLES that I stress in my presentations on corporate creativity is the "3Cs": Concentrate, Collaborate and Communicate.

CONCENTRATE. "Thinking is hard work; that's why so few people do it," wrote Mark Twain. To be creative you must allow yourself the privilege of actually doing nothing but thinking. Try this approach: Pick a time of day when you feel you can give yourself 15 minutes of uninterrupted time. Take everything off your desk, except a pad of paper and a pencil.



Close the doors, hold the calls, shut your eyes and relax. Clear your mind and begin to think about a problem that has to be solved or a need that must be met. Write all of your ideas down — even the ones that seem incredibly crazy — and in a few days examine what you wrote. You may find that some of those crazy ideas aren't so crazy after all. Most inventions or improvements start with thinking, with uninterrupted concentration. Take the automatic toaster, for example. Charles Strite was so upset at the burnt toast in his factory's lunchroom that he invented the toaster. Betty Nesmith, discouraged by the number of typing errors that she made on her typewriter, mixed water based paint and a color dye and developed liquid paper correction fluid.

COLLABORATE. Once you've concentrated on your ideas, set up an informal meeting with co-workers who you can trust and be relaxed around. Make this meeting different by calling it a "Yes" meeting (the brainchild of Chuck Jones, the creator of Bugs Bunny, the Road Runner and most of the Warner Brothers cartoons). A "yes" session isn't a brainstorming session. It simply means that you can't say "no" or make any negative statements. All ideas are placed on the table and given complete positive support. Later, an agreed upon weeding out process can occur. This approach will definitely give any idea the opportunity to crawl, walk and maybe even run.

COMMUNICATE. Talk about your idea with the decision maker. By first concentrating and then collaborating, you've probably worked out many of the bugs and have a better chance of forecasting any negative comments or questions the decision maker may have. Some decision makers may automatically shoot down ideas due to fear of change, which is probably based on the theory that your "good" ideas may

make them look "bad." If he/she stares blankly or says, "That's not how we do it around here," it may escalate your fear of making a mistake. But remember, if you've concentrated and collaborated on your idea, you don't have a "dumb" idea.

Hopefully your decision maker is a leader who believes in empowering employees. Empowerment means that employees have the freedom to be creative and make decisions based on the guidelines of the company's specific goals and objectives. True leaders inspire vision and give that vision to others, which they can turn into a reality. By having a shared vision of creativity, employees are engaged in a collective process that will result in corporate and personal growth.

By following the "3Cs" you'll think in a more creative way and your ideas will have a chance to grow. You'll be able to shape and mold those ideas and find the avenues for them to become reality. So, take those ideas and travel...far. ①

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