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In 2009, a Stanford business professor:

- Split her class into 14 teams
- Gave each team \$5 and 2 hours
- Told them to get as much ROI as possible
- Said they'd give a presentation after finishing

Here's how it went down + the foundational lesson you can learn from it:



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First, let's talk about the teams that lost.

Most of them tried to flip items.

They bought something for \$5 at a store, sold it for \$8 on the street, and went on like that.

Their ROI was minimal.

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One team got more creative.

They realized that the \$5 was mostly a distraction, so they just thought of ways to make money in 2 hours.

They ended up making reservations at a restaurant and selling them to people who didn't want to wait in line.

Their ROI was a bit better.

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The winning team got even more creative.

They didn't just realize that the \$5 was mostly a distraction.

They also realized that there was a valuable asset hidden in the challenge:

The presentation time.

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This realization led to them reaching out to local companies offering the 3-minute slot as ad space.

After some negotiation, they closed a deal for \$650.

That's an ROI of 12,900%.

They were the winners of the challenge, and it wasn't close.

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So, what's the big lesson?

Be flexible and think outside the box.

The assets you have might not be as valuable as you think they are.

You also might have assets that you don't even know you have.

The “logical” path might not be the right one.

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When building a business, look beyond the obvious.

Ask yourself:

What are my assumptions?

Could they be wrong?

Is there something I'm not seeing?

Do that and you might stumble on an idea that changes the future of your company.

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If you are interested in learning more about this exercise Prof Seelig ran check out her book 'What I wish I knew When I was 20'