

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

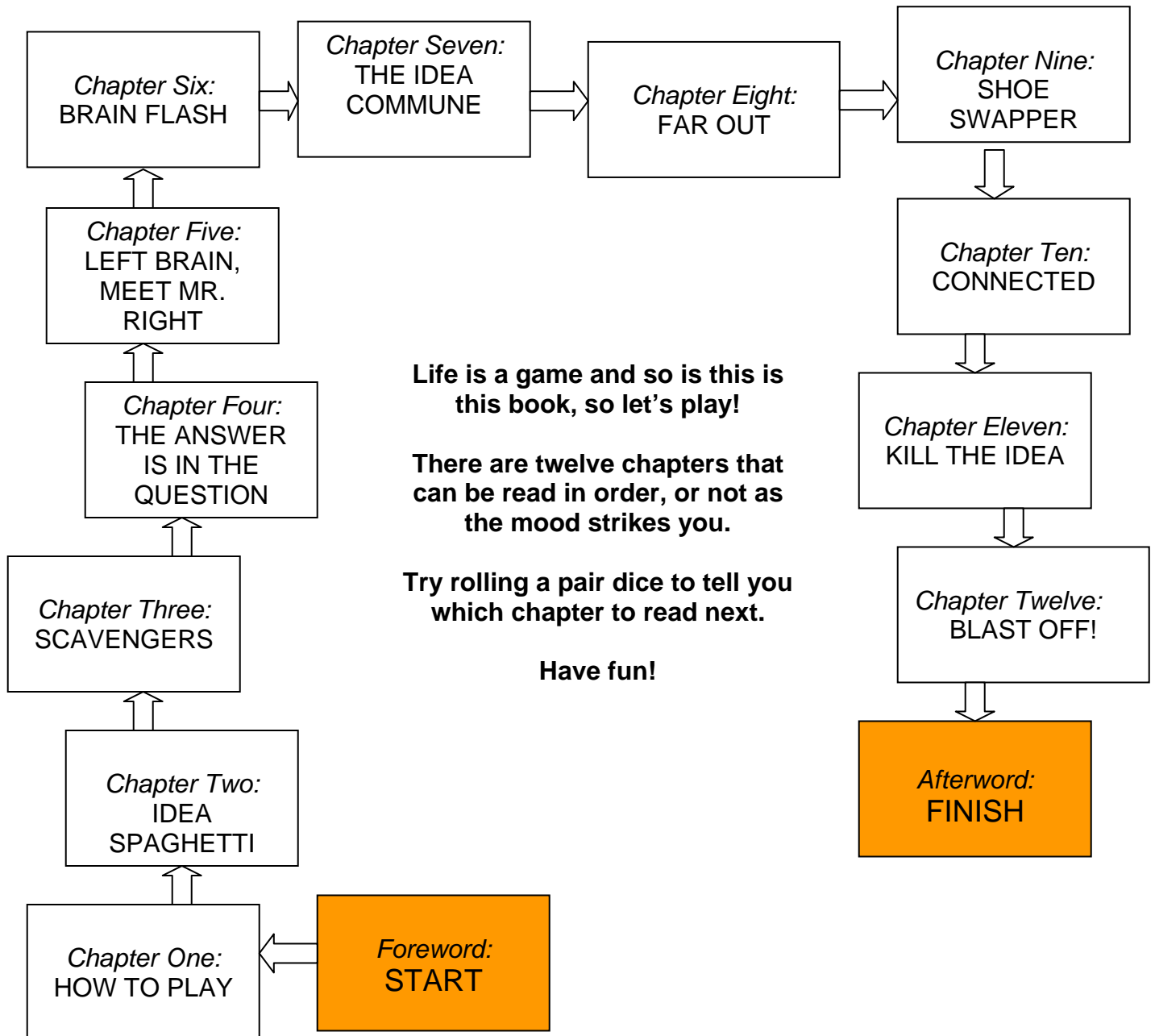
TTL THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND:

SUBTTL WHERE CREATIVITY AND COMMERCE COLLIDE

AU Dave Stewart & Mark Simmons

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Designed like a game board



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FOREWORD

Ideally written by Richard Branson.

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CHAPTER 1: HOW TO PLAY

Creativity is Inside Every One of Us. It Just Needs a Little Encouragement to Come Out and Play.

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Open for Business

You know it's weird, but you don't often find the words "business" and "playground" together in the same sentence. One is serious, the other is, and well, sort of playful, and never the twain shall meet. Play is a vital ingredient for creativity (there are others too and we'll come to those in the following chapters) because it frees up the mind to new possibilities that otherwise just wouldn't have got a look in.

Music is creativity at play in one of its purest forms and it's no coincidence that one of this book's coauthors is a prolific musician (the other being Dave Stewart. Ha ha, only kidding). When the creativity is allowed to come out and play, magic can happen. When the *Rolling Stones* first performed "Get off My Cloud" in 1965, their first song to top both UK and US charts, who would have thought that well over four decades later they'd still be playing it to huge audiences? They just wanted to make great songs and music and threw their hearts into it and as a result this creative spirit has made them one of the most enduring and iconic

brands out there. *Business Playground* recently talked to Mick Jagger about how the *band* became a *brand*.

Mick has always been a very smart businessman as well as spellbinding performer and amazing songwriter (he also runs a successful film company, Jagged Films). His days are consumed with a myriad of film productions meetings, band strategy meetings and creative writing sessions, and yet he still makes time to work out for hours and he is one of the fittest people in the music industry. Mick was studying business at the London School of Economics (LSE) before dropping out in 1963 to form the *Rolling Stones* with Keith Richards and Brian Jones. When he left the LSE he thought that was the end of his involvement in business and saw music as his way to escape, but later began to realize to be continue to be successful he had to play a part in the business of the band. "Because at the beginning you always have people helping you, and I guess, even though I was sort of vaguely business-orientated, I really didn't want to do it," he told *Business Playground*. "In the end I was forced to come back to it again when I realized at one point, I guess in the 60's, that I had to make it my job to be involved."

"In the era when we were starting out it wasn't considered part of your remit to do anything but playing music," says Mick. "But, because we had no money, one of the first things I ever did was the music for *Rice Crispies* commercial. Some guy

came up to us in a club and he obviously thought, 'Oh god, look.' Later on, doing this sort of work was not considered the right way to go and was seen as selling out. *The Who* even did an album called *The Who Sell Out* with a can of baked beans on the cover." *The Who Sell Out* album that Mick is referring to was released in 1967 had multiple versions of the cover depending on which country it was being sold in. One version shows on the front cover Roger Daltrey in a tub full of *Heinz Baked Beans* and Pete Townsend pitching *Odorono* deodorant, and on the back Keith Moon selling *Medac* pimple cream and John Entwistle promoting the Charles Atlas bodybuilding course. Part of the intended irony of the title of the album and cover art was that *The Who* were in fact making commercials at that stage of their career, and some of them were later included as bonus material on the remastered CD version of the album. Mick laughs, "That was like the epitome of that era because it was kind of like a joke. I don't know what Pete meant by that."

Then, in 1981, the *Rolling Stones'* tour *Tattoo You* became the first ever to be sponsored. "We did sponsorship for the first time and got a lot of attacks for it. It was a perfume company¹ and it was a real breakthrough," he says. "I don't think any tour had ever been sponsored before. They approached us and we said, 'well, why not?' You know, we're not making a lot of money on this tour. In those days ticket prices were really low, so this would up the income. It wasn't very

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¹ The sponsor was perfume-maker *Jovan*.

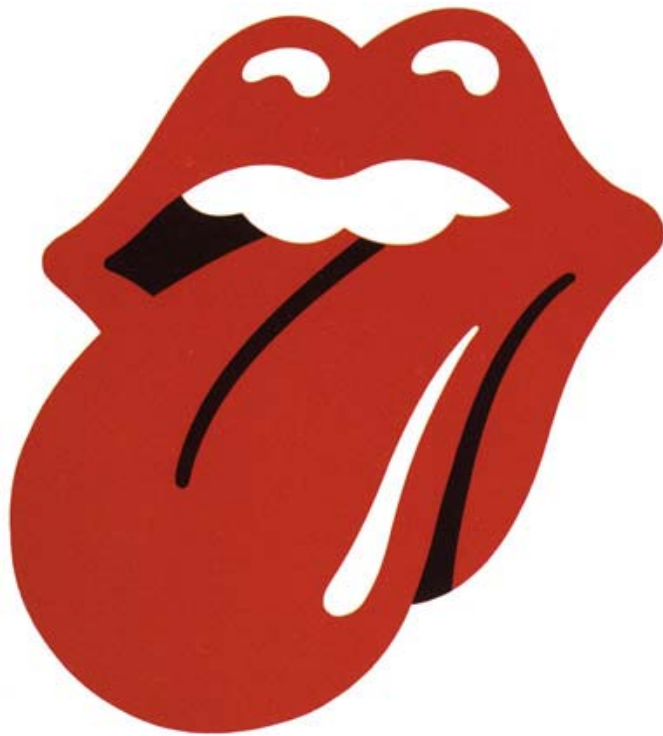
much money but it was a breakthrough thing. After that it became the norm and the next time we went on tour we got more money from a much bigger company.” It’s now part of the business-model to find corporate sponsors for tours. According to industry veteran Irving Azoff² third-party sponsorship is now the second biggest revenue stream for the music industry after ticket sales (whereas in the past sponsorship didn’t play a major role and the top earners were, first, record sales, second, ticket sales and, third, merchandize).

Part of what makes Mick Jagger a smart businessman is that he’s a savvy marketer and completely understands the importance of creating the right image. He told *Business Playground*, “Very early on I think I realized that image-making was as important as the music, if not in some ways more important. Visual imagery helps tells the story.” He commissioned the *Tongue and Lips* logo for a *Rolling Stones* record label and it has since become one of the most recognized logos in music history. Created by John Pasche, a design student who was still at the Royal College of Art when he got the call from Mick’s office, it was inspired by Mick’s mouth and was a perfect visual summation of the band’s anti-authoritarian image. It was first used on the inner sleeve of the 1971 album *Sticky Fingers* (Andy Warhol did the cover art) and then as a design element on a slew of other record, CD and DVD covers and merchandise. The *Rolling Stones* were definitely the bad boys of rock at the time and Mick Jagger immediately saw the

² Irving Azoff was interviewed for “The Price of the Ticket” – by John Seabrook for the *New Yorker*, August 10&17, 2009

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beauty of the simple yet iconic design. Mick was very knowledgeable about design. According to Pasche in a recent interview³ about working with Mick: "He's always taken a lot of interest in everything graphical and photographic related to the band and he understands the importance of image," and when he was satisfied with a piece of design work, "he would get the rest of the band to rubber stamp it, but he was always the leader."



³ *Creative Review*, September 2, 2008

H1 What's the Big Idea?

A question that on first blush might seem to have an obvious answer but really doesn't is: *what is an idea?*"

After all, each one of us has ideas everyday. Ones like: "I know, I'll go and get a coffee now. One with froth and chocolate sprinkles." Or, "I think I'll wear the tie with little fishes on it today. People made fun of me when wore it last time, but they can go stuff themselves." As ideas these are hardly earth shattering innovations. They don't involve much of our creative potential, they are just thoughts that pop into our heads.

Then there are things we do which aren't ideas, but can loosely be described as creative. We doodle in meetings, we make jokes and we help with our children's craft projects. Again, nothing that will bring us fame and adulation, but we've at the very least made something from nothing that has some sort of meaning to us, and possibly to others.

Creativity is more than the production of ideas. The ideas have to be novel and useful as well. Unoriginal or unrealistic ideas are two a penny (the exchange rate fluctuates according to economic circumstances). Original and practical ones are harder to find.

For instance, take Thomas Edison's incandescent electric light, an idea he patented in 1879. Actually, the first incandescent light source was developed by Humphrey Davy in 1809. It became the first "arc lamp," which then became abbreviated to "arc lamp," when the marketers got a hold of the idea. Attempts to roll out arc lamps commercially weren't successful because of the lack of a constant supply of electricity. It wasn't until Edison developed a system to supply electricity all over the place that the incandescent light became practical on a large scale. The point is Davy's invention wasn't that useful until Edison found a way to make it so. Edison promised, "We will make electricity so cheap that only the rich will burn candles." And he did. Competitors were incandescent with rage (excuse the bad pun). Especially rival William Sawyer who claimed Edison had infringed his patent.⁴

And then there's the novelty or originality of the creative output. Music is a great example of creativity at work but, more often than not, even the most incredible musicians start their careers by playing music that isn't their own. The Beatles were naturally gifted musicians and right from the beginning of their careers, first

⁴ According to Wikipedia, "On October 8, 1883, the U.S. patent office ruled that Edison's patent was based on the work of William Sawyer and was therefore invalid. Litigation continued for nearly six years, until October 6, 1889, when a judge ruled that Edison's electric light improvement claim for "a filament of carbon of high resistance" was valid. To avoid a possible court battle with Joseph Swan, whose British patent had been awarded a year before Edison's, he and Swan formed a joint company called Ediswan to manufacture and market the invention in Britain."

as The Quarrymen and then as The Silver Beatles, they demonstrated an amazing raw talent. To start with though, the songs they played were covers of other people's songs and, while the lads certainly added their own distinctive style and flair, there was a long way to go before the lads would reach their full creative potential.

In their early days John and Paul would write songs that sounded like all of the other songs they had been playing Liverpool's Cavern Club or in the Hamburg clubs where they would often perform at throughout the night. But, after a lot more practice at songwriting they got better and better at it until, at last, they were able to produce truly original songs, many of course which immediately became instant classics.

Their first hit was in November 1962⁵, and over the next eight years⁶ they produced some of the finest popular music ever created. One album in particular stands out. On June 1, 1967 The Beatles released *Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band*. This was such an original album, chock full of ideas, experimental recording techniques and unique songwriting. They had begun to understand what a truly original idea was, and their fans could hear it in the music. The day the album was released it could be heard blasting out of houses, bedsits,

⁵ *Please Please Me*, their second single, was released in November 1962 and went to Number 2 in the UK charts.

⁶ Paul filed suit for a dissolution of the band on December 31, 1970

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apartments and palaces all over the world. They had practiced so much at being creative, that on *Sgt. Pepper* they broke through the “brain barrier” and delivered a pop music masterpiece.

It inspired other musicians as well as fans. Jimmy Hendrix learned the whole album the day it was released, and just three days later at a gig at the Saville Theatre in London, much to the amazement and delight of an audience that included Paul McCartney and George Harrison, he performed his own version of it. Jimmy had no trouble in letting his creativity flow. He also knew that the more you practice being creative the better you get at it.

A musician can instinctively tell the difference between a great melody and a bunch of notes. You don't need to be a musician or artist to be creative, but you can learn from how they think. Through practice and experience we can all learn how to judge our ideas and decide if they are exciting and compelling - even unique – and, if not, how to improve them. We all have natural creative talents that need to be encouraged and shaped, but we don't all recognize them or do what it takes to bring them out and improve them. As The Beatles proved, when we combine the process of creativity that we all innately have with our ability to come up with original ideas, we have the power to transform. And in business when the idea serves a useful purpose that meets specific needs, this can mean

transforming products, transforming market sectors and transforming whole industries.

BX1

SIDEBAR

Whether an idea is novel and useful to you depends on the purpose of your creation. Sometimes it's just to fix your own shoe or some contraption so you can read in bed a bit better. My Stepfather, Julien, had amazing ideas every day and he put them to good use. He never worked, was a practicing Zen Buddhist (his own version) and he never touched money. Julien would only eat, read or play with what he found each day and he was a recycling genius. He also was a true pioneer against Global Warming. Back in 1970 he was marching up and down Hampstead High Street and Downing Street wearing his home made sandwich board on which he had written: "The Ice Caps are slowly melting. We are all in grave danger."

I'd go visit him and he would be sitting on the floor wearing a paper Xmas hat playing electronic chess with himself and eating salami, all three things he had just found thrown away locally on his morning stroll. But, I was more fascinated with some of the things he invented out of these discarded objects.

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He would struggle home with old chair legs and coat hangers, 500 door handles, all sorts of stuff, then the next time I went to see him (he lived with my mum around the corner in Maida Vale in London) he had turned these bits and pieces into fantastic inventions, some of which would have sold like hotcakes if they went into production, and he had already built the prototype.

Most of them were built out of necessity, as he was quite lazy and had bad vision so he wanted things to come to him as opposed to getting up to get them, and my favorite was his Aphrodisiac Bedside Lamp. He had found a female dummy's leg that they use in shop windows to display nylon stockings and he had then found a light bulb, a cord and plug and a lampshade. A brand new pair of stockings and, hey presto!, in a few hours he had it all working. He said, "Just imagine now every night to turn out the light I have to reach my hand inside a lady's skirt touching, her stocking and grope around for the switch."

Now that is better than any pill on the market today! You see Juilen was using creativity to solve every one of his problems and to satisfy all his wants. He lived like a king on creativity, and didn't ever need to even cash a cheque!!!

H1 Creativity is Child's Play

EXT "Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up."

SRC Pablo Picasso

Saying creativity is child's play is not to say it's easy, but to children it's second nature. It's what they do. They explore, they question, they build and they destroy and the next minute they do it all again. As we get older, things get in the way of our creativity. We learn rules. We have to go to school. We get a job. We fit in and conform. And little by little we forget how to do it (American psychologist Paul E. Torrance described in the 1960s as "the 4th grade⁷ slump" the declining creativity in children as they get older⁸).

Education and creativity expert, Sir Ken Robinson, has extensively examined what happens in schools to bury its students' creative abilities. In his book, *Out of Our Minds*,⁹ he notes that in Europe and the U.S. the education systems have been designed to meet the needs of an industrial society, one that no longer exists. In that society, practical subjects such as languages, mathematics,

⁷ Kids are around 10 years old when they enter 4th grade.

⁸ E. Paul Torrance, "A Longitudinal Examination of the 4th Grade Slump in Creativity." *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 12 (1968): 195-197.

⁹ "Out of Our Minds: Learning to be Creative" – by Ken Robinson (Capstone Publishing Limited, 2001)

sciences and technology are seen as useful, while arty ones such as history, geography, art, music and drama are often not.

Over the past few decades the economy has shifted towards industries that rely on a different set of skills. In the U.S., “the intellectual property sectors, whose value depends on their ability to generate new ideas rather than to manufacture commodities, are now the most powerful element in the U.S. economy,” he writes. “The Intellectual Property Association in Washington has estimated these sectors to be worth currently \$360 billion a year, making them more valuable than automobiles, agriculture or aerospace.” With a market for new ideas that large you’d expect schools to place greater value on teaching creativity.

Multi-award winning film and theatre director, Matthew Warchus (he won the 2009 Tony award for Best Direction of a Play for *God of Carnage*), told *Business Playground* in an interview about his experience at school: “I’ve often thought that the arts are a great recycling centre for people who’ve got certain aspects in their personality that might be seen as dysfunctional in other areas,” he told us. “But, if you bring them to creative arts they find a fantastic role. My slight dysfunction is that I’ve always been a bit of a loner and an outsider and I can remember most of my time at school being spent on the outside, looking in, listening to other people talk and behave together and not really being in the middle of anything.” Fortunately he found a career that was based on his ability

to step back from things somewhat: “Someone like me is used to being on the outside and having an overview of things, and is able to see patterns in behaviour and life and the interactions between people. In conversations you see patterns that you wouldn’t notice if you were on the inside of the conversation. And that kind of person doesn’t make a very good actor, for example, nor a very good orchestral instrumentalist, and that could an unfortunate type of person to be if there wasn’t a great job for that type of person, which is being a director.”

The need to not impose adult values in a child’s education and encourage play and creativity has been recognized by many pioneers in the last century or so, including Italian educator Maria Montessori who lent her name to the Montessori Method of teaching that allows a child to learn by following his or her natural grain. But, the school system as a whole hasn’t changed to reflect the shift from manufacturing to an innovation-based economy and academic skills are still valued above creative ones. Schools still focus their efforts on developing a child’s left brain skills, the part involved in language processing and reasoning, at the expense of the right where the creative abilities take place.

Sir Ken uses an analogy from James Hemmings to expose the folly of this approach, who said that educating people entirely through left-brain activities of the academic curriculum was “like training somebody for a race by exercising

only one leg while leaving the muscles of the other leg to atrophy.” If we don’t use our creative abilities as adults they too will atrophy. In fact, data shows how as children get older they lose their ability to think divergently, a key component of creativity. In research, 98% of three to five year olds tested showed they could think in divergent ways, but by the time they 13 to 15-year-olds, only 10% could think in this way. And when the test was used with 25-year-olds, only 2% could think divergently.¹⁰

Evan Williams, co-founder and CEO of Twitter, told *Business Playground* about his experience of school in rural Nebraska: “At grade school my parents were told by my teachers I would come up with the right answers but the wrong way. Even if I knew the answer I didn’t want to get to it the way they wanted me to get to it.” He says, “I definitely think people can learn how to be creative. But, I think for the most part people unlearn how to do it.”

This division between the different values placed on academic subjects compared to the arts wasn’t always the case. As Sir Ken writes, “The idea of a Renaissance Man is one who is learned in a range of disciplines including the arts and sciences...when Michelangelo was painting the Sistine Chapel he had in his room drafts of scientific theorems and of new technological innovations.”

¹⁰ “Creative thinkers wither with age” – Elizabeth Bule in the *Times Educational Supplement*, March 25, 2005

These renaissance dudes successfully combined academic ability with artistic abilities.

BX1

SIDEBAR

Children until a certain age are not hampered by self-doubt. My daughters Kaya (9) and Indya (7) are constantly solving stuff through creative 'brainsailing.' To them everything is easy peasy.

Recently Kaya was in the car coming home from school and she was saying that the teacher was telling them that there needs to be more awareness about recycling and everyone should try to 'go green.' As she was telling me this we were stopped at a traffic light on red. When the light turned green Kaya immediately connected the dots and said, "Why don't they write recycle on every green traffic light!"

So simple a brilliant way to brainwash everyone on the planet plus it would be cheap and easy to do. In fact, after I write this I'm going to approach Mayor Villargaigosa in Los Angeles to ask if we can do a test in a small area. Don't be surprised if by the time this book comes out that this is in effect all over USA!

Can Creativity be Rediscovered?

If we don't make use of our creative skills they become weaker. But, are they still there when we're older?

The Moon and Sixpence is a short novel by William Somerset Maugham, based on the life of painter Paul Gauguin. The story is about Charles Strickland, a stockbroker who, like Gauguin, leaves his family to pursue a passion for painting. After a number of years living there in poverty in Paris, Strickland makes his way to Tahiti where he eventually dies from leprosy (oops, sorry, we just gave away the ending!) His greatest work of art is the one he paints on the walls of the hut in Tahiti he lives in. But, because he has no visitors to his remote part of the island thousands of miles from civilized society, nobody from the outside world ever gets to see it. And following his instructions after he dies his Tahitian wife burns down the hut leaving no trace of his life's work.

Strickland painted just because he just had to, not because he wanted fame or money from it. The title of Maugham's book is thought to come from an earlier novel he wrote, *Of Human Bondage*, in which the main character is described as, "so busy yearning for the moon that he never saw the sixpence at his feet." For both the fictional character Charles Strickland and for Paul Gauguin, the real artist Maugham based the story on, the desire to create was more powerful than

the comfort and security of family steady job. They went for the moon instead of the sixpence.

There is compelling evidence to suggest that there remains a creative force in all of us. It's there, waiting to be used, but is sometimes buried deep down or even repressed. It is a hidden and for the most part untapped reserve of creative energy that can sometimes be brought out under the most extraordinary circumstances. For instance, there are cases of people who had shown little or no creative talent until they started suffering from a mental condition called frontotemporal dementia (FTD). This condition forces parts of the brain involved in creativity to step in to compensate for deterioration in other parts of the brain. In FTD the temporal and frontal lobes of the brain are damaged and, when the left temporal lobe - the area responsible for speech, social behavior and memory - is affected more than the right lobe, sufferers experience loss of memory and reduced verbal and social abilities. In fact, before being diagnosed with FTD it is not uncommon for sufferers to have been arrested for disorderly behavior.

But, in addition to being thrown in the clink for a night, many of them go on to experience an increase in creative abilities. One sufferer, Jancy Chang, started to paint when she started suffering from FTD and, according to neurologist Bruce Miller, "The more she lost her social and language abilities, the wilder and freer her art became." Another sufferer started to compose music despite having no

musical training. And yet another patient, like Charles Strickland and Paul Gauguin, had been a stockbroker and when he became ill started painting, going on to win several prizes for his work.

Neurologist Miller believes that as people like these lose the ability to use words to conceptualize things they are forced into a much more visual way of thinking about the world. It's as if the brain, unable to operate through the usual means, compensates in other ways. Because parts of the left hemisphere aren't functioning, parts of the right come into play, and these are the parts used in creativity. He describes the left hemisphere as a bully that suppresses some of the right hemisphere's musical and visual abilities, and when it's turned off the abilities the appear.

Other evidence¹¹ supports the idea that we retain the ability to be creative as we age. Quantity of creative output might decrease but quality probably won't. While adult creativity peaks in our 30's and 40's there are "late bloomers" who peak much later. There is often a secondary peak in the late 60's. So yes, even when we're older, our creative abilities are still lurking down there, waiting to be reawakened. And the good news is that there are ways to tap into our innate creative abilities that don't involve leaving our families and jobs or suffering from dementia. We can exercise our creative muscles so they become strong again,

¹¹ "Creativity in Later Life." By Simonton, the Theme Issue of GENERATIONS 15, no. 2 (Spring 1991).

as strong as they were in childhood when our imaginations were unbridled and the left hemispheres hadn't had a chance to bully them into submission.

We are all creative inside even if we don't look it from the outside. As Tim Brown, CEO of IDEO, the foremost design and innovation consultancy in the world, told us in an interview: "The myth is that you have to wear black turtlenecks and designer spectacles in order for you to be creative. Sure, some people are born with talent they exploit, but everybody to some extent can use creativity techniques to be more productive and have better ideas than they would otherwise."

The Pyramid of the Powerless

Of course, most businesses aren't designed for creativity. Instead they tend to be designed to be efficient machines with established processes, systems and rules that allow little flexibility for the more unstructured thought necessary for ideas to form and flourish.

And that's a problem. "Innovation in business offers an alternative to the endless downward spiral of commoditization that comes if you don't," says Tim Brown of IDEO. "Once you're over a certain bar in terms of quality or efficiency, there's very little competitive advantage to be had from doing more of that. Everybody

else learns just as fast as you do. The only alternative to commoditization is new choices and alternatives that haven't existed before."

Even if individuals do find room for maverick thinking in corporations it is rarely encouraged or rewarded and employees often need to leave to become entrepreneurs. Or drunks. Some companies, like Google for instance, recognize this and encourage employees to devote a proportion of their time to pet innovative projects that the company will support and fund if they have merit (although as we note in a later chapter, in the case of Google that isn't always enough).

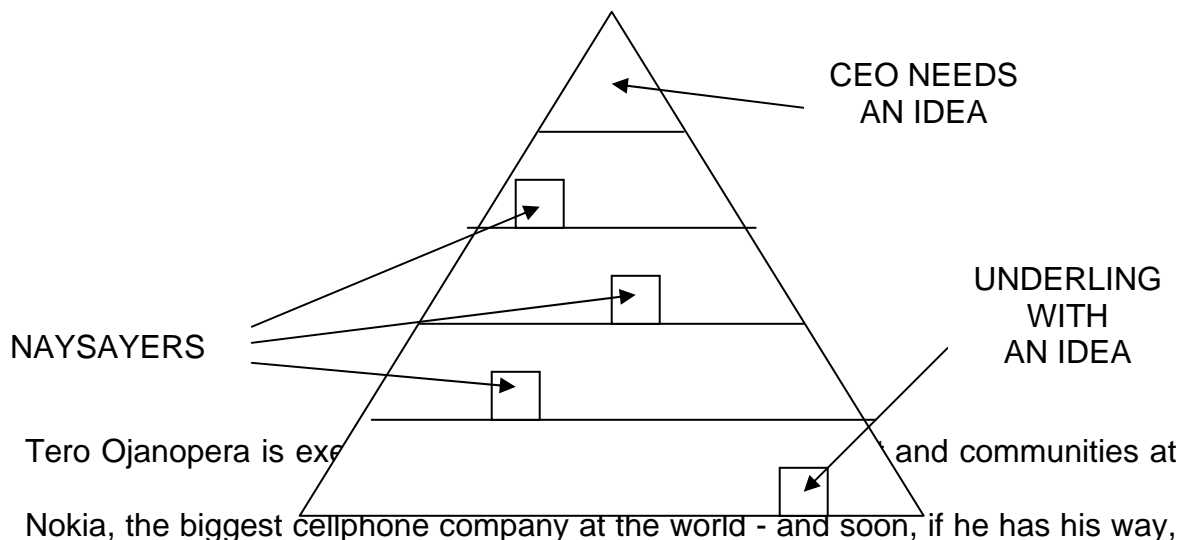
The inability to foster a creative environment in corporations means that imagination and innovation are usually outsourced to outside specialist companies such as ad agencies and consultancies. These outside specialists often have very narrow remits and might be brought in very late in the process when almost all of the major decisions have already been made. They are rarely privy to the big picture – partly because their clients do not allow them to see it and partly because their expertise is so narrow – and so even if brought in earlier, they are unable contribute to the other parts of the process.

Even if you have a good idea that will benefit the business, there's still a long way to go. Many corporate environments make it almost impossible for good

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ideas to make it out alive. The idea, often created by some underling far down the food chain, might never survive through the multiple layers that exist between him or her and the big boss. At each layer there are people who have the power to say “no,” but very little power to say “yes” and the idea dies before it ever gets to the decision-maker. As Charles Kettering, inventor of the starting motor along with other innovations, said: “If all the naysayers had to be met, nothing would be ever be invented.”

Welcome to the Pyramid of the Powerless.



one of the biggest *media* companies in the world. Nokia is becoming a massive distribution network for all sorts of content (such as music, games and film), services and applications. Its *Comes With Music* service, for instance, allows

people who buy certain Nokia handsets unlimited access to millions of music downloads for a fee already built into the price of their new phone.

Tero is a highly creative thinker and recognizes the barriers to creativity in most corporate environments. "Typically things start with the 'no, it's not possible,' or 'no, you cannot do it like that,'" he told Business Playground. "When you think about innovation companies typically always drive for the linear innovation. Linear innovation is you continue to do what you are doing, but just a little bit better. And that helps you to a certain degree and you can reach something, but ultimately there is a point where actually the linear innovation produces so little that somebody comes with the non-linear thinking and they bypass you and you are left behind. That's why companies typically fail. They continue with the old trajectory of things."

Jack Welch, former CEO of GE urged that corporations "Use the brains of every worker. Make sure that it is the person with the best idea who wins. Reward and celebrate new ideas to encourage others to want contribute as well. Reward those who live the company's values, show 'guts,' and, in doing so, make the numbers." And most leaders of corporations would agree with this. Time after time, in survey after survey, they talk about the need for new innovation to drive business. Yet still, the rubbish bins of corporations everywhere are full of the rejected ideas of dejected innovators.

A recent IBM study¹² of CEOs and senior managers confirmed the importance of innovative thinking as business continues to change. Eight out of ten CEOs predicted significant change ahead, change that come from just about anywhere. One of those interviewed described the business environment as “a white water world.” We don’t think he was referring to a theme park ride. A 2005 report¹³ commissioned by the UK treasury cites the PricewaterhouseCoopers’ *Innovation Survey*, which found that “top innovators generate over 75 per cent of revenue from products not in existence five years ago.” The Brit sponsored report notes that the Brits produce a disproportionate number of the world’s big ideas and in many creative industries - including architecture, fashion, product design, advertising, performing arts, games software, film and TV - the UK is top of the pile.

Yet the UK, or indeed any nation known for its innovators and inventions, cannot take its creative skills for granted. As the report goes on to say, “It’s dangerously complacent to think that the UK’s creative capabilities are simply an enduring national characteristic...Innovation cannot flourish in a vacuum – and successful businesses cannot be sustained without it.”

¹² “The Enterprise of the Future: Global CEO Study” conducted by IBM and The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2008

¹³ “The Cox Review of Creativity in Business: building on the UK’s strengths” was commissioned by the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the time of Budget 2005 and has been led by Sir George Cox.

And how do we do that? Well, in the words of Brendan Barber, General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress, quoted in the government report: “We can’t compete in the modern world simply by working harder, or longer, we have to work smarter.”

More evidence that business leaders agree: in a 2008 Boston Consulting Group survey on innovation of senior executives from around the world¹⁴, two-thirds of them put innovation as one of their top three strategic imperatives. That’s good, right? But, and here’s the rub, less than half of the big cheeses questioned were happy with the results that their investment in innovation bring. According to the report, these *cheese blues* came from a mix of the time it takes to develop innovations, risk-averse corporate cultures, not knowing which ideas to select to put money behind, and, well, let’s call them, “internal shenanigans.” We would agree, there is little point saying innovation is important without finding ways to actually put it into practice. In the words of Benjamin Franklin, the man on the hundred-dollar bill, “Vision without action is hallucination.” More on hallucination in a later chapter.

SIDEBAR

¹⁴ “Innovation 2008: Is the Tide Turning?” by The Boston Consulting Group, 2008.

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I think we all have been through this one. You want to get your idea or concept to a person that may comprehend it and above all have the power to implement it. This person is usually very busy surrounded by barking dogs, or has already had someone whisper in his ear that you are nuts, or someone you know has mysteriously told him the same idea a week earlier as their own.

In 1996 I had my own TV channel on the web. It was called SLY-FI (will supply pics). It was a weekly show and pretty crazy, I must admit. I was so excited about this censorship free environment that I went wild. The show was basically me as the host wearing unusual headphones with aerials (pic) and I tuned into strange happenings on our planet. It could be The Edge from U2 scuba diving looking for Pierre, or artist Damien Hirst showing a scorpion coming out of his penis. The 100 or so people who had fast speed broadband, and who saw it, flipped out. They either said it was the greatest thing they had ever seen or they sent threatening emails.

I thought, this is the future! Every artist will have their own “world” on the web. It would be a subscription, or ad revenue based, or a la carte sales, or all of these things, and would disintermediate¹⁵ all the sneaky money siphon tricks and the holder-uppers in the food chain so artists could have a direct connectivity with their fan base.

¹⁵ To disintermediate is to miss out the middle-man. Or woman. Or child.

A film editor friend of mine who had created a virtual shopping mall where you would be able to sell real estate (like an early version of 'Second Life') came to see me and, with my artists' worlds in mind, I suggested we build an artist world with streets and shops and every piece of media. We met with Deutsche Bank and they gave us money to build "Eurythmics World" (will supply images of the world). This was finished around 1992. Since then I have had to play the 'Pyramid of the Powerless' game with huge corporations and, each time I get near to this becoming a reality, there is another obstacle in the shape of a vice president or a CTO¹⁶ or CEO. Because what I want to do is fair trade for artists and for them to have a direct connection to fans and, as you can imagine, not a lot of companies want to see that happen. But, it is the only way and those companies just need to change their role and become marketing and merchandise companies. They can still have creative input, it's just that things would be transparent! Now there's a scary thought to any entertainment company!!!

(See Chapter Five for a visual map of how this would work).

About 15 years ago I bought the name "musicmail." I was convinced people would want to send music to each other through cyberspace, like sending a

¹⁶ CTO = Chief Technology Officer

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

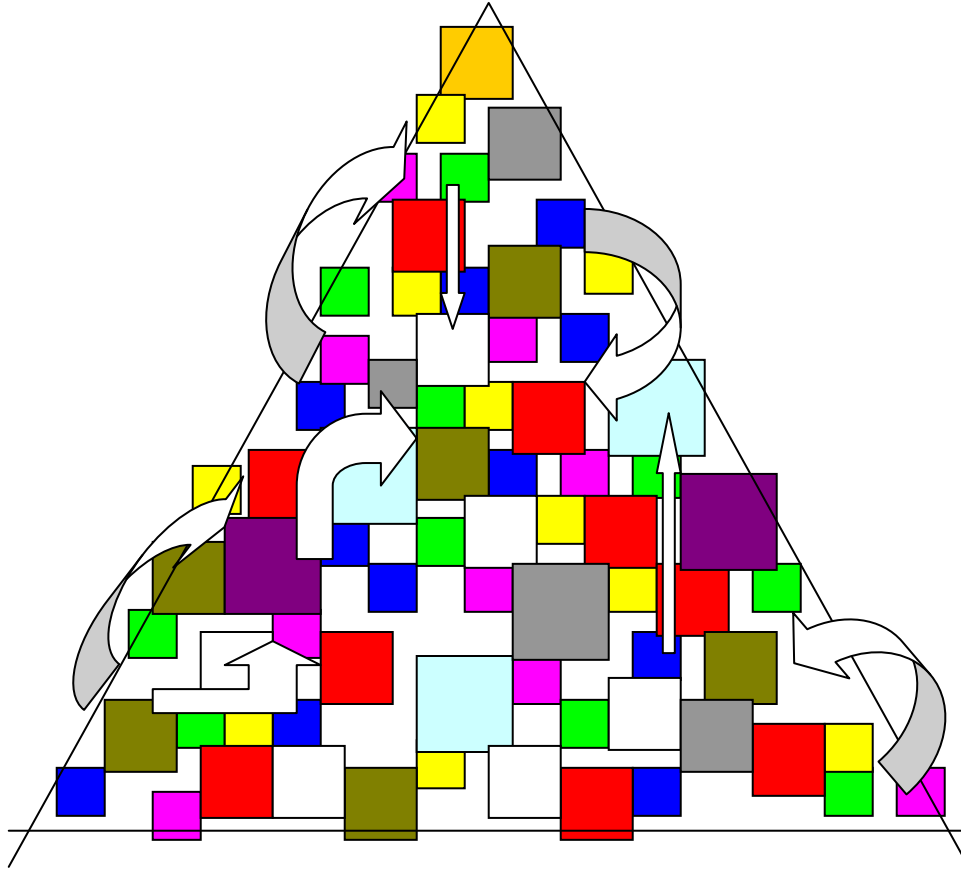
music letter. It was a very exciting time as I had just met with co-founder of Microsoft, Paul Allen, and we had become friends and I was able to ask him lots of questions about what was and would be possible technologically. Another friend of mine, Willy Henslall, had created a company called Res Rocket and using their software Paul and I had a jam session live on the Internet while I was in Covent Garden, London, and he was in Seattle.

This just about blew my mind and I realized music would never be distributed the same way again. If we could this on the Internet in 1996 (date to be confirmed), then what would be possible in 10 years time!

Move One Space Forward to the Next Chapter...or Roll the Dice

We've shown we are all born creative geniuses, but that too many rules and regulations can bury our natural abilities. In the next chapter we explore what the ingredients are for great creative output or, as we like to call it, *Idea Spaghetti*.

BOARD GAME: HOW TO PLAY



The board: A pyramid with spaces moving from bottom left to the very top. The pyramid represents the typical hierarchical structure of a company, and throughout there are obstacles that get in the way and heroes that help things move forward.

How it works: Pushing an idea through an organization is full of obstacles that must be overcome - most of the time it's just like a game. And like any game worth playing, it helps to know the rules.

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

How to play “How to Play:” Players spend a few minutes writing down ideas for new products on individual cards (see the game *Inspiral* in chapter ten for way to generate some ideas) including a crazy name for it and one line description of what it does. Players then each randomly pick an idea from the pile and try and make their way up the pyramid to the very top by the throwing of dice and, like snakes and ladders (or in this case, Snakes and Leaders), fighting obstacles and benefiting from helpful shoves along the way.

Example of a suitably crazy idea: “Chewagloo,” a blob of mint-flavoured glue that you activate by chewing first before using it to fix things.

The Helpful Pushes:

“The Elevator Pitch” – land on this square and a player has 30 seconds to pitch the idea to the CEO’s right hand man (played by the person to the player’s right of course). To take the short cut up the board the player must follow certain rules in his or her pitch: mention the name of his or her product exactly five times, use the words “return on investment” twice and compliment the right hand man on his or her appearance.

“Dead PDA Day” – there’s been a glitch in the corporate software that has temporarily disabled everyone’s smart phone, allowing them to get on with some work without being interrupted constantly and finding excuses to just check

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

emails/voicemails/instant messages/you name it. This is a free ride up the board so take it while the going is good. You just need to draw a quick picture of your product (less than 30 seconds please) first.

“The boss went to a seminar on innovation” – good for you, the boss has just heard about the importance of experimenting and taking risks with new ideas is. All you need to do to benefit from the boss’s wonderful epiphany is to describe what the TV commercial for the new product will look like and which celebrity will be the spokesperson for it.

“The competition just did something clever” – the biggest competitor just launched a new product of their own and the CEO is on the hunt for ideas to show investors that your company can match those ne’er-do-wells move for move. You don’t even need to do anything, just throw a die and move that number of spaces.

Obstacles:

“Death By Committee” – land on this one and you have two minutes to answer the committee’s (played by the other players) criticisms of the idea. Each committee member in turn must criticise the idea starting with the words “It’ll never work because...” The player must respond to the criticisms by starting with the phrase “I’m so glad you bought that up” and keep smiling throughout. The

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

player will have to move back one space for each criticism he or she doesn't answer following this "very strict" protocol.¹⁷

"Not created here" – there's an unfortunate tendency to pooh-pooh ideas created by others. Land on this space and players will inevitably have to drop back a few spaces. How many is determined by the throw of the die.

"Research it to death" – research has its place mining insights about the people who might be customers for a product or service, but delegating decision making to market research is a sure fire way to give it a slow painful death. Sorry, if a player lands here he or she will need to slide back down the board.

"If It's Such A Good Idea Why Has Nobody Ever Thought Of It Before?" – this often heard justification for not pursuing an idea make as much sense as wooden trousers. Maybe nobody has thought of it before because they're not as brilliant as you are, or they because someone had said, "If It's Such A Good Idea Why Has Nobody Ever Thought Of It Before?" - and they actually listened. The only way to escape certain relegation on this one is throw a six with a die, otherwise move back the number shown.

How to Win: Be the first to get to the CEO at the top of the pyramid. You're now the king of the castle and everyone else is a dirty rascal.

¹⁷ Up to you and the other players how strict to be.

SIDEBAR

Need permission to use this

THE LITTLE BOY

By Helen E. Buckley

Once a little boy went to school.

One morning, when the little boy had been in school a while, the teacher said:

"Today we are going to make a picture."

"Good!" thought the little boy. He liked to make pictures. He could make all kinds: lions and tigers, chickens and cows, trains and boats.

And he took out his box of crayons. And he began to draw.

But the teacher said: "Wait! It is not time to begin!" And she waited until everyone looked ready.

"Now," said the teacher, "We're going to make flowers."

"Good!" thought the little boy. He liked to make flowers, and he began to make beautiful ones with his pink and orange and blue crayons.

But the teacher said: "Wait! And I will show you how." And it was red, with a green stem.

"There," said the teacher, "Now you may begin."

The little boy looked at the teacher's. Then he looked at his own flower. He liked his flower better than the teacher's. But he did not say this. He just turned his paper over and made a flower like the teacher's. It was red, with a green stem.

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

On another day, when the little boy had opened the door from the outside all by himself, the teacher said: "Today we are going to make something with clay."

"Good!" thought the little boy. He liked clay. He could make all kinds of things with clay.

Snakes and snowmen, elephants and mice, cars and trucks. And he began to pull and pinch his ball of clay.

But the teacher said: "Wait! It is not time to begin!" And she waited until everyone looked ready.

"Now," said the teacher, "We are going to make a dish." He liked to make dishes. And he began to make some. They were all shapes and sizes.

But the teacher said "Wait! And I will show you how," and she showed everyone how to make one deep dish.

"There," said the teacher "Now you may begin."

The little boy looked at the teacher's dish, then he looked at his own. He liked his dish better than the teacher's, but he did not say this. He just rolled his clay into a big ball again.

And made a dish like the teacher's. It was a deep dish.

And pretty soon the little boy learned to wait, and to watch, and to make things just like the teacher.

And pretty soon he didn't make things on his own any more.

Then it happened that the little boy and his family moved to another house, in another city, and the little boy had to go to another school.

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

And the very first day he was there, the teacher said: "Today we are going to make a picture."

"Good!" thought the little boy. And he waited for the teacher to tell him what to do.

But the teacher didn't say anything. She just walked around the room. When she came to the little boy she said, "Don't you want to make a picture?"

"Yes," said the little boy, "What are we going to make?"

"I don't know until you make it", said the teacher.

"How shall I make it?" asked the little boy.

"Why, any way you like," said the teacher.

"And any color?" asked the little boy.

"Any color," said the teacher.

"If everyone made the same picture, and used the same colors, how would I know who made what and which was which?"

"I don't know," said the little boy.

And he began to make a red flower with a green stem.

CHAPTER 2: IDEA SPAGHETTI

Having lots and lots of ideas increases the chance of having some really great ones.

Remember Thomas Edison, the dude mentioned in the last chapter who invented the first viable electric lighting system? Turns out he also invented a bunch of other stuff too. Oh yes, Tom was no slacker.

Known as “the wizard of Menlo Park,” an area near San Francisco that happens to be the home of Google Inc.¹⁸, he was one of the most prolific inventors in history, with a cool 1,093 U.S. patents to his name, not to mention a few in the U.K., France and Germany. In addition to electric lighting (1879) he invented the phonograph (1877) and the carbon microphone (also 1879, apparently a good year for Tom), which was used in all telephones for the next hundred years and in radio broadcasting.

Alex Osborn, known as the father of modern brainstorming, said that one key component of creativity is *fluency*, or how many ideas a person can generate. And Edison had this in spades. “Prodigious” was his middle name (actually Alva was, but let’s not quibble). The other two components of creativity that Alex

¹⁸ Don’t you find it infuriating that spelling check on Microsoft’s Word software still highlights “Google” as a word it’s never heard of? Competition, what competition...?

identified were *flexibility*, defined as the number of different types of ideas a person generates, and the *originality* of the ideas, or how unique they are.

Statistically speaking, which we try not to do too much, original ideas are those generated by less than 5% of a sample. If, for instance, we were to ask 100 people for suggestions on what to do with a clothes hanger the ideas that five or few of the people come up with will be classed as original (however bizarre the ideas are). Osborn claimed that fluency is the driver of both flexibility and originality. The more ideas we generate, the more likely that the ideas will include ones that are varied and original.

If coming up with so many ideas – what we call “idea spaghetti” – is such an important driver, the question is: “What helps make a lot of spaghetti?” The answer, it turns out, is not just having a big pasta pot to cook it in, though that helps, but the ability to think divergently. “Meaning?” we hear you ask. Well, there are two types of thinking: convergent and divergent. Convergent thinking is thinking that helps us converge on a single answer – e.g. “the answer is 42” - while divergent thinking has many possible answers.

In classic tale “The Little Prince” author Antoine De Saint-Exupéry’s tells the story of how, as a little boy, he drew a picture of boa constrictor after it has swallowed an elephant. The drawing looked a bit like a brown misshapen blob, as a snake

would look if it had swallowed anything that big. When he asked grownups whether the image frightened them, they answered: "Frighten? Why should anyone be frightened by a hat?" Even his second attempt of showing the elephant inside the boa, this time of the inside of the snake, failed with the grownups. "Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining it to them," says De Saint-Exupéry.

Later in the book the Little Prince of the story's title, who is visiting Earth from asteroid B-612, talks about grown-ups and their ways: "Grown-ups love figures. When you tell them you have made a new friend, they never ask you any questions about essential matters. They never ask you, 'What does his voice sound like? What game does he love best? Does he collect butterflies?' Instead, they demand: How old is he? How many brothers does he have? How much does he weigh? How much money does his father make?' Only from these figures do they think they have learned anything about him."

Looking at things more broadly, as children do, is at the very heart of creative thinking.

Open-ended questions are a good way to stimulate divergent thinking. As an

example¹⁹, say hotel guests are complaining that they are having to wait too long for the lifts, if thinking *convergently* the hotel manager might ask an engineer to fix the problem by installing costly new lifts. But, by thinking *divergently*, the manager might reach a completely different and much cheaper solution to stop the guests complaining - for instance, giving them something to do while they wait, such as magazines to read and mirrors to distract them. (We thought one of those “what the butler saw” peep shows would also work, but that’s just us).

SIDEBAR

Most creative people like us have more ideas than they know what to do with. They will drive themselves crazy in the middle of the night trying to find a pencil and paper in the dark to make a note of the latest idea so they can fall back to sleep! Most of these ideas are great and you can spend hours discussing them over breakfast or in Starbucks after an espresso jolt. Only, after the espresso, the idea you were talking about seems to morph into five other ideas and in fact all of them are connected somehow to another idea you had three years ago.

By the time you've left Starbucks and fought through the traffic or climbed over fifty train commuters balancing your briefcase and squashed sandwiches on your head, you've had a few more ideas about future hover shoes and newspaper

¹⁹ Example from T. Verberne “Creative Fitness” in *Training & Development*, August 1, 1997, 68-71.

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

sandwiches that double up as news and breakfast and, before long, it's all turned into a Beatles song and you are singing "newspaper taxis appear on the shore" as you burst through the office door drenched from English summer rain. Of course the office staff all think here comes that so called "creative" nutcase again, singing with his sandwich on his head...why on earth do we pay him?

By the time our creative genius has got to his desk he has what we call "idea spaghetti." In other words a plate full of ideas but without a knife and fork! Now CEOs are often looking for ideas, but sometimes people hide the knives, forks and plates and the creative genius is left hyperventilating or acting like a hyperactive puppy dog jumping up at anyone around him yelping random bits of idea scraps or scratching and whining at the closed door of a CEO or chairman. We know there's a better way to keep the pot bubbling so everyone gets some of that wonderful spaghetti.

Following Tinkerbell

Here's something interesting about these two different thinking styles – convergent and divergent - and how they can be used effectively. Evidence suggests that groups are better at convergent thinking, while individuals are

better at divergent thinking.²⁰ When a problem has a single best possible answer, a group will work more effectively getting there than people working on their own do. But, when many different ideas are required, a group comes up with more clichéd and traditional ideas compared to individuals.

Yes, contrary to the received wisdom, perpetrated we suspect by meeting facilitators and manufacturers of snack foods, group brainstorming is not always worthwhile. In fact bad brainstorming can be counterproductive, leaving participants feeling frustrated, confused and feeling fat.

One reason for this is that groups generally try to avoid conflict, and yet, by their very nature, wildly diverse ideas are often in conflict with one another. The group tries to keep things on an even keel so the idea generation is a *pleasant* experience rather than a particularly *creative* one. People smile, they say nice things about one another's shoes, and come up with ideas that are all pretty much alike. In fact, participants often go through certain social rituals as if they were at a cocktail party. They tell stories, repeat ideas and make lots of positive noises. "Hmm. That's a good one. Pass the chive 'n' onion oven-baked crisps, would you?"

²⁰ "Improving the creativity of organizational work groups" by Leigh Thompson in *Academy of Management Executive*, 2003, Vol. 17, No. 1

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

Groups also have a tendency to slack off and only do as much, or as little, as the least productive person in the group. This is called “downward norm setting,” even if the slacker in question isn’t actually called Norm, and alludes to the fact that the least productive members of the group have more of an influence on overall group performance than the high-flyers. And then there’s the mix of distractions that come with working in a group. Just when you’ve started an interesting train of thought, some bozo interrupts with his or her own and by the time you’ve heard what they had to say - you’re mind is blank again.

This is not a plea to work on your own when trying to solve creative problems. If some of these barriers can be removed, working in a pair or as a small group can be very effective. One way is to include a healthy mix of people from different backgrounds, or a mix of healthy people from different backgrounds. Ideally both. The point being, if they are NOT all people with similar ideas, interests, beliefs and love of bizarrely patterned socks, the chance for some novel ideas to bubble through is greatly increased.

Another way is to give the participants in brainstorming sessions some high benchmarks to aspire to. Telling them how many ideas another group came up with, or telling them that their ideas will be posted for others to see, for instance, will bring out the competitive spirit in them and encourage them to come up with

more ideas themselves (“Sod those oven-baked crisps! I’ll be damned if those losers on the 12th floor come up with more ideas than us!”)

Competition is good for the creative process. But the tendency for people to pooh-pooh one another’s ideas simply because they weren’t the ones that had thought of them - the “not created here” syndrome – should definitely be avoided. The trick is to take the ego out of the process and to *follow Tinkerbell*, the fairy in ‘Peter Pan’²¹, the brightest light in the room. If the group is rewarded as a whole for the best idea, then the participants will be motivated to build upon one another’s ideas rather than do their best to ensure theirs is the one that wins out.

Paul Allen, co-founder of Microsoft, started *The Allen Institute for Brain Science* and committed \$100 million in funding to it, as a collaborative effort by a group of some of the top scientists in the world to increase understanding of the human brain. Paul absolutely recognizes the importance of the right group dynamics for creative thinking. “Everybody wants to say something, so you don’t want to get to big in these things and also you need people that are going to listen to each other, really listen, and understand where the other person is trying to go, and add their value to it or bring up something that’s complimentary or hasn’t been thought about,” he told Business Playground. The inaugural project for the

²¹ Originally in J.M. Barrie’s 1904 play and then his 1911 novel, ‘Peter and Wendy,’ her name was Tinker Bell. For the 1953 Disney movie, ‘Peter Pan,’ she was an attractive young blonde in tight lime-green mini dress and was modeled on actress Margaret Kerry.

Institute is the Allen Brain Atlas, a map of the mammalian brain at the cellular level that combines the two disciples of neuroscience and genomics to create. A three-dimensional map of gene expression of the mouse brain was completed in 2006. Us humans share more than 90% of their genes with mice and so the Atlas give invaluable insights into human disorders and diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, epilepsy, schizophrenia, autism and addiction.

The Perfect Brainstorm

The *perfect brainstorm* removes the barriers to creativity by letting all ideas come out and be given a chance to breathe without the judgment and criticism that might otherwise kill them. It's like yoga without the grunting. People, especially grown up people, are afraid of doing something embarrassing in a group of peers (although that doesn't quite explain the popularity of reality TV or talent shows). Tim Brown of IDEO talks about a creativity exercise that Robert McKim, founder of Stanford University's Product Design Program, would often use to prove this to a class of adult students. He would give them each a piece of paper and a pencil and ask them to draw in just 30 seconds the person sitting next to them. At the end of the time limit, their sketches would of course be crap. And then they would invariably apologize to the person they drew. "Yes, I know – sorry!"

Ask children to do it and they won't be embarrassed by their unflattering attempts to capture the looks of their peers. Have they no manners! Or, more likely, have

they not learned to be afraid of the opinion of others? For grown ups, who expect rules, establishing some for creativity is important. One being, “no idea is a bad idea.” And, in that vein, “don’t be insulted if I make your nose look big on a sketch I’m asked to draw. I’m not a very good artist. The time I was given wasn’t enough. And, well, it *is* kind of bulky.”

The setting of a brainstorming, or a “brainsailing” as creativity expert Edward De Bono calls it, and how it is structured are both important. To get the right brain to do its job, some form of “meditative zoning out” is required so the left brain doesn’t interfere before the ideas have been properly formed. Finding a space without too much formality or rigidity helps. Some wise folk have gone so far as to recreate the feeling of being inside a cloud by putting brainstorm participants inside a chamber made of billowing silk. Just imagine the ideas a formation of parachutists must have as they drift towards the ground under canopies of silk.

SIDEBAR

Once, about 15 years ago, I was up a tree house in Jamaica with a chap called Brian Reynolds. It was New Year’s Eve, we were in Montego Bay and he wanted to be at his friends’ party, the Fault Line, in Kingston on the other side of the island. He also wanted to share New Year with his family in Yorkshire, and he also wanted have a jam session. Most people were saying he was crazy and

even I was doubtful, but he was so enthusiastic I followed him around, fascinated to see how he was going to pull this off and entertain us, his guests, at the same time. But lo and behold by around 8p.m. that night I was talking to his mother in Yorkshire by videoconference and even me and Brian sang a few Yorkshire songs with her while up in the tree house with a guitar and computer. Then the Kingston party kicked in and Brian had a telephone dangling in front of the sound system in Kingston. He had dismantled it at our end and wired it through amplifiers and soon we were jamming with the third world playing live in Kingston and us playing live in Montego Bay and laughing with his family watching in Yorkshire on a screen and drinking over proof Jamaican rum!

Next morning with a terrible hangover Brian said, "I think I will create a family of systems like this." He was convinced this would be the future. And he registered the trademark ibook and patented lots of this stuff, such as interactive web books, voicechat and personas to text and converse with. Needless to say, given how what he envisioned has pretty much turned out to be reality, Brian is doing ok! And because he loves jamming so much he has now invented a way everyone can play real guitar easily using his own tuning method (take a look at www.uplay2.org).

It Takes Two, Baby

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

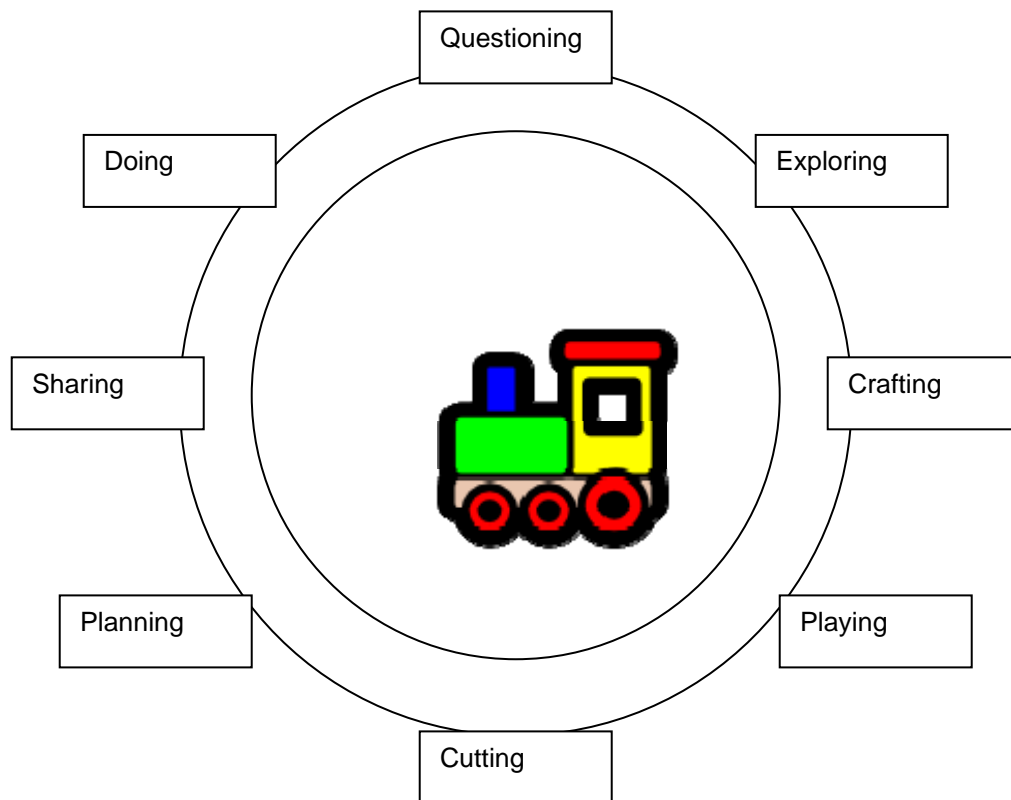
Of course there is a happy medium between working on your lonesome to come up with creative ideas and being part of a gangbang. And that's working with a partner. Many of the problems found with the group dynamic disappears while still providing the benefits of having someone to bounce ideas off and adding a different perspective. Think Rodgers and Hammerstein, Lennon and McCartney, Rice and Lloyd Webber, Bernstein and Sondheim, Black and Scholes, or The Captain and Tennille.

Paul Allen started Microsoft with Bill Gates and is now one of the richest men in the world. He told Business Playground: "I was lucky to have a great partner in Bill Gates and he was more interested in the business side of things, and I was more interested in the technology side so we complemented each other really well." For more of his interview see chapter three, *Scavengers*.

The Innovation Train

Tickets Please!

Innovation never stops. It is an ever-spinning wheel. Think it's done? Think again. The cycle continues without faltering, like a toy train on a circular track, passing through the stations along the way. There's no last stop, just the station before the next one. When done right, the trip around the train track is fun. The stations will become as familiar as old friends, but the journey is always different. Who-oo whoooooooo! Here's our track.



Each station along the way represents one of the eight key stages of innovation.

Starting at the top:

UP



Questioning

What can be improved upon? What is it about a product or service or situation that isn't quite right? Why would anyone be interested?

Exploring

What can we find out about it? What information is there about the thing we're trying to improve?

Crafting

What's the best way to describe the problem we're trying to solve? How can we capture it in its simple, clearest form?

Playing

How can we solve the problem in a creative way? What creative techniques can we use to look at the problem in new ways and come up with innovative solutions to solve it?

Cutting

What ideas should we focus on and which ones should we discard? Which are the ones that have the greatest potential for success?

Planning

How do we put the idea into practice? What steps do we need to take, and who should we involve to help us?

Sharing



THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

What do other people think of the idea? How can we improve it so they are as committed to it as you are?

Doing

Now we've answered all the questions, let's put the idea into practice.

And so it continues, onto the first station again on the innovation journey without stopping. Back to...

Questioning

What can be improved upon? What is it about a product or service or situation that isn't quite right? Why would anyone be interested?

In this book we're going to take a stroll around some of these stations in a little more detail and introduce techniques to help make the journey go smoothly. Sandwiches and thermos packed? Settled in a comfortable seat with a good view of the passing scenery? Let's go!

"All aboard!"

SIDEBAR

I love bouncing ideas off inspiring people who also have spaghetti heads (or can cope with one). This could be anyone from a musician like Bono, The Edge and Bob Geldof, to film directors Jim Sheridan or Shekhar Kapur, engineering or technology braniacs like Paul Allen or Nokia Exec Vice President Tero Ojanpera. With these people like these, it's a kind of ongoing conversation that never ends and it could be face-to-face in the middle of Africa or on a helicopter over a Volcano in ...or in a fish and chip shop in Seattle. It could be via email or late night phone calls or in San Francisco sitting in Visa's boardroom with the CEO and CTO and next day walking around Greenwich Village in the rain with Lou Reed discussing the same thing.

I've also been in floods and avalanches in Jamaica with highly intelligent Shakira and we never stopped the spaghetti type discussions. In fact Shakira and I carried on emails for a year afterwards in coded pasta conversations where she would sign off as Madame Tortellini and I would reply from the Linguini Brothers. My favorite to play with in "wonky speak" is Sam Roddick with whom I have fast and furious ichats with that usually leave us exhausted ending in a brain orgasm. Sam is the creator of Coco de Mer (Erotic Emporiums) and I am fortunate enough to be a partner with Sam and her sister Justine in this sumptuous venture (never a bored meeting I can tell you!). Sam and Justine are the daughters of

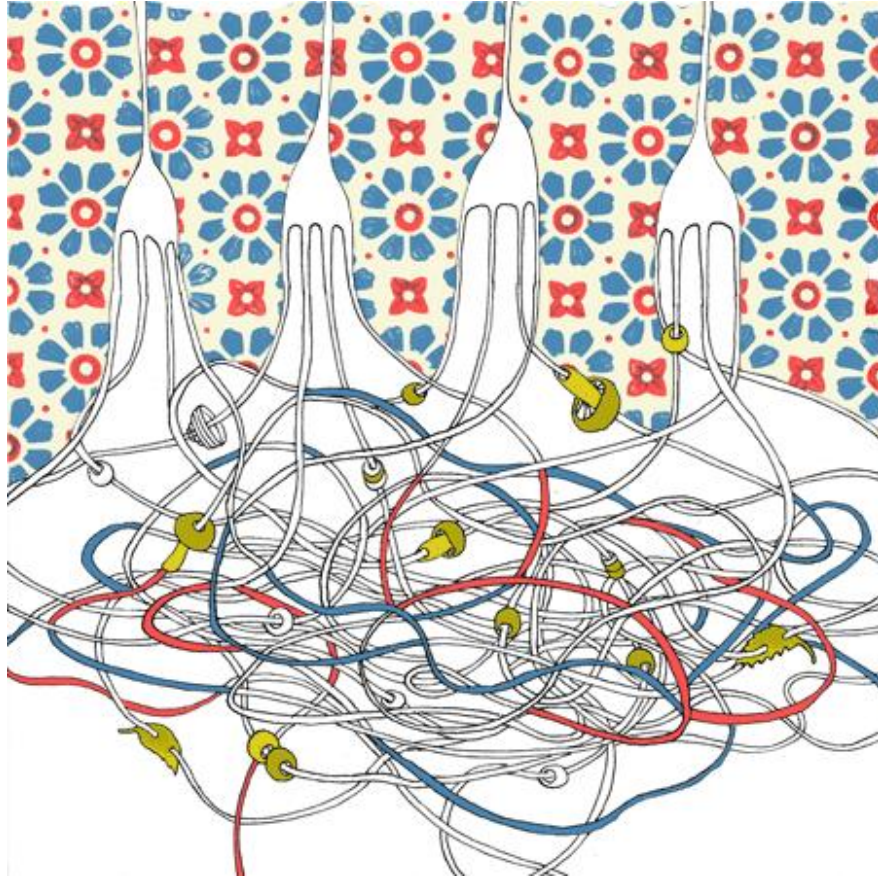
THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

Gordon and the late Anita Roddick who founded the Body Shop and Anita and I would often exhaust ourselves with brain sparking sessions.

Move One Space Forward to the Next Chapter...or Roll the Dice

Now we know, size really does matter. Creativity isn't about coming up with the one idea that will change the world, it's an exhilarating journey that never really ends. In the next chapter we go on a scavenger hunt for things to innovate.

BOARD GAME: IDEA SPAGHETTI



How it works: The more ideas we think up, the more likely it is we'll have a good one. In this game the object is not so much to come up with a solution to a problem but to train our brains (in fact, it's a "brain-train") to generate lots of ideas (or *spaghetti*). We have two versions for you: one that tasks you with finding some simple bits and bobs to make your own game; and the other that's more straightforward. We hope you'll try both!

VERSION ONE

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

How to play: This is a bit of a do-it-yourself game. First cut up some small pieces of card into the shape of ingredients - like mushrooms, tomatoes, ham, cheese - and write on each one a topic to generate ideas for. Challenges could, for instance, be coming up with “new names for pasta”, “uses for a brick,” or “ways to generate power.” Players can choose to come up with their own challenges or use the list of suggestions given at the end of these instructions.

Players will have two minutes to come up with as many suggestions (or as much spaghetti!) for each challenge as possible.

But, first the players have to pick up one of the ingredients from the bowl to determine which topic they'll be generating ideas for. Attach a metal paperclip to each piece of card and place all the ingredients on a plate or in a shallow bowl. Now find some small magnets (maybe from that *Travel Scrabble* set, or perhaps fridge magnets) - one per player please - and tape them onto pieces of string (*How long is a piece of string?* In this case, about the length of a strand of spaghetti.) Tie the other end of the lengths of string onto the prongs of some forks and, hey presto! We're ready to play. Players simply dangle their spaghetti strands in the bowl to choose the ingredient they'll be using for their idea spaghetti.

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

VERSION TWO

The board: Each fork in the bowl of pasta is connected by strands of spaghetti to a different ingredient – mushrooms, tomatoes, ham, onion, cheese, garlic, courgettes, mussels - in the bowl, each of which has a number from 10 to 20 written on it.

How to play: Players pick a fork and, by following the spaghetti strand to the ingredient its attached to, see how many ideas they need to come up with in two minutes. In the warm-up round players should pick problems from the list below and then, when they've got the hang of generating lots of ideas fast, they can try it on problem of their own choosing.

FOR BOTH VERSIONS

How to Win: Players write down as many ideas as they can and then after two minutes read them out. After three rounds, the player with the greatest number of ideas wins.

Topics for ideas: Make me healthier; improve my neighbourhood; get rich quick schemes; impress the boss; work less; have more sex; use the car less; improve air travel; titles for new a movie; new names for pasta; ideas for new national holidays; make me famous; save energy; fun excursions; titles for a new song; get more sleep; uses for a brick; names for a new restaurant; help the homeless;

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

theme hotels; reality TV shows that ought to be made; saving money; things they should teach in school but don't; generate power; April fools jokes; making parking easier; ruling the World; titles for your autobiography; save water; odd adventure holidays; odd ice cream flavours; silly gadgets.

CHAPTER 3: SCAVENGERS

Always on the hunt for things to innovate.

Nothing is perfect. No product, no service, no business model, no situation. There are always things that can be improved upon. The need to question and to wonder, “what can be changed?” is the engine for the whole innovation cycle.

Take outdoor clothing company Patagonia, for instance. Patagonia Inc is a privately held company based in Ventura, California, and was founded by climbing enthusiast Yvon Chouinard. The stuff ain’t cheap, but is incredibly practical and well designed and so worth the cost. Patagonia also has a very strong social conscience with a mission statement is clear and simple: “Build the best product, cause no unnecessary harm, use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis.”

Patagonia strives to make each product with as little environmental impact as possible. They know that however hard they try, everything they do leaves, “an indelible footprint on the environment,” and are very open about the fact they are by no means perfect so they allow consumers to track the carbon footprint of selected Patagonia products from inception to sale. For each one of the items they chronicle on the *Footprint Chronicles*TM microsite at Patagonia.com²² website

²² On the US website it’s at <http://www.patagonia.com/web/us/footprint/>

visitors can see the steps that Patagonia went through to develop it and, included with the facts and figures, are short videos and pictures about their design, manufacture and distribution.

And this is not just a greenwash. There's bad news given alongside the good. For the *Nine Trails Shorts*, for example, the good is that the factory has committed to stringent environmental and safety standards. The bad is that the fabric the shorts are made from is neither recycled nor recyclable and, because the factory is in Vietnam, the finished product need to travel no, er, *short* distance (sorry) to get to Patagonia's U.S. Nevada distribution center. In fact, each pair of shorts must travel 16,262km from the place where the raw material is sourced to the distribution centre in Reno, Nevada, a greater distance than that travelled when circumnavigating Antarctica (15,000km). Patagonia know they have more work to do to lower their impact and they actively solicit feedback from consumers to help get there. Here's a big pat on the back, Pat.

Jill Dumain, Director of Environmental Analysis at Patagonia told Business Playground that what's been surprising about the initiative is not so much how well it's been received externally, but how difficult it's been for Patagonia employees to, as she puts it, "learn out loud in public." When the Footprint Chronicles initiative was first launched employees felt they were on the front line in full public gaze, but management, convinced it was the way to go, pushed it

through regardless. They wanted to take Patagonia's environmental commitment seriously, and knew that if they just talked about the good things they were doing they would only be telling half the story. "We wanted to change the notion that we had it all figured out," says Jill.

The senior executives decided that to be part of a serious conversation about the environment they had to break through, what she describes as, "the Patagonia Perfection Paralysis." The culture had been always been about doing the very best possible and employees found washing their clothes in public (see the section on metaphors later in the book) initially very awkward. But, eventually, she says, the lack of self-censorship felt very liberating for them.

And it's forced everyone in the supply chain to think through what they do and the impact it has on the environment. By looking at their carbon footprint in such detail they realized, for instance, that manufacturing locally is not necessarily the answer. When Patagonia top brass first conceived of the Footprint Chronicles the received wisdom in the media was that it's got to be made locally to be green, so they were surprised to learn through their analysis how small, relatively speaking, the impact from transportation is - something they might otherwise not have known. "If we'd simply listened to the environmental chatter," says Dumain, "we might have gone in a different direction."

Rip it up and Start Again²³

One technique for looking at an existing product or service, and wondering how it can be improved is to break it down into its components and then build it up again. Figuratively that is. This is sometimes called “attribute listing,” but we’re going to call it Derek. Take a pen for instance. A pen has a number of attributes such as its look, its feel, what material it’s made of, the type of ink it uses, how the ink is released so it stays in the pen when it’s not needed and how it comes out when it is.

Or take restaurants. What are the different factors that make up the restaurant experience? Type of food, price, style, and how it’s delivered are some of the main ones. And each of these categories in turn has a number of different possibilities. The type of food, for instance could be Italian, Chinese, Indian, English, Mexican, Middle Eastern, Thai, Japanese or Latvian, to name just a few. You’ve tried Latvian, right? Then, often independent of food type, there are the prices charged, which might be cheap, low priced, medium priced, expensive or bleedin’ pricey. Then there’s the style of the restaurant: casual, formal, family-oriented or trendy. And then how the food it’s delivered could conceivably be: by waiters on skateboards, eating it Roman-style while sprawled recumbent of soft

²³ I said, rip it up and start again

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

pillows, as take-out or home delivery, or even thrown by catapults (that could be fun!)

We can make a list of each of these factors under their headings and then try different combinations of them to see whether one of them makes for a great new dining experience, or is in fact just a “recipe for disaster.”

TBL

COL HDS

FOOD TYPE	PRICE RANGE	STYLE	DELIVERY
French	Cheap	Formal	Skateboarding waiters
Italian	Low	Casual	Roman-style
Chinese	Mid Expensive	Family	Take out
Indian	Boy, that's pricey!	Business	Home delivery
English		Trendy	Catapulted
Latvian			

(Dave has a penchant for pricey Italian food served in a formal setting that he can take his time over, Mark for extra spicy Indian food washed down with icy cold beer).

Try randomly picking from the different factors to see what you come up with. How about expensive Italian food delivered to businesses? Or how about mid-priced French food in a leisurely family-friendly restaurant? Nice one, Derek. And this same thinking can be applied to many types of business, especially those

that sell products or deliver “experiences” in one form or another. The product can be broken down into the factors that fall within a small number of distinct categories, and these can then be recombined to create something completely new. (A giant triangular suitcase made of cotton wool was what we came up with, but don’t tell anyone, it’s still in development and is going to be a big hit, we just know it.)

Another approach to innovation to see what needs to be changed about a product, a service or situation, is think about the things that bug you about it. Take the umbrella (no, not *that* one, that’s mine, the one by the lamp). The steel-ribbed umbrella was invented by Sam Fox²⁴ in 1852, although umbrellas in one form or another have been around for thousands of year. An innovative design, for sure, but one not without its flaws. It keeps the rain off and can be folded away to be put in a bag, used to fend off people when fighting to get on the bus or, when sharpened, even used to poison people with. But Sam’s design is also prone to blow inside out or to break, and maybe even unintentionally poke out an eye or two.

Dutch company SENZ Umbrellas designed a new umbrella that uses an asymmetrical (or “lopsided”) shape rather than round one, apparently making it much more aerodynamic. It works with the wind rather than against it, and

²⁴ Sam Fox is also the name of a large-breasted model who became famous by appearing topless in The Sun in the 1980s and 1990s, but it’s not that Sam Fox. This one is Samuel Fox and he never appeared topless in The Sun as far as we know.

changes its orientation to deflect it without creating pressure on the fabric and rib cage. And those clever Dutchmen even added “eye-savers” to protect innocent bystanders from being blinded. It was a roaring success. It went on sale in 2007 for \$67 a pop and they sold 10,000 units in the first nine days²⁵. Ophthalmologists were in uproar. SENZ²⁶ say their umbrella design “makes Senz,” which is a terrible pun, but we forgive them.



²⁵ “The Umbrella Gets an Extreme Makeover: Dutch Designers Give Old Standby an Aerodynamic Twist” ABC News, March 6 2007

²⁶ You can see their umbrellas (for some reason not sponsored by hot Barbadian singer Rhianna who had a hit with “Umbrella” in 2007) at www.senzumbrellas.com.

The Bug List

The SENZ umbrella is so distinctive looking that according to the company founders, its owners will stop and greet one another on the street (perhaps saying, “I see you have plenty of SENZ! Ha!” but, then again, probably not). Yes, SENZ designer Gerwin Hoogendoorn had come up with an innovative new design for an old product that had some inherent design flaws after he thought about the irritating and debilitating design flaws, or the bugs, of the original.

We asked SENZ co-founder, Philip Hess, why they picked the umbrella to redesign and not another product. “Our journey started out of pure frustration with traditional umbrellas,” he says. “Everyone hates the fact that umbrellas always go inside out, break, poke you in the eye, provide bad visibility and are very uncomfortable. After coming home one week with three broken umbrellas, my partner Gerwin decided that it was enough and started the quest to design the best umbrella in the world. A week after setting this goal, we found out that the umbrella has been around for 3,400 years and never really changed. We could not understand that a product that has caused frustrations for such a long time, was never redesigned!”

As for the design process that led to the lopsided design: “The process was never a Eureka! moment. First there was a solid analysis of all the problems

people encounter with umbrellas. When coming up with solutions for all of those problems, although it sounds kind of corny, we really tried to go outside of the box, and we even considered magnetic fields and helicopter constructions above the head. However, as a designer, you should also consider social acceptance and commercial potential. Therefore, the umbrella is still comparable to a traditional umbrella, but is fundamentally different. Gerwin made the first prototypes of the SENZ umbrella by ripping apart old-style umbrellas and making asymmetrical umbrellas from them, using his grandmother's sowing machine!"

What's on your bug list? Bugs can be things you don't like about a product, a service, a whole industry, or just things that irritate the hell out of you²⁷. Bugs that if you get rid of could be the basis for a wonderful innovation. For industrial designer Ethan Imboden a light bulb went off (a beautifully designed one, of course) when he realized that sex products needn't be ugly and cheap and launched Jimmyjane as a range of very stylish alternatives made of precious metals. Some of the products even come with a small hole drilled into one end so they can be worn around the neck as a pendant, and celebrities like Kate Moss have done just that.

²⁷In the film "The Jerk" Steve Martin plays the character of a hapless chap, Navin R. Johnson, who invents an ingenious and stupid-looking a device called the "Opti-Grab," as a solution to the design 'bug' of spectacles sliding off the wearer's nose when the frames have lost their shape. Navin becomes rich beyond his wildest dreams. (For a while. He eventually gets sued and loses everything because the Opti-Grab make people go cross-eyed.

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Here's our bug list - feel free to steal any of them and send us your solutions (or better still, a royalty fee from the devices you invent).

BL



- Junk mail
- Piped muzak
- Not enough time in the day
- Air travel
- Condoms
- Parking
- "Special offers"
- Commercial radio
- Airport security
- Shrink-wrapped packaging
- Bottled water
- Dog poop on the pavement
- Tasteless fruit
- Useless plastic toys
- Customer service
- Naysayers
- Talking heads (not the band)
- We could go on...

Oh, and did we mention the seats in coach class on aircraft? While we accept that the priority for people who design the damned things is safety rather than comfort, comfort doesn't even seem to get a look (or knee) in. "There is no catch-22 to this," says Rick DeWeese, who is in charge of one of the Federal Aviation Authority's two crash-test centres, says, "There's no reason a safe seat can't be a comfortable one."²⁸

The people who make the seats for the airlines blame the airlines for packing the seats in too tight so passengers, squashed with a knee up each nostril and their elbows wedged beneath their armpits, can't wiggle about. The seats on their own are, according to the designers, just fine, it's just that if you have to stay sitting in it for too long without the ability to wiggle they become, well, a bit of a pain in the arse. "If you put an economy-class seat in a nice place and compared it to an Aeron chair, I would argue that the Aeron chair is no more comfortable," says Glenn Johnson, design director at B/E Aerospace, which makes seats for Southwest Airlines, Continental Airlines and British Airways. Yeah, well, hmm.

The airlines of course blame the consumers, saying that more room for passengers to wiggle means fewer seats on the aeroplanes and less money for their coffers. But, luckily for us consumers, there do seem to be alternatives to the current seat design, ones that balance safety with comfort and the space they

²⁸ 'Why Are Airplane Seats So Miserable, and What Can Be Done About It?' by Eric Hagerman in Popular Science, April 27 2009.

occupy. It's just that the ailing airlines will need to pony up and stick 'em in, so to so speak. Thompson Solutions, for instance, a company in Northern Ireland that specialize in designing seats for the aircraft industry, have come up with the 'Cozy Suite'²⁹, a craftily configured seat row "boasting a shoulder width as wide as business class." Check out the cool prototype, a sort of staggered arrangement of seats so each one is in a row positioned slightly behind the next (www.thompsonaero.com/cozy-suite.html)

Not accepting the way things are now is a great starting point for innovation. Even the humble mousetrap, the stuff of the innovation cliché, is the inspiration for countless new designs and patent applications. The saying goes: "Build a better mousetrap, and the world will beat a path to your door." The world excluding the mice, that is. As proof of this witness Rentokill, who in June 2006 and to much fanfare, launched a digital mousetrap that tells operatives that a rodent has been caught and in which trap. The trapped mice or rats then go through some sort of interrogation, we imagine. They call their device RADAR – presumably the acronym preceded the choice of name – which stands for Rodent Activated Detection And Riddance.

Rentokill installed a bunch of them in Wembley Stadium and a press release from the following year boasting of RADAR's success proclaimed, "As soon as a

²⁹ What's with these terrible names?

rodent enters the RADAR unit the pressure sensitive pads detect its presence and automatically close the doors. The unit then releases a measured dose of carbon dioxide into the sealed chamber, killing the rodent quickly and humanely with no release of toxins.” And the blurb went on to say, “With a capacity of 90,000, each event at Wembley Stadium will be a major catering exercise, and Rentokil will help keep the organisation free of harmful pests and the taint of poor hygiene that can go with them.”³⁰ You’d think they were talking about the fans.

Ball-Gazing

Looking into the future can help focus the mind on what might need to be changed to help meet it. Let’s do some ball gazing to look at what life will be like in years to come. Gaze deep into the ball. Deep...deep.

OK, stop for a second.

A word of advice before we go on. What life is like now shapes our view on what it will be like in the future and so not looking far enough ahead tends to anchor our thinking to the present too much. Look just five years or so into the future and we tend to assume that it’ll be like it is now, just more so. So, if we don’t look far enough ahead, it’s likely we’ll underestimate some big important shifts that will

³⁰ From “Building a Better Mousetrap” by Mark Roth in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, May 9, 2007.

blow any current trends out of the water. These are the disruptions that force people to do things in a new way. Who just a few years ago would have predicted the explosion in social media, the collapse in house prices or the rise of the tree frog as a superpower? These and other changes have fundamentally shifted the way we live our lives.

To clear the decks let's gaze a little bit farther forward, at least ten years into the future. Again, look deep...deep. That far ahead and it's easier to disregard the short-term trends and focus on a future that might be very different from the present. To help, let's throw in some big disruptive changes that might have happened along the way. For instance, the mists in the ball clear, and...it is the year 2025. Now,

- People have lost the use of their legs.
- A scientific breakthrough has increased average life expectancy to 300 years.
- People rarely leave their homes because of dangerous freak weather conditions.
- Children are in charge.
- Women have declared all-out war on men.
- We have discovered the ability to read each other's thoughts.
- A team of mice are playing Chelsea in the FA Cup at Wembley.

OK, so they're completely implausible (apart from the first, third, fourth and fifth scenarios, that is) but they will at least shake our minds free from the baggage of current experiences and how they limit our thinking. Maybe you could make the disruptive changes more relevant to your own situation. If it's business, what huge shifts can you imagine could possibly happen in your industry? Not the little ones that are logical extensions of what's already going on, but the big breaks in the status quo.

Thinking through odd scenarios can help us come up with a better ways to do or make something. How odd you make them is up to you. Throw a few in there that are on the crazy side. Here's one that could have been written fifteen years ago that might have seemed crazy at the time, but started happening just a few years later.³¹

"You are a record label and in ten years time people will have stopped buying your music because they can get it elsewhere for free?"

You don't have to know "how" the disruption will happen, but sometimes thinking about that might help too and once in a while, can end up becoming the focus of our innovation. In fact, by thinking through some, at first blush, bizarre scenarios you might actually find a way to create the disruption itself. When Business

³¹ Shawn Fanning unleashed file-sharing site Napster in 1999

Playground interviewed Tero Ojanpera, the executive vice president of entertainment and communities at Nokia, he talked about the need for disruptive factors such, as technology, to be embraced as positive agents of change and not feared: “Technology is moving so fast nowadays and when it comes to mixing technology and art and creativity, people tend to fight the technology. They think there is something bad and it’s like ‘destroying my business, it’s harming us,’ but very often if you embrace it sooner than later you will find out that it unleashes completely new forces in creativity.”

Your Big Grey Sponge

As Albert Einstein said, way before the invention of the Internet: “I have no special gift, I am only passionately curious.”

The brain is a big blobby sponge ready to absorb all that comes its way, and creative types are more often than not avid consumers of information and entertainment³². They read magazines, newspapers and books, go to movies, listen to music and podcasts and scour websites. They are always hungry for more and never feel they know enough. Paul Allen, co-founder of Microsoft, told

³² For a look at some of the websites your authors peruse on a regular basis to feed our minds see our website www.businessplayground.com

Business Playground in an interview how he has been doing this since he was a child:

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"I guess it started when I was a kid. Because both my parents were librarians I was always around books. When I was a little bit older I started reading magazines about computers and technology, and just stuffing my brain with everything I could learn about where technology was going in the future and trying to project that out and see where that was going to end up. And kind of the way it works is I just read everything I can get my hands on and occasionally you see a connection of two ideas, where the connection was more than each individual part. Like the one for Microsoft was the connection between a microprocessor and a really easy-to-use programming language called 'Basic.'

"So, that turned out to be a pretty good idea!³³

"Every once in a while - it's probably happened to me at most ten times in my life to have a big idea like that - and when they pop out, you know first you have to check and see whether anyone else is on the same line, the same trail of thought, and if they haven't then you need to jump on the opportunity.


³³ An idea that spawned Microsoft.

"I think you have to have a certain natural curiosity and you have to have fearlessness that you think you can try your ideas out and you have to have encouragement that it's okay to try ideas out. And I just luckily had all those things. Some of it, you're right, it could be genetic or environmental and how you're brought up, and then you have to have the incredible thirst - like, in your case, I'm sure you [Dave Stewart] studied 30 different guitarists and tried to learn all their licks, and learned all *The Beatles'* songs down to the last note and everything else - and somehow that makes your imagination more fully-formed. I read a lot of science fiction even as a kid so that kind of causes your brain to think of things that don't exist, or 'might' exist, or *shouldn't* exist, even.

"Some people are really focused and deep in one area or a couple of areas. I think I'm a bit unique in that I'm interested in so many different things, you know from charities and sports teams, to trying to figure out how the brain works, to underwater exploration, to rocketry and Internet things and software. To me it's all this "stew" or "gumbo," or whatever of different things. And there are so many interesting things in life. One of things I've discovered is that any one of these things, with very few exceptions - any business or entrepreneurial thing - is interesting. When I was involved with *Ticketmaster* I got excited about learning how ticketing worked, and I had a few rock bands that were mad at me at different points because they didn't like the business model of *Ticketmaster*. But, you can find something fascinating about just about anything. Of course some

things are more fascinating than others. There are great mysteries out there that are only vaguely understood – like the human mind, or how to improve the Internet or how to save the planet from global warming – and they are all fascinating, and you could spend a lifetime studying any one of them.

Everything is much more interrelated than I think people realized twenty years ago, and certain things like the human brain has so much more complexity - and the fact that you can build a whole body from a single cell - there are so many areas that we're just scratching the surface of understanding and some of these areas, because of technology or genomes or decoding, they're accelerating a lot faster. Some are just super hard, like understanding how the human brain works. For example these guys that specialize in fisheries were telling me that the best kind of fishery you can have is one where, instead of having an open season where you just grab all the fish at once, you just slowly take some out and you can even just can have a reserve where somehow the fish know they're not going to get caught there. You create a square mile, no fish zone, on the ocean and a lot of the fish go there and it builds the population back. So, some of these complex systems in the real world, we're just starting to discover. The problem is we've got really big problems of global warming and bringing enough power for everybody in a clean way, so you could spend your lifetime trying to do any of these things and a lot of people specialize in one area – I call it “drilling into the orange with a needle.” Like scientists will study the heck out of one kind of



microbe or something. I try to find ways of doing things in big scale like the genetic atlas of the brain – first the mouse, and now we’re doing the human brain - the whole rind of the orange, you’re helping people with that at once, so everybody when they’re drilling their needle in can go further in more quickly.”

SIDEBAR: It May Never Happen (But it Just Did)

I knew the music business was going pear-shaped in 1985 or 1986 when Jose Menendez was brought in from Hertz Rent A Car to run RCA Records in New York. The first I heard of it was when I went to a meeting at his office (our manager had met him once and refused to work with him). I was summoned to meet him and talk about plans for our new Eurythmics’ album called ‘Be Yourself Tonight.’

I sensed something was wrong as soon as I entered the room and had, like an instant weird chemical allergic reaction. He was a big man, with a big handshake (which didn’t save him later when he and his wife were gunned down by own children[1]). He said in a booming voice: “Great album, Stewart!” adding, as he slapped me on the back, “Sounds just like Ghostbusters!” I nearly choked on my gum. Before I could speak he said, “I’ve done a deal that’s gonna blow you out of the water,” and proceeded to tell me that McDonald’s had agreed to make mini

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

Dave and Annie toys and, with every 10 or 20, or whatever number it was, of toys collected you'd get a free album.

I was trying to tell him that Annie was vegetarian (and was also on the cover of that month's Vegetarian Times magazine) and was a practicing Hare Krishna, but he was very forceful and overbearing and I was soon nudged out of the office. He had artists in and out of there like a revolving door and, as I left, I saw a confused looking Cyndi Lauper about to be wheeled in. In those 15 minutes I saw the future of the entertainment industry. And it was burger shaped.

By 2000 I'd realized that in order for artists and content creators to survive at all, they had to take control of their situation. And so I came up with the idea that we artists should start a "bank" called, surprisingly enough, "The Artists Bank". (I stole the idea from The Farmers' Bank.) As you can imagine, trying to round up lots of artists is a bit like trying to saddle a rat, and getting them to talk about finance often seemed about as difficult as selling Bibles in a brothel. Of course, when I got the attention of Deutsche Bank, things started to happen. I pulled together first a meeting in their boardroom in London where Mick Jagger turned up and said loudly, "This is the first time I've been in a fucking bank in 30 years," and then a meeting in their New York board room at which Stevie Wonder arrived on time - a miracle! A miracle because Stevie doesn't see time as particularly relevant.

Now, when you are standing at the head of a huge boardroom table on the top floor of the biggest European bank at their boardroom in NYC addressing everyone from Quincy Jones to Lou Reed to Stevie Wonder to Jeff Rosen (Bob Dylan's manager), you had better have something to say.

So, I announced that this was the end of the entertainment business as we knew it.

Michael Philipp, who at the time was on the board of Deutsch Bank[2] and was at the meeting in London as well as hosting the meeting in NYC, recalls: “When I first met Dave in September 2000, he talked for 12 hours about the impact of digitalization on the production and distribution of media. As a banker, I didn’t know what the hell he was talking about: nor did anyone else. Over the next five years, we all found out.”

Everyone was very interested in what I was saying, but no one was totally convinced by my idea of a bank for artists. There were lots of heated discussions and plenty of puzzled expressions. All the artists knew that I was making some kind of sense but, because I was an artist too, I’m sure they thought, “Uh-oh, Dave could be nuts but it’s hard to tell because we are a bit nuts too.” There were non-artists there too – a publisher, a record executive, a lawyer representing Dr. Dre – and, by the looks on their faces, they were petrified that the lunatics were

taking over the asylum. As far as I was concerned, the lunatics were already running the asylum.

What I was trying to explain to everyone there was that the Internet can be a good thing, if only we take control. The old business model was to retain control of manufacture and distribution, bamboozle the artists with contracts and then, when the money started rolling in, to hold onto it for as long as possible. And then finally, months later, when you had to pay the artists what was owed, deduct as much as you can for as many reasons as you can think of (such as a 25% deduction for costs of packaging). Music publishers were basically the equivalent of bad mortgage companies that loan you money at incredibly high interest rates, then, when you have paid off your loan, they still own your property (i.e. your songs).

Rather than embrace the Internet and find new ways of doing business that reflected consumers' interest in downloading music digitally, the record industry got scared about cannibalizing existing sales and missed their opportunity. I think they thought: "if we keep our heads down it might never happen." On June 15, 2000 the industry's top executives had gathered for secret talks with Hank Harry, the CEO of Napster, the rogue file sharing website that had been giving fans access to digital music downloads. They discussed a subscription service for Napster's 38 million users, which would give them the ability to carry on

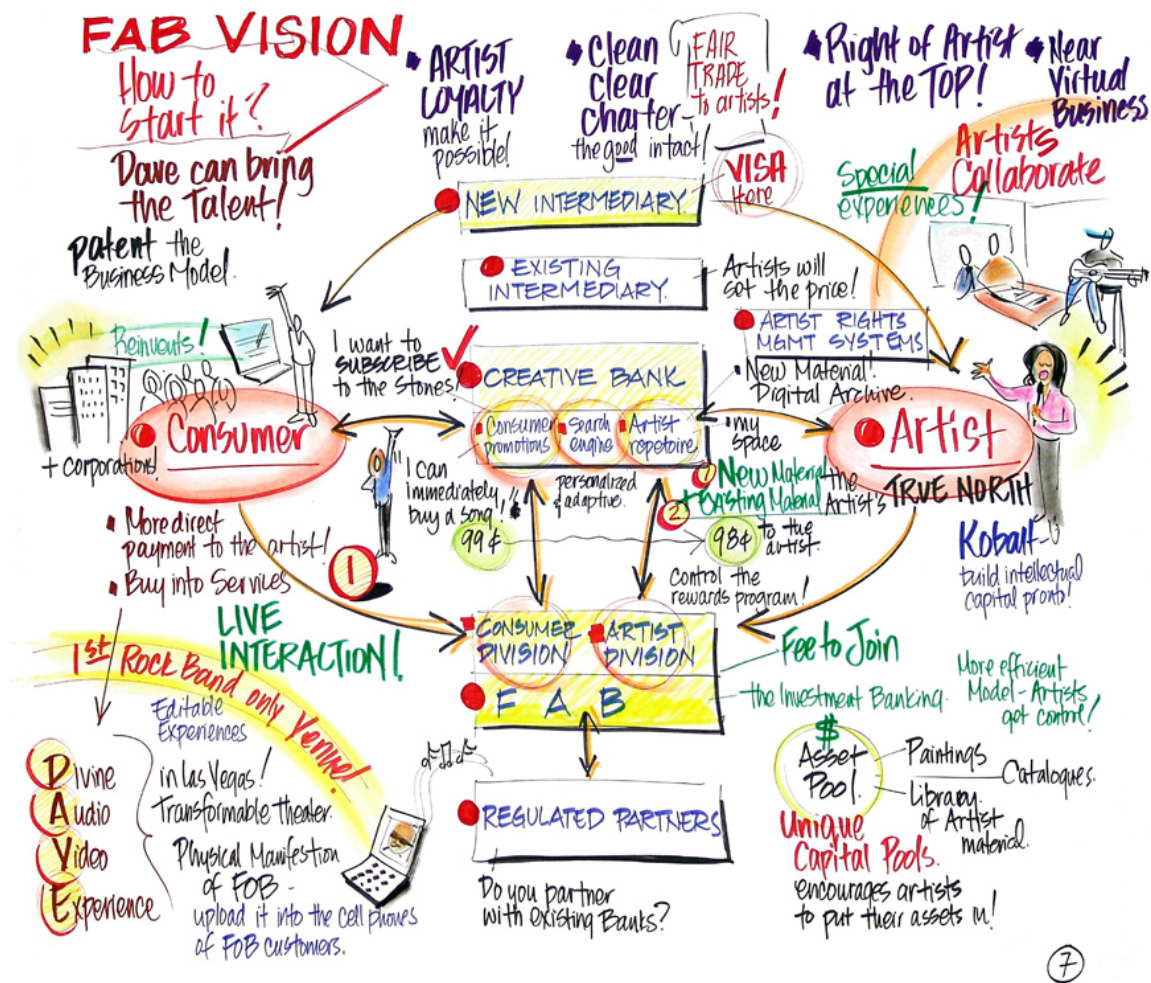
downloading for a flat monthly fee of about \$10, revenues to be split between the labels and Napster. But, the record executives simply couldn't take the final leap and the deal was never done. Napster went bust a year later, but it wasn't for another two years that the industry finally launched a legal, user-friendly service. By then, consumers were too used to other ways of getting the music they wanted.

What I was suggesting with my Artists' Bank was that we create digital destinations for artists such as U2 or Bob Dylan or Gwen Stefani that allow them to share, market and monetize their content, merchandize, tickets - and whatever else - to fans on the web and through mobile phones. Payments of royalties to the artists would be transparent and quick – seconds rather than the 9 to 27 months it usually takes to get royalty checks. If the artist is the amazingly talented Gwen Stefani, for instance, her digital world could include her music (No Doubt and her solo work), her L.A.M.B. clothing range, her co-branded K-Swiss and Hewlett-Packard products, Gwen dolls, her music videos, ringtones, digital applications, tee shirts, tickets to her concerts....even hotel rooms and travel to her concerts.

One day very soon my idea will be realized. It's taken ten years so far and a lot of meetings but it's finally beginning to happen. I don't think I could have got this far unless I had absolute faith in one simple, big audacious idea. I kept asking "why?" over and over again. I didn't see why I had to follow the rules if they no

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

longer made sense. Children do this too. They constantly question us adults about why the world is the way it is and sometimes the answer, "Just because," isn't enough. The Entertainment industry needed to change and I could see a straightforward (I didn't say an easy) way to change it. As they say, "necessity is the mother of invention," and in for this labor the birth has been long overdue.

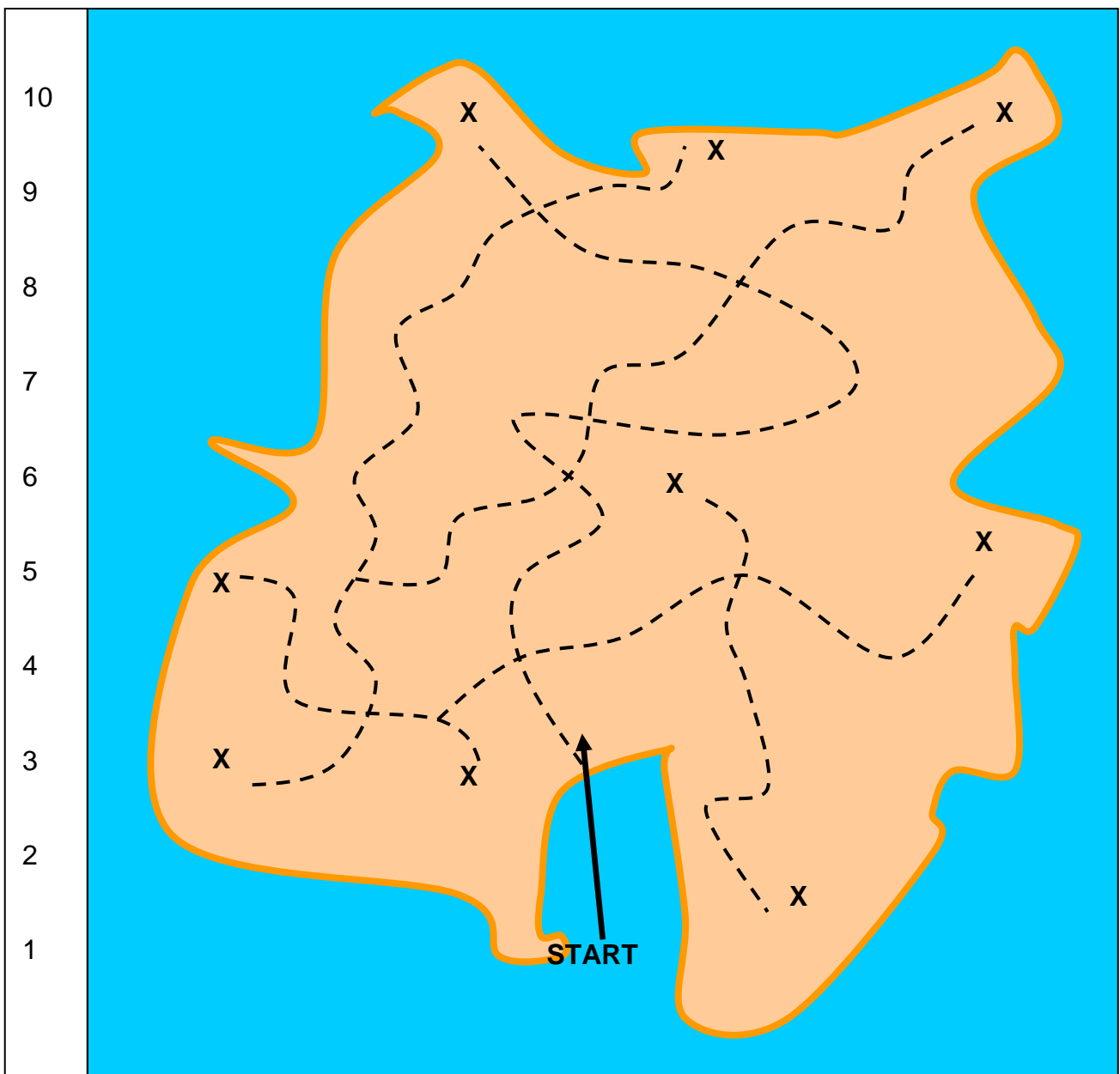


Move One Space Forward to the Next Chapter...or Roll the Dice

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Keeping our eyes, ears, noses (and throats) open to what's out there keeps our minds tuned to new possibilities. In fact, we should never accept just the status quo (however much we love their music). In the next chapter we go into the importance of looking at the world in different ways to craft problems we want to solve creatively.

BOARD GAME: SCAVENGERS



THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

This is roughly how it might look, but the specifics are not accurate

The board: A map of an island on which somewhere treasure is buried. There are a series of paths on the map that fork at various points and along the way, and at the end of each path there is an “X.” One of them signifies where the treasure is buried. The map is on a grid – letters on the bottom and numbers going up - and each of the X’s can be identified by a pair of coordinates (e.g. H4, or B6).

How it works: There is a treasure trove of ideas out there just waiting to be discovered, it’s just a matter of keeping our wits about is. If we keep our eyes open we might be able to see things that others don’t notice or just take for granted without ever really thinking about them.

How to play: From the start point on the map, players move along the path and at each numbered stop where the path divides they must answer a question that test their powers of observation. The answer they choose determines which fork they should take, one way left the other right. If they answer all of the questions correctly they will arrive at the spot where the treasure is buried.

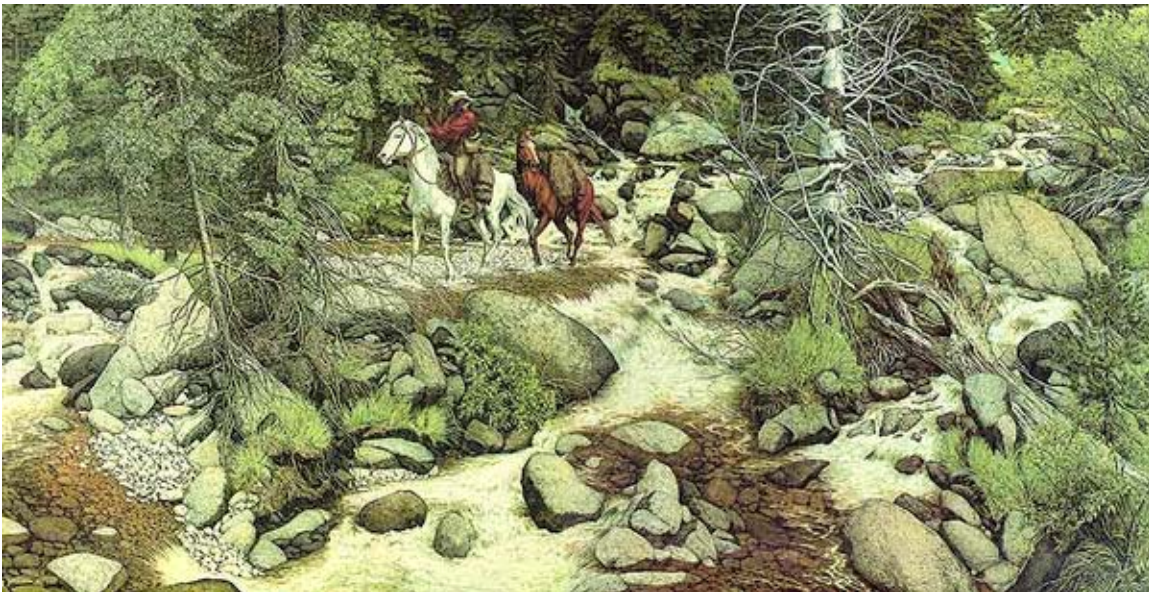
THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

How to win: Once they have arrived at what they think is the right X , players work out the co-ordinates and check to see if they were right by looking at the back of the book.

The observations:

1. In this picture by Bev Doolittle how many faces are there?

10 = LEFT FORK, 11 = RIGHT FORK



(answer: 10)

Another way to do this would be to design the map with faces or other objects hidden in it.

2. How times does the letter F appear in the sentence below?

“When I visited Phil, finches of Japan were flying around the flourishing bonsai placed on the left of the lounge's entry.”

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5 = LEFT FORK, 6 = RIGHT FORK

(answer: 6)

3. On a standard traffic light is the green light at the top or bottom?

TOP = LEFT FORK, BOTTOM = RIGHT FORK

(answer: bottom)

4. How many curves are there on a paper clip?

3 CURVES = LEFT FORK, 4 CURVES = RIGHT FORK

(answer: 3)

5. In which hand is the Statue of Liberty's torch?

LEFT HAND = LEFT FORK, RIGHT HAND = RIGHT FORK

(answer: right)

6. Which way do fans rotate?

CLOCKWISE = LEFT FORK, ANTICLOCKWISE = RIGHT FORK

(answer: clockwise)

7. How many sides are there on a standard pencil?

6 SIDES = LEFT FORK, 8 SIDES = RIGHT FORK

(answer: 6)

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8. Do books have even-numbered pages on the right or left side?

LEFT SIDE = LEFT FORK, RIGHT SIDE = RIGHT FORK

(answer: left)

On this and the adjacent pages we should miss out the numbers

9. On the American flag is the top stripe red or white?

WHITE = LEFT FORK, RED = RIGHT FORK

(answer: red)

10. On a cloudless day is the sky lighter blue or darker blue on the horizon.

LIGHTER BLUE = LEFT FORK, DARKER BLUE = RIGHT FORK

(answer: lighter blue)

11. On a phone keypad which of these number keys has 4 letters on it

7 = LEFT FORK, 8 = RIGHT FORK

(answer: 8)

12. When you walk does your left arm swing with your right or left leg?

LEFT = LEFT FORK, RIGHT = RIGHT FORK

(answer: left)

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13. Which card in a pack of playing cards carries the manufacturer's trademark?

ACE OF SPADES = LEFT FORK, JOKER = RIGHT FORK

(answer: ace of spades)

14. How many differences are there between these two pictures?

Make two pictures using the BP characters with 4 differences between them

4 = LEFT FORK, 5 = RIGHT FORK

(answer: 4)

CHAPTER 4: THE ANSWER IS IN THE QUESTION

Why getting the best creative answer means asking the right questions in the first place.

When Jorma Ollila joined Nokia in the mid 1980's the giant Finnish corporation made toilet paper and wellies. Nokia Corporation was the result of a merger between a paper company, a rubber goods company and a cable company. Ollila became the CEO in 1992 and when he took over asked *what business should Nokia be in?* His answer was *mobile communications* and, against the wishes of many Nokia shareholders, executives and employees, over the next few years he sold off all the assets not aligned to this new focus and helped transform the company's fortunes (profits increasing five-fold between 1993 before the changes kicked in and 1999), and with it the Finnish economy. Nokia is now the biggest mobile phone manufacturer in the world and has a 40% share of all handsets sold. Not a rubber boot in sight. And *now* Nokia has asked itself that question again. And the answer is different once more. Nokia is currently transforming itself into a media company, by offering music games and applications through its phones, and plans to be the world's biggest entertainment network.

The questions we ask shape the answers we get, and posing the right question about is an art in itself. Before we unleash our creative energy (including our

time, money and resource) on finding creative solutions to a problem, we need to question the assumptions we're making about the problem we're trying to solve. Is it in fact the right problem in the first place, or are we basing it on a bunch of flimsy assumptions? Jorma Ollila of Nokia didn't focus on how to increase sales of toilet paper, even though it started life in 1865 as a lumber mill, he questioned the assumption that Nokia needed to have all those diverse and unrelated businesses to survive. Someone one of us used to work with was apt to say, "Assume' makes an 'ass' out of 'u' and 'me.'" A little irritating when you've heard it a few times, but you get the point: it's important to examine each assumption we're making to see if it actually holds up to scrutiny.

What, for instance, if we turn an assumption on its head by looking at its exact opposite? Does it make a real difference? If so keep it in, if not you might want to dump it. To illustrate how different assumptions can change a problem we'll use one dear to our hearts: *the traffic congestion in Los Angeles*³⁴. Incidentally, the average annual delay per road user in Los Angeles is 93 hours³⁵! If the problem we are trying to solve is how to reduce traffic congestion in LA, what sort of assumptions are we making, do they pass the sniff test? The assumptions include:

³⁴ The point of this example is not actually to solve the problem of traffic congestion - there are a million worthy efforts dedicated to that - it's just to illustrate how to think through a problem that you should be able to relate to.

³⁵ Data from "Commuting in America" - by Alan Pisarski, a 2006 study published by the *Transportation Research Board*.

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- There's too much traffic in LA
- People don't like being stuck in traffic
- Congestion slows things down
- It's a bad thing to have congestion
- People need cars to get around
- People need to travel around LA

Duh! We might think - those all look blindingly obviously true. Maybe so, but let's just hold our horses for a minute and take a closer look at them. For instance, the first one, *There's too much traffic in LA*, begs the questions what is *too much* and *compared to what* exactly? And, how about the second one, *People don't like being stuck in traffic*? Some people might love being stuck in traffic and maybe they've got used to that time alone in their cars drinking coffee, making calls and shaving/applying lipstick/both at the same time³⁶. The third one, *Congestion slows things down*, seems solid, as does the forth, *It's a bad thing to have congestion*.

But the fifth assumption, *People need cars to get around*? Nah, that's baloney. People clearly don't need cars to get around - they have legs (even the people in

³⁶ In 2003 a woman from Ohio was fined for breast-feeding her one-year old baby while driving (the mother, not the baby). In 2009, a Chinese lorry driver was fined for taking a shower while driving his lorry along the Jinyi expressway. He had a sprinkler system rigged above his head while his wife in the passenger seat held a plastic sheet up to protect the cab's instruments.

LA), bicycles, buses (sort of) and if you look really, really hard the occasional train. Of course if you've spent any time in LA you'll know these alternatives don't make much sense unless you're traveling just a couple of miles and even then you take your life in your own hands (or someone else's hands if they're applying lipstick and shaving while driving). But there definitely are alternatives; they just might need a little working on. And the last assumption, *People need to travel around LA*, is sort of true in that they need to get to work and to go to the shops to buy food and stuff, but many of the journeys are for nonessential things like going out to eat, or going to a movie, or going to the beach. We don't want to party-poopers here... we're just saying.

Is it perhaps better to find ways to reduce the need to travel around LA in the first place, rather than make travel easier? As anyone who has spent time in LA knows, it is very spread out, it's actually not one city but 88 of them, and maybe transportation as a whole is the problem - whether that's by bus, train or car – and by trying to switch people to public transport we'd just be dealing with the effect of the problem rather than its cause. Being transported around is dangerous, for instance, it uses up valuable fuels, produces dirt emissions, and takes up precious time and costs money.

So, rather than assume people need to travel around Los Angeles, we could chose to tackle a different problem altogether, namely how to get people to travel

around LA less. This version of the problem suggests a need for ideas that are not solutions for better public transportation and other ways for making getting around easier. But instead for solutions for ways to encourage people to work from home and improve local services so they don't have to travel around much at all. Of course that wouldn't satisfy the people who like being stuck in traffic drinking coffee, shaving and putting on lipstick - but maybe that's okay.

One Step Forward, Two Steps Back

As we examine a problem to see if it's the right one to focus on, we can try either *stepping back* from or *stepping forward* to it, a bit like a dance but without the music (although we could stick some music on too). Step back from the problem to see if a broader version of the problem makes more sense. Step forward from it to see if we can make the definition a little more specific. Take the traffic congestion in LA problem. Step back and it is part of some wider issues such as the need to:

- Improve the environment.
- Make it safer for pedestrians.
- Lower noise pollution.
- Have fewer road accidents.

Step forward and the goals could be more narrow and personal, like:

- Spending more time at work.
- Spending more time at home.
- Cutting the costs of car maintenance, depreciation and fuel.
- Reducing the stress of being in traffic³⁷.

By looking at the steps behind and steps in front, we can see whether we should focus our energies on a different problem altogether; one that's perhaps broader or narrower than the problem we originally set. For instance, the biggie version of the problem that gets to the broader issues at stake could be: "How do we make LA a nicer place to live?" And the minnie version of it, one that addresses some of the more specific issues: "How do we help people spend more time at home?"

Another way to broaden or narrow the problem is by asking a couple questions of ourselves. First, "Why do we want to solve the problem?" and, second, "What's stopping us from cracking it now?" In other words, why do we want there to be less traffic congestion in LA? If the main reason is because getting round LA is a pain in the arse, we could reframe the problem more broadly as, "How can we make getting around LA easier?" And, as for what's stopping us from reducing the traffic congestion in LA, if it's because there are too many cars on the road,

³⁷ A 2004 study of 700 heart-attack survivors in southern Germany, interviewed bedside about the what they'd been doing during the four days leading up to their attacks, concluded that the time spent stuck in traffic has a direct effect on likelihood of having a heart attack. The study was published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*.

for instance, then perhaps a narrower version of the problem, such as, “How do we get people to use their cars less in LA?” might prove to be more fruitful.

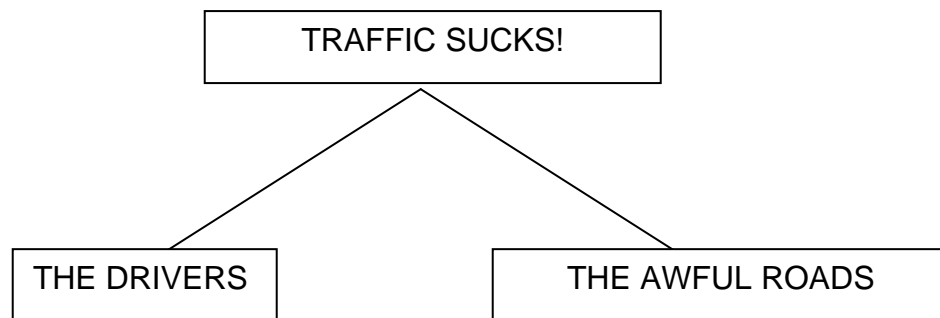
Reframing problems in this way can help focus our creative energies on the right things. The two different versions, one broad and one narrow, lead to quite different types of solutions. A focus on making getting around LA easier might spark ideas around building more roads and encouraging people to use public transport more of the time. And if it's about getting people to use their cars less, the ideas might include encouraging people to work from home more or penalizing their unnecessary use of cars through taxes and fees, as Red Ken did in London.³⁸ Or, by even bribing commuters to leave their cars at home. In 2006 the city of Seoul, South Korea, launched their “No-Driving Day” scheme in which drivers are given incentives to leave their cars at home for one day every week. Provided by public organizations and private companies, the incentives include discounts on auto tax, cheaper petrol, free parking and free car washes. Drivers stick e-tags (using Radio Frequency Identification Technology, or RDIF) on their windcreens so the City can monitor car usage and see if they are eligible for the discounts and freebies. It's estimated the scheme keeps two-million cars off the road each year, reducing traffic volume by 3.7%, reducing carbon emissions by two million tons and saving \$50 million a year in fuel costs³⁹.

³⁸ The congestion charge was introduced in London by then Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone in February 2003.

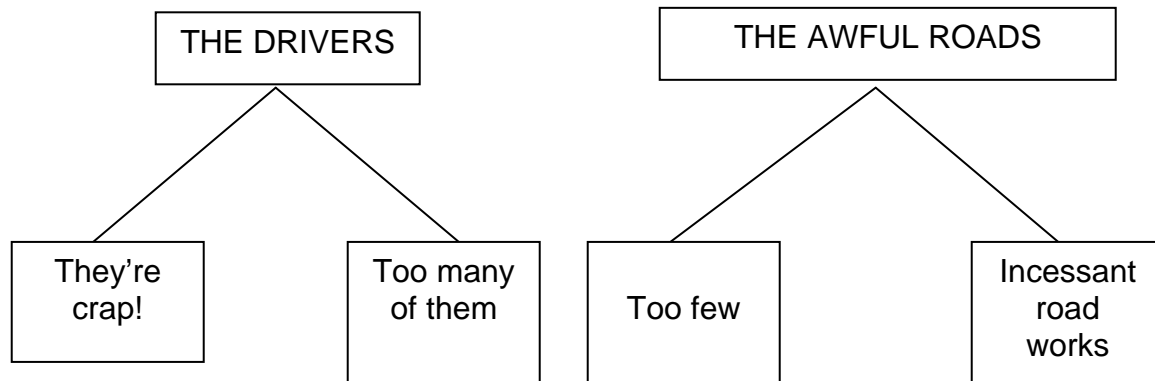
³⁹ http://www.c40cities.org/bestpractices/transport/seoul_driving.jsp

Splitting the Cherry

Another way to look at a problem is to split it up into smaller chunks and explore some of those. We start by writing the problem in its simplest form, such as “traffic sucks,” and then split that problem into two pieces.



Now we split each of those cherries up into two more. For example, two big problems with drivers is that they don't pay attention (we of course are great drivers, it's just those *other* drivers that are so bad) and there're just too many of them blocking our way, and two big issues for roads is that aren't enough of the bloody things and, anyway, they're closed half the time.



We carry on splitting up the cherry until we can't do it any more and end up with a tree diagram (a cherry tree!) of all the individual problems that make up the bigger problem. From these we can decide which ones to focus on.

(Just a thought, but how about redirecting all the really crap drivers into the holes made for the road works?)

Something Fishy

Try not to be put off by the size of the problem, however stinky it might at first seem, because it can almost always be broken up into smaller more manageable chunks. Think of it as a fish bone.

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Using a technique developed by a Japanese dude named Kaoru Ishikawa - who in the 1960s developed the fishbone as a process to manage work in the Kawasaki shipyards - can help us break up the big problem. First, by stating by it as simply as possible and writing it on the our fish head, and then on bones that make up the skeleton putting down the things that are the key factors. When we have stuck in every one we can think of and written them on the fish bones, we then start to think through possible ways to address them, one bone at a time. It's a bit like the cherry splitting technique, but where the cherries taste like cod.

The Mazda MX-5 car, also known as the *Miata*, was developed using Ishikawa's fish bone method. According to the *Guinness Book of Work Records* the MX-5 went on to become the most popular sports car ever built. Designers in California and Japan started with a design credo called 人馬一体 , or "jinba ittai," which translates roughly as "rider and horse as one." It was all about driving fun - that wind in the hair driving experience you get when riding a horse. Or from blow-drying your hair.

They then broke the design credo into five separate elements that together would deliver the car they were looking for: it needed to be compact and light-weight while still safe; have a cockpit big enough for two normal-sized adults; an engine placement that gave 50:50 weight redistribution across the front and rear of the

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car; all four wheels evenly used on the road to enhance stability and performance; and lastly, a good connection between the engine and rear differential so it was very responsive to pressure on the throttle.

The first MX-5 galloped off the production line in February 1989 and, two decades and 900,000 sales later, the MX-5 had gone through three generations of design, each one staying true to the five core design principles outlined in their original fishbone diagram. Ah so.

SIDEBAR

I had been working on the musical "GHOST" with the Tony Award winning stage director Matthew Warchus⁴⁰. As you can imagine putting on a stage musical is a massive undertaking for all concerned and is a nightmare of logistics. The director has to consult the set designer, the special effects expert, the lighting engineer, the actors and the actresses etc. on every decision because of the timing and practicality issues. And, of course, let's not forget the music and lyrics, which have to not only help tell the story but often do so in "timed by the stopwatch" organized sections, so that the music and stagecraft work seamlessly hand-in-hand with sets that are moving and have actors and actresses leaping around them.

When a problem appears it can be overwhelming for us mere mortals to fathom out how to fix it, as one thing effects everything else. Fortunately, we have Matthew who is not normal! Matthew is a classic example of someone who uses "The Answer Is The Question" method of decision-making. He also uses the

⁴⁰ Among many other accolades, Matthew has won the Globe's Most Promising Newcomer Award for Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* and has won the Evening Standard Best Director award; was nominated for the Olivier Award for Shakespeare's *Henry V* and Ben Jonson's *Volpone*; won the Drama Desk award for Best Director of a Play for his production of Alan Ayckbourn's trilogy of plays, *The Norman Conquests* at London's Old Vic Theatre; and competed against himself - and won - in the Best Director of a Play category in the 2009 Tony Awards.

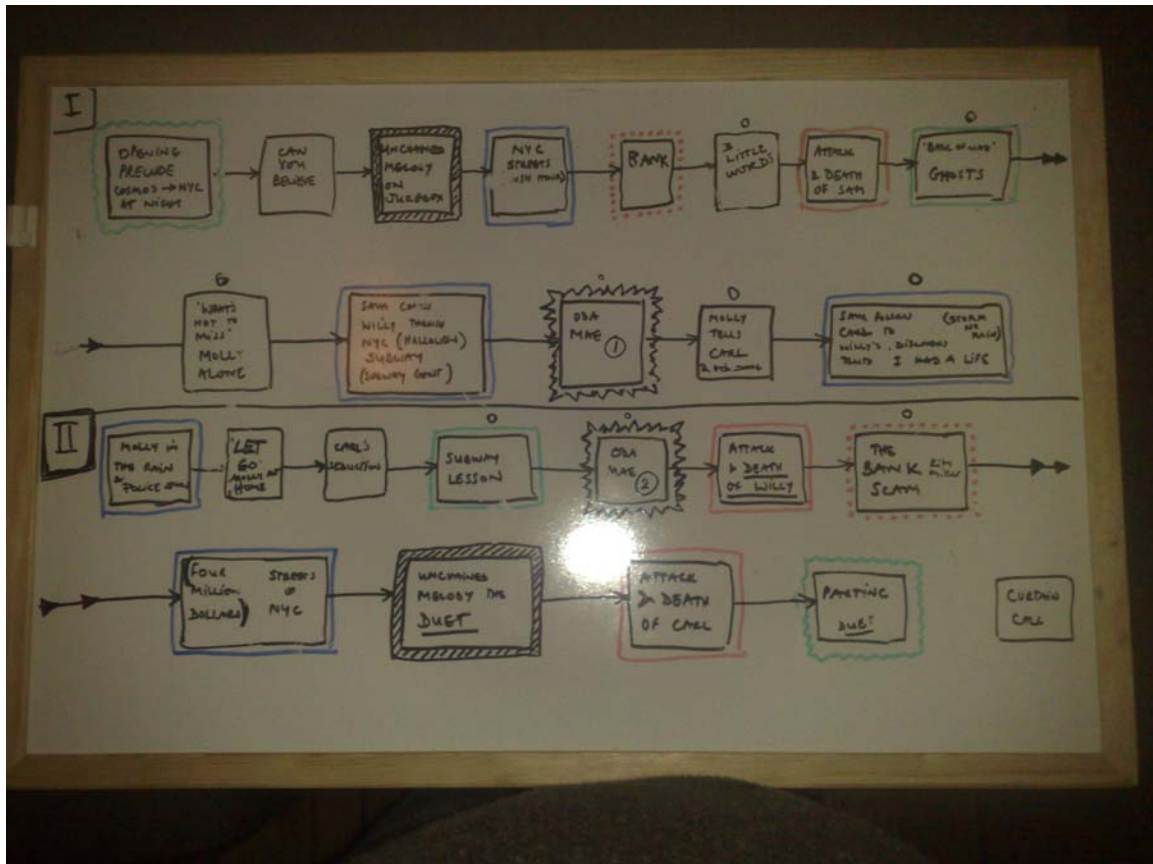
method of breaking everything down into small pieces like Kaoru Ishikawa did. In fact one very drunken night in "The Hospital" (not a medical hospital but the creative members club I founded with Paul Allen) Matthew broke down the whole musical into what looked like a block diagram (see picture) on the Hospital Club's "Today's Specials" menu board from the bar. Each block represented a scene and had a colour border, and each colour that was repeated in another block meant those scenes were connected and had a musical thread running through them.

This simple way of standing back and looking at the whole musical helped us solve many issues and brought about interesting Big Questions, such as: What is the musical really about! We all had our own idea but even Bruce Joel Rubin, the writer of the original film screenplay and was working with us, was amazed at how Matthew simplified the whole show in five minutes in front of us after several vodka martini's and a full bodied red wine!

Matthew told *Business Playground* in an interview: "My job is storytelling and scripts are written in linear form or they are presented in a linear form – you read them from the first page to the last – and when an audience then watches a story, they receive it in a linear sequence. But, the effect the story has on an audience is not achieved through a linear sequence. The emotional effect of the story is achieved by patterns, and so only by creating a chart can you start to

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look at what the patterns are in the story, or what patterns you want to emphasize, or what patterns you want to add to the story. Those little “mirrors” and “reflections” and “echoes” that reoccur in the story – a park bench and the things that take place there, a piece of music that keeps coming back in a musical, or a phrase like “ditto” in the film *Ghost* - all these little things make the pattern that creates the emotion in a story.”



Different Strokes

In crafting a problem looking at it from different points of view can help. We in our own little worlds might see it in one way, but others will almost certainly see it in other ways; and stepping into their shoes for a while can help us reframe the problem so we can decide what is the best question to ask. With the traffic congestion conundrum, for instance, if you are the mayor of the city you might have a different way of looking at it than if you are the police chief, an environmentalist or a regular commuter. All might agree that the problem is a bad one that needs to be solved, but exactly *why* it needs to be solved will vary depending on viewpoint.

The mayor might be most concerned that too much time is lost through bad traffic, which is affecting businesses throughout the city, and would like to see office workers LA having to spend less of their day stuck in cars. The police chief probably cares less about productivity (and getting votes from business leaders) and more that the sheer volume of traffic is a major cause of accidents and fatalities so a drain on police resource. The environmentalist hates the traffic because exhaust fumes are poisoning the atmosphere. And commuters don't like the congestion because it takes up too much time and is stressful. From which perspective we look at the problem will help us prioritize. If the time commuters spend traveling to work is a really important consideration, for instance, and public transport is being considered as a solution, then encouraging people to

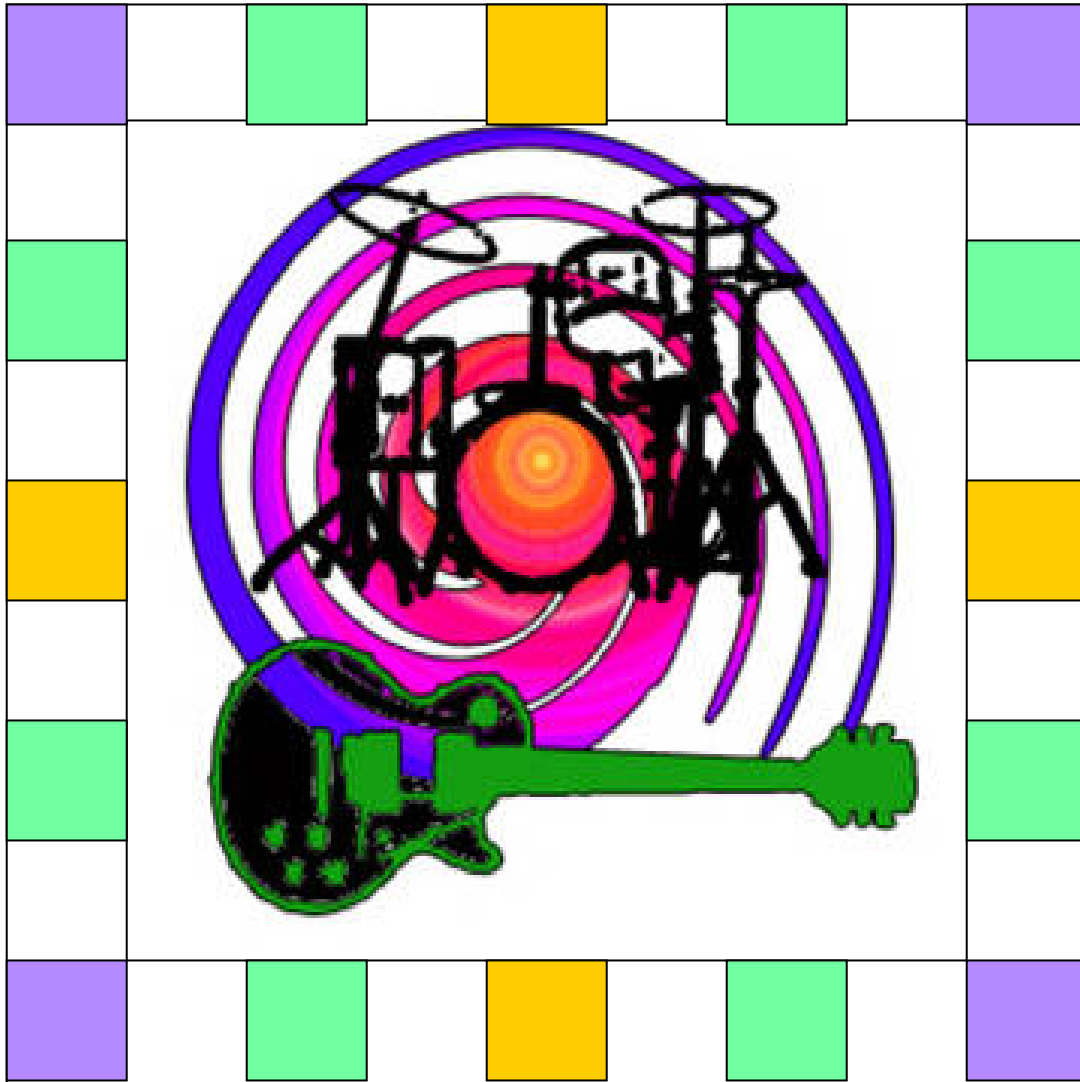
travel by clean natural gas powered buses – a great solution from an environmental point of view - might *not* be the best answer, as buses make so many stops tend to be slower than cars.

“Different Strokes” is a good group exercise to help define the problem. If there’s a small team of people working on an innovation project, you can assign roles for each one of them. Make it fun by giving them names and even find some props to help get them into character. It’s also a good technique to use when you have what you think is a good solution to a problem, or a great idea for an innovation and need to get buy-in from stakeholders (the Sharing stop on the innovation track). Again, putting yourself in the shoes of other people – people with different agendas - can help you see what the challenges in getting them to endorse it might be. Just make sure they have clean socks on. You can take account of their concerns before they’ve even told you, and if you can deal with them you have a way better change of seeing your idea happen.

Move One Space Forward to the Next Chapter...or Roll the Dice

Now we have our problem down pat, we can on move on to giving ourselves ways to solve it creatively. In the next chapter we how, for our creative abilities to do their work properly, they need a little breathing room. Okay, now open wide, say, “ah...”

BOARD GAME: THE ANSWER IS IN THE QUESTION



The board: There are 32 squares on the board and every other one is coloured and shows a musician playing a different musical instrument.

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How it works: Working out the right problem to solve is a bit like putting a band together. It takes patience and practice, but when we get it right we can make some sweet, sweet music.

How to play: Players write down a problem they want to find creative solutions for and then rewrite it in different ways. In round one players audition members to be in their band by writing up the problem in different ways and then, in round two, two they chose which musicians they want to include in the final line-up by eliminating versions of the problem that don't help. As German abstract expressionist painter, Hans Hoffman, said: "The ability to simplify means to eliminate the unnecessary so that the necessary may speak." He could have just said *keep it simple stupid* instead, but oh well never mind.

The auditions: Players throw a die to move along the board. Every time they land on a musician, players write down a different version of the problem. They carry on with the auditions until they've been around the board once and land on a square they already landed on. By that stage they should have a small pile of paper, each with a different version of the problem written on it.

Picking the final line-up: How many band members should be in the band depends on what each of them can add to the mix. Perhaps it's a solo performance, or maybe a duet, a trio, a quartet or...well, you get the picture. So

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long as they each have a role, keep them in and otherwise show them the door (or at least take their chair away). So to pick the final line-up, players must take the versions of the problem they have written and eliminate the ones that seem repetitive, aren't clear or are just plum off brief. The ones that are left, whether one or six or whatever, should be an eclectic mix of ways of looking at a problem that could lead to some interesting creative solutions.

Now, just to make it more like a real band, give your band a name that reflects the problem you're trying to solve (e.g. "The Get Rich Quicks.")

The musicians and what they do: These 16 musicians all happen to be Welsh and, as for many traditional Welsh names, what each of them does is a part of their names. Introducing:

Llewelyn the lead guitar

Hywel the bass guitar

Gwaladus the voice

Deyo the drum

Morvid the keyboard

Tacy the tambourine

Gwyn the violin

Ieuan the sax

Mabilia the harp

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Hugh the trumpet

Maredudd the fiddle

Griffith the backing singer

Morvyth the banjo

Agnes the second guitar

Rhys the double bass

Gwervyl the clarinet

Dyddgu the cow bell

CHAPTER 5: LEFT BRAIN, MEET MR. RIGHT

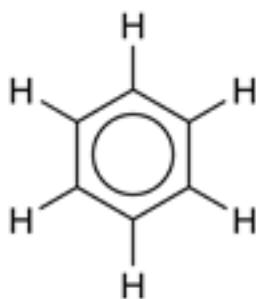
Helping the two halves of our brains work together.

Driven to Distraction⁴¹

Now the real fun starts. Once we've defined what the problem is we can begin unleash our creative powers to solve it. There are some powerful techniques to use, beyond just staring into space or taking a hot bath waiting for that "Eureka!" moment⁴², although it has to be said just staring into space or taking a hot bath can actually work (as can having a shower, or doing some exercise, or going on a bus). Once the brain has been given a clear problem to work on, doing something completely different lets it stew for a while and do its voodoo. Organic chemist Friedrich August Kekulé was drowsing in front of the fireplace when he came up with his big idea. He saw in the flames an image of snakes about their own tails and that helped him depict the chemical structure of benzene as ring-shaped.

⁴¹ There isn't any place called Distraction anywhere that we could find, which seems like a wasted opportunity. Wife: "Where are you off to, dear?" Husband: "I'm driving myself to Distraction." Wife: "That's nice, pay attention to the road won't you."

⁴² As Archimedes did when wallowing in the bath he suddenly came up with the idea for how to measure the volume of an irregular object. He ran naked through the streets of Syracuse shouting "Eureka!" We don't know what the shocked citizens of Syracuse shouted back.



Mathematician Henri Poincaré wrote⁴³ about his own experience of a creative solution popping up when he was distracted doing something completely unrelated: “I turned my attention to the study of some arithmetical questions apparently without much success and without a suspicion of any connection with my preceding researches. Disgusted with my failure, I went to spend a few days at the seaside, and thought of something else. One morning, walking on the bluff, the idea came to me...that the arithmetic transformations of indeterminate ternary quadratic forms were identical to those of non-Euclidian geometry.” (Personally, we thought it was obvious that arithmetic transformations of indeterminate ternary quadratic forms are identical to those of non-Euclidian geometry, and are surprised Henri hadn’t realized that straight away).

The period of unconscious thought in which the brain is not focusing on the problem at hand is known as *incubation*, and it’s often during this time that the solution pops up. You’re in the gym sweating away on a machine thinking how to

⁴³ *The mathematician’s mind: the psychology of invention in the mathematical field*, J. Hadamard (1945)

keep from collapsing and embarrassing yourself in front of everyone when WHAM! from nowhere you come up with an idea for solving the problem you've been working on for days. You're so surprised that you fall off the machine and embarrass yourself anyway, but you don't care because you have the answer.

Matthew Warchus, multi award-winning theatre and film director, told *Business Playground* how he needs mental space when he's trying to solve problems creatively: "I'm in a very strange position when I work with an assistant director. I find it quite difficult when I work with an assistant because I like collaborating - it's obviously my job to collaborate – but the only way I can work with assistants is if I tell them when they start with me I say, 'Feel free to speak and comment and things like that, follow me round, come to the meetings and all that. All I ask is that, if I'm stuck don't help me. If things are going along really well then chip in, say what you want, but if I'm stuck don't say anything, because being stuck comes just before having a really brilliant idea.' To me that's when having really special ideas come, just after being stuck. I think it's the magic moment creatively when you get a room full of people who are all stuck. I like that, it's a good sign."

Creativity involves making connections between things that didn't previously appear to be connected. In 1913 Poincaré⁴⁴ wrote, "To create consists of making new combinations of associative elements which are useful...the most fertile will

⁴⁴ *The Foundations Of Science*, H. Poincaré (1913)

often be those formed of elements drawn from domains which are far apart.” And, recent research proves that being distracted from a creative challenge for a while can bear fruit (mainly plums, but mangos too sometimes). When distracted while trying to solve a creative problem they can come up with better ideas than if they’re not distracted.

In one study⁴⁵ consisting of three separate experiments, undergraduates studying (or whatever students do) at the University of Amsterdam we were each given a creative problem to solve. Then they were either given three minutes to think it through before giving their answers. Or they were given another task to do for the three minutes to distract them. Or asked to come up with their ideas right away.

In the first of the three experiments, students were asked to create new names for pastas and given examples of some made-up names to help them. All of the examples happened to end with the letter “i” (you’ll see where this is going if you hang around a bit). In the second, they were asked to come up with names of Dutch places starting with the letter “A” (we can think of just one⁴⁶, but the tests were conducted in the Netherlands so our guess is these people were better at it

⁴⁵ “Where Creativity Resides: The Generative Power of Unconscious Thought” – Dijksterhuis & Meurs in *Consciousness and Cognition*, 2006.

⁴⁶ Alkmaar. Did you think we were going to say Amsterdam? Nah.

than us). And in the third, they were asked to come up with ideas for some creative uses a brick (don't get us started).

Now remember that some of the students were distracted by another task before giving their answers. If randomly allocated to this *distracted group*, immediately having been given their creative task they were given another, but this time non-creative, task to do, one designed to occupy their *conscious thoughts*. A circle appeared on their computer screens in a random place and they had to track it with their computer mouse and sometimes, just to mess with their heads we presume, the circle would change color and they (who probably by now thought they were in some weird Dutch drug-induced haze) had to click the space bar as fast as possible until the circle disappeared. Then a new one would appear, and so on for three crazy, crazy minutes.

The people in the other two groups seem to have got off relatively lightly. If not in the distracted group with the circle-on-screen task, they either had to generate answers straight off the bat for the creative tasks they'd been given, or were given three minutes to think up ideas first.

Results from the three experiments varied for the three groups. Ignoring the fact that we've just told you that the *distracted group* performed better, you might logically think that being given time to focus on the problem would help. But, oh no, that's not what happened at all. Logic be damned.

For instance, the distracted group generated more pasta names that did *not* end with an “i.” Their names were more original than the other group’s who had created pasta names more similar to the ones given in the examples (that’s where *that* was going). Also, during the second experiment, the distracted folks came up with more Dutch villages rather than the obvious big cities and towns when compared to their less distracted brethren. So, again the solutions they generated were less obvious. And, you guessed it, in the third experiment the distracted group generated more creative suggestions for what to do with a brick (such as, and we’re guessing here, “Throw it at the middle of the moving circle on the computer screen!”)

How does one explain these results? As the Dutch researchers conclude, in way better English than most English-speaking natives would use, “Whereas conscious thought stays firmly under the searchlight, unconscious thought ventures out to the dark and dusty nooks and crannies of the mind.” The weird circle-tracking task had occupied their conscious thoughts so freeing up their unconscious to do some nifty creative work. It’s like letting a dog off the lead in a park. If you let the creative part of your brain go run around for a while (the dog), without being restricted by the more rigorous conscious thought (the lead), it will come back with lots of interesting ideas (in this analogy: sticks, balls and dead birds).

Monsieur Poincaré, our French mathematician friend, believed that the products of unconscious thought often do not enter the conscious mind right away, but pop up in there later unexpectedly. We've all experienced feeling that there's *something there*, some interesting idea or solution that we can't quite put into words yet. Experiments by a different bunch of researchers⁴⁷ in fact suggests there's a two-step process going on. In the first, unconscious thought goes to work looking for creative solutions by exploring the dark and dusty nooks and crannies and, in the second, the solutions are transferred across to conscious thought.

The creative task these dudes used for their research is known as the Remote Association Test (RAT) and tasks people with finding remote associations between two things. This fits nicely with the Frenchman's description of creativity. In one form of RAT, for instance, people are given three words and they need to come up with a fourth that fits with each of them. Read to try one? Cheese-Ocean-Sky.

Quickly...quickly.

⁴⁷ "The Merits of Unconscious Thought in Creativity" - Cheh-Bo Zhong, Ap Dijksterhuis and Adam Galinsky in *Psychological Science*, 2008.

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

The answer is *blue*. As in *blue cheese*, *blue ocean* and *blue sky*. Here are a few more to play around with. The answers are at the end of the chapter, but the last few are pretty tricky so don't be surprised if you don't get them all.

Light – Birthday – Stick (answer: Candle)

Cross – Rain – Tie (answer: Bow)

Boot – Summer – Ground (answer: Camp)

Catcher – Food – Hot (answer: Dog)

Health – Taker – Less (answer: Care)

Down – Question – Check (answer: Mark)

Carpet – Alert – Ink (answer: Red)

Test – Runner – Map (answer: Road)

Man – Glue – Star (answer: Super)

Here are the trickier ones....

Stick – Maker – Point (answer: Match)

Fork – Dark – Man (answer: Pitch)

Line – Fruit – Drunk (answer: Punch)

Mate – Shoes – Total (answer: Running)

Land – Hand – House (answer: Farm)

Cast – Side – Jump (answer: Broad)

Problems like these can be solved in one of two ways. Either by trial and error, an analytical process whereby we consciously go through word combinations to see if one of them fits (for the last one in the list you might have started with “Off” to make “Castoff” and tried it with the other two words before realizing that wouldn’t work). Or solve the problem through insight. There’s an “A-ha!” moment when the answer arrives from your subconscious. That’s the creative bit at work. And it’s funny, but that “A-ha!” feeling is how people almost always describe it (unless you’re Greek, in which case “Eureka” is the more usual exclamation). So when researchers want to find out if someone got the answer through analysis or insight, they ask them to say whether or not they got that “A-ha!” feeling when they found the solution, and their answer tells the researchers which method of problem-solving was used.

It turns out that the brain actually *prepares itself* to come up with an insight when it’s using the insight method even before it’s solved the problem. It’s limbering itself up to be creative. Researchers⁴⁸ put people in brain scanning machines and used electroencephalography (EEG) and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to look at their neural activity during problem solving tasks. Subjects were given RAT problems to solve and told to press a button when they had the

⁴⁸ “The Prepared Mind: Neural Activity Prior to Problem Presentation Predicts Subsequent Solution by Sudden Insight” – John Kounios, Jennifer L. Frymiare, Edward M. Bowden, Jessica I. fleck, Karuna Subramaniam, Todd B. Parrish and Mark Jung-Beeman in *Psychological Science*, 2006.

answer that indicated whether they had solved it with or without insight. Did they get the “A-ha!” feeling or not? Well, did they?

The researchers found that, “The neuronal populations active prior to presentations of problems subsequently solved with insight are different from neuronal populations active prior to the presentation of problems subsequently solved with noninsight processing.” Eh, what? In other words, if the problem was solved with insight then the brain activity looked different *even before* they came up with the answer. The brain was preparing itself for going down the A-ha route.

But more than that, brain activity for the Ah-ha method compared to the analytical one was different, not just before the problem was solved, but, wait for it, even *before the problem was given to them*. Even before they were given the problem, data from the scans showed that people’s brains had decided which method to use, insight or analysis. The different people tested in the study didn’t just use one or the other method to solve the problems. Each person used both insight and analysis to solve the problems at different times and switched between the two methods. Perhaps they were trying a different approach to see which one was most effective, or maybe giving one part of their brain a rest. The researchers conclude: “...they spontaneously alternate strategies or that one form of preparation, presumably insight preparation with its top-down component, is perhaps too demanding for every problem in a series.”

Phew. I think you need a break to digest all this. Have a cuppa and then come back to us. We'll still be here.

SIDEBAR

August 20, 2009.

Evening Dave,

It was good to hear you speak at the Conference in Yorkshire and I recollect your offer for people to contact you. With this in mind I am wondering if you have any advice for a family bicycle shop who also handbuild custom steel bicycle framesets on premises? How do we keep our customers loyal, grow our customer base and keep customers coming into the shop rather than purchasing through internet? Any thoughts? My husband and I have owned the business since 2000 when the previous owner retired to Canada at age 80 and business was established in 1946 so seen lots of changes and Paul, MD, has worked in the business around 18 years.

Many thanks.

Yours in cycling,

Sandra Corcoran, Director Pennine Cycles

Dear Sandra,

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

I would suggest getting an old-fashioned Italian espresso or cappuccino machine creating a coffee club type atmosphere in a small area where people can hang around while they wait , put a mini library all about cycling and adventure old and new books ask customers to swap share cycling stories on your website and print them each week put them on wall in coffee area. Customers stay loyal and keep coming back to a place that has personality and a feeling that the owners care and want them there and it's good fun for you too. Give the different coffee names like "wheels on Fire" or "1st gear espresso" make it humorous create outings with the coffee club clientele and Take photos of the outings and place them on the web and in the finished coffee corner. Start a Twitter about cycling, coffee music and romance. Make cycling and meeting people fun and could lead to relationships that last.

Dave

Evening Dave

Lovely ideas. Appreciate you getting back to me. We do handbuilt sexy bikes as well as selling Italian sexy bicycles and we are passionate about cycling and our business so all fits in nicely. One of our first bicycles was named "Marilyn" after Marilyn Monroe in the 50s. We do offer coffee to our customers just need to make more space and get the cappucino machine in operation now. Love the coffee titles!! Paul has lots of books on cycling so need to set them up at the shop. Handbuilt Pennine bicycles have a following worldwide too a Pennine on

its way to California in September and a guy from near San Francisco is wanting to refurb a Pennine and needs some Pennine decals. It is a fun business to be in and my husband says the best job ever and I am sure you feel the same.

Happy days.

Yours in cycling

Sandra

Switching Gears

OK, ready? So to sum up, what going over these scientific studies has told us is this. First, when we have a creative problem to solve and we turn our minds to something else for a while, the distraction can actually *help* us solve it. Second, people often solve problems through sudden insight and get an “A-ha” feeling when they do so. In fact our brains can switch between using insight or the analytical method of problem solving and do so pretty frequently. Third, the brain spontaneously switches between methods, perhaps to give its various bits and pieces a rest.

So far, so good? Now, while people can generally switch from one mode to another to solve problems like these, a subsequent research study⁴⁹ suggests

⁴⁹ “The Origins of Insight in Resting-State Brain Activity” – John Kounios, Jessica I. Fleck, Deborah L. Green, Lisa Payne, Jennifer L. Stevenson, Edward M. Bowden, Mark Jung-Beeman in *Neuropsychologia* (2007)

that certain people are predisposed to solve them through the insight method. They veer towards finding those “A-has.” Using the same sort of techniques (i.e. RAT, EEG and fMRI, if you want the acronyms) experimenters looked at resting brain activity to see how it differed among people, and found that activity in certain parts of the right hemisphere of the brain is higher for people who tend to solve the problems using insight. That’s interesting, it means that some folks use insight to solve creative problems more than others and their brains are getting into gear to do so ahead of time. Hmm.

So, are certain people more creative than others?

No doubt. In fact, Einstein’s brain was physically different from most other brains. When Einstein died his brain was dissected into 240 blocks, nearly all of which were lost (they should have sent them by registered post), though luckily not all of them were. One piece remained and, thirty year later, the chunk that’s known as “Brodmann’s Area 39” was analyzed by Dr. Marian C. Diamond and colleagues⁵⁰ who found that it contained a higher proportion of *glial* cells versus neurons when compared to brains of control subjects. Kenneth M. Heilman, in his lecture at the 17th Annual Meeting of the American Neuropsychiatric Association, suggested this was a sign of “connectivity” and that for Einstein, who was

⁵⁰ From “Exploring the Brain’s Role in Creativity” in *NeuroPsychiatry Vol. 7, No. 5 May 2006*.

dyslexic, the right hemisphere of his brain had become specialized for spatial computations to compensate for his dyslexia.⁵¹

But, we don't all have to be an Einstein to be creative. As the research we outlined shows, all of us have the ability to switch into creative mode to solve problems, we just need to train our brains to think that way so it gets used to doing it. As Louis Pasteur (man, these French thinkers were smart) said, "Chance favors only the prepared mind." He believed preparation facilitates insight and, while he was specifically referring to the need to gather information, we think it also applies to the preparation of our brains to think creatively.

⁵¹ Dyslexia is not funny, but did you hear the one about the dyslexic, amnesic, agnostic who kept waking up in the middle of the night wondering if there really was a dog? No? Well it goes like this...

SIDEBAR

Hello Dave,

My company is a fairly small but fast growing manufacturer of products that provide indoor air quality into homes. Basically we are on a mission to improve the health and wellbeing of people by delivering fresh, filtered air into homes. According to the American College of Allergists 50% of the worlds illnesses are attributed to poor indoor air which causes respiratory illnesses, headaches, fatigue, cot deaths and in some cases stress and depression. And the problem is getting worse as we seal our properties up to save energy.

The air we deliver into homes is as fresh and clean as the air found in the Amazon Rainforest (you will never see a monkey using an inhaler). This fresh filtered air we deliver promotes good health and wellbeing, reduces illnesses and actually improves performance. There is a huge worldwide potential for our products in what is basically an untapped market and after seeing you at Harrogate last month I thought I would have nothing to lose in emailing you. I was wondering if you were prepared to talk to me to see if we can tap into your creativity and come up with a message to the mass market, which will create a demand for fresh, clean, oxygenated air. It would be great to hear from you with any thoughts.*

Nick Heaton

Managing Director, EnviroVent

** Our products literally are tested on animals!*

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

Dear Nick,

“EnviroVent” is quite a tough name to sell, yet I can see that the business could be huge. Selling the idea of breathing clean air and avoiding various illnesses should not be tough and if you can scale up fast enough to meet demand then it may be worth investing in a visual way that gets across your message using every viral trick in the book and the web as a platform. Make an electronic emailable Flash version of a short film of around 60 seconds that tells the story (have a song like "All You Need is the Air That You Breathe" as the soundtrack) and make it a little like an animated film you see on Virgin Airlines about safety on board (even though its serious, it has some lighthearted humorous aspect to it). There are young flash animators that can do this with your guidance on their laptop very cheaply and to save \$\$\$ you could write a simple song about "fresh clean air" and hire a music programmer to create a track session singer to sing it, and then you own it! If you can afford it you could make little 60 second webisodes with flash animation that explains all the reasons to use your product, having the song as a thread through it. If it's fun and informational and at the end says “brought to you by EnviroVent” then it can be seeded on blogs etc. all over the world. Also start twittering asap about the air we breathe and all the concerns about it with hundreds of tags.

Dave

Tuning Up to be Creative...Music Please, Maestro

You're not going to be particularly surprised by this, especially given that one of the authors of this book is a musician and the other likes to whistle, but there is a strong link between musical ability and creative ability. But don't just take our word for it. In a recent study⁵², twenty percussion, wind and string players were given creativity tasks to perform while their brains were scanned. They were asked to come up with creative uses for household objects and, compared to a control group of non-musicians, on average came up with 14 more. Scans of their brain showed that, when working on the creative tasks, the musicians showed more symmetrical blood flow between their brain hemispheres than the non-musicians did. In other words, they used both halves of their noggins pretty well.

And, to dive a bit deeper into the way musicians use their brains to be creative, it seems that when they create *original* music they use different parts of their brains compared to when performing music they already know. For example, research⁵³ has shown that Jazz musicians, when improvising jazz, use different parts of their brains than when playing jazz from memory.

⁵² "Enhanced divergent thinking and creativity in musicians: A behavioral and near-infrared spectroscopy study." Gibson, C., Folley, B. S., & Park, S. in *Brain and Cognition*, 2008.

⁵³ "Neural Substrates of Spontaneous Musical Performance: An fMRI Study of Jazz Improvisation" by Charles J. Limb and Allen A. Braun in *PLoS ONE*, Feb 27, 2008.

The highly creative and spontaneous improvisation style of modern jazz leads to an increased activity in the medial prefrontal cortex, a small area at the very front of the brain, in these musicians. The medial prefrontal cortex is involved during our self-initiated thoughts and behaviors and comes into play when we describe an event that happened to us, or when we make up a story. The research was funded by the *National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders* (NIDCD) and involved asking (and luckily, getting) six highly trained jazz musicians to play the keyboard when under an fMRI brain scanner. In one scenario the wired-up musicians played a simple C-major scale and then performed a bit of “low level” improvisation using just the C-major scale. In another scenario they improvised music based on a novel blues melody that they'd been asked to memorize.

These performances didn't take place in a cool jazz dive, however. The musicians were on their backs, knees bent up, heads inside the scanners and playing the keyboards only with their right hands. Now, there's a novel act.

The results showed that during improvisation not only does the medial prefrontal cortex show a increase in activity but the large portion of the brain responsible for monitoring one's own performance (the *dorsolateral prefrontal cortex*) completely shuts down. “The researchers explain that, just as over-thinking a jump shot can

cause a basketball player to fall out of the zone and perform poorly, the suppression of inhibitory, self-monitoring brain mechanisms helps to promote the free flow of novel ideas and impulses.”⁵⁴ The brain pattern is similar to that seen in people when they are dreaming.

And in the scenario when the musicians were improvising from the blues melody there were increases in neural activity in the brain areas responsible for touch, hearing and vision, even though improvising didn't involve a greater use of these senses compared to the other test scenario. "It's almost as if the brain ramps up its *sensorimotor* processing in order to be in a creative state," said Dr. Charles Limb, one of the authors of the study.

These two studies show that musicians are skilled at applying their creativity to other areas outside music, and also that when in creative mode they know how to bring in and shut off specific parts of their brains to help with their tasks. Musicians use both sides of their brains more frequently than non-musicians and, through their musical training have limbered up not only their fingers and lips, but also the flexibility of their brains to enable them to switch between the two hemispheres with relative ease. Who said those piano lessons were a waste of time.

⁵⁴ “Large Portion Of Brain Switches Off And Lets Creativity Flow In Jazz Improvisations” from www.terraviva.com, Feb 27 2008

In the Mood

Yet you don't have to be an accomplished musician to experience the positive effect music can have on creative performance. Just listening to certain types of music enhances creativity by lifting our mood. Try Joan Ambrosio Dalza's *Piva*, for instance, the fourth movement of George Frederic Handel's *Music for the Royal Fireworks* or the final movement of Joseph Haydn's *The Creation*. At one ad agency we know, when driving to a big presentation at a client's offices the agency team would play Richard Wagner's *Flight of the Valkyries* to fire themselves up.⁵⁵

Music is one of the few things in the world that connects everybody without a language barrier, but it also connects people emotionally and, being a musician, you learn how to connect with somebody emotionally by choosing particular chords or by choosing a particular melancholy melody or whatever. You can actually use music in business meetings or by taking a ten-minute break to listen to a piece of music and it will actually tune everybody together. Before that everyone might have thinking about a million things – “I need to put on the washing” or “I forgot to call my husband” – but you put on a piece of classical music, ABBA or whatever music you like, and suddenly everybody's on the same

⁵⁵ Same music that Lt. Colonel Gilgore, the air cavalry commander played by Robert Duvall in film *Apocalypse Now*, blasts out from his helicopter as he lays waste to a North Vietnamese Village. “I love the smell of Napalm in the morning.”

plane. It puts everyone on the same wavelength momentarily. There are instances of where people have taken a piece of classical music to parts of Africa, where they've never heard any classical music before, played it and then had an interpreter get the villagers' reactions. Everybody in the village felt the same way when they heard this classical music, even though they didn't really understand what it was.

It reminds us of the scene in film *The Shawshank Redemption*, one of the greatest in any film, in which wrongly convicted prisoner Andy, played by Tim Robbins, finds a recording of Mozart's Marriage of Figaro. Knowing how much trouble he'll get into, but doing it anyway, he barricades himself in the warden's office and plays this beautiful music, an aria called *Che Soave Zeffiretto* or *What a Gentle Breeze* over the prison PA system, transfixing every hardened inmate and prison guard in the place. They stare up at the speakers as they become momentarily transported to another, better place⁵⁶.

IDEALLY WE'LL INCLUDE A MEMORY STICK OF OUT-OF-COPYRIGHT
CLASSICAL PIECES

⁵⁶ No, not Starbucks.

Dr. Adam Anderson of University of Toronto wanted to see how listening to music impacts people's mood and creative ability and so asked⁵⁷ subjects in his experiments to solve two types of problems, a creative one involving word associations and a visual problem that involved ignoring visual distractions. To create a positive or negative mood people listened to happy or sad music and were asked to think about happy or sad things.

When in a happy mood they did well on the creative tasks, but did badly on visual tasks with distracting information. "If you are doing something that requires you to be creative or in a think tank, you want to be in a place with good mood," says Dr. Anderson⁵⁸. "For example if you are having difficulty solving a problem, a typical reaction is to get angry. But that can actually make it harder to solve the problem. One prescription is to go out and play and get yourself in a good mood, then come back to the problem." It's thought that a part of the brain called the *amygdala* might be responsible. The *amygdala* triggers fear and that shuts down the part of the brain that makes us creative, but when we're happy the *amygdala* is oh so quiet⁵⁹...shhhh.

But, being in a good mood actually has a negative impact on some other types of mental task. Says the good doctor, "If you are doing some form of task that

⁵⁷ "Happy Mood Improves Creative Thinking but May Lead to Distraction" – Adam Anderson, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Dec 2006.

⁵⁸ "Happy Emotions Boost Creativity," ABC News Dec 19, 2006.

⁵⁹ We love Bjork.

requires focus, many details of calculation, strangely, it might be better to be in a negative mood because the negative mood can filter out everything else.” Negative moods then help people focus. “Under a negative mood,” he says, “we see the world through a porthole. But under a positive mood, we see the world through a big window.” In fact another study found similarly that physicians in a positive mood solve problems more creatively than those in a neutral mood.⁶⁰ Positive emotions inhibit logical reasoning and make it difficult to detect strong versus weak arguments.

So, depending on the problem you want solving, choose your accountant and physician very carefully.

And, don't tell the kids, but playing certain video games can produce emotions that give a creative boost. As part of her graduate thesis Elizabeth Hutton and a professor at Penn State University, S. Shyam Sundar, got 98 students to play videogame “Dance Dance Revolution” to see if it would affect players problem-solving abilities. If you've never watched this game being played it's quite a spectacle - players stand on a platform with flashing arrows arranged in a cross shape, and dance to the music by moving their feet quickly onto each arrow as it lights up.

⁶⁰ “Positive Affect Influences Creative Problem Solving and Reported Source of Practice Satisfaction in Physicians” - Estrada, Isen and Young in *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 1994.

After dancing the players took a creativity test, their skin conductance was tested and they were asked whether they felt positive or negative. The researchers found⁶¹ that players with a high degree of arousal and positive mood were more likely to have new ideas for problem solving. But, creativity scores were the highest for players with low arousal and negative mood. In other words, happy or sad people are creative, while angry or relaxed people are not. “The key is to generate emotion,” they concluded.

And doing some form of aerobic exercise can make us more creative. A 2005 study⁶² looked at how doing aerobic exercise would affect people’s creative performance compared to not doing any. And guess what? The couch potatoes lost. Sixty volunteers were asked to do creative tasks involving completing pictures and their performances were rated against a pre-defined set of creativity measures. Some of the volunteers were randomly picked to do the creative tasks immediately following thirty minutes running, fast walking, swimming, cycling on a stationary bike or stair climbing. Another group was politely asked to do exercise for thirty minutes and then given a two-hour break with their feet up before doing the tasks. While a third group did the creative task after having done no exercise that day, the slobs.

⁶¹ “Video Games Can Make Us Creative If Spark Is Right” from *Science Daily*, May 5 2008.

⁶² “Aerobic Exercise and Cognitive Creativity: Immediate and Residual Effects” – Blanchette, Ramocki, O’del and Casey in *Creativity Research Journal*, 2005.

The results showed that, “Instances of aerobic exercise significantly impacted the creative processes of the participants, and these effects were shown to endure over a two hour period.” Why this happens is likely to be to do with blood flowing through the brain, the increased blood flow delivering nutrients in the form of glucose, and perhaps the endorphins released by the increased oxygen in the bloodstream making new neural connections in the brain.

If music, videogames and aerobic exercise all effect mood and in turn creative performance, the same is true of what is described as the “speed of thinking.” In a 2006 study⁶³ researchers manipulated *thought speed* of a number of volunteers (144 volunteers, if you must know) and observed the effects on mood. Half of the people read a set of statements at about half normal reading speed and the other half read them at twice the normal speed, with some of these guinea pigs given depressing statements to read (e.g. “I want to go to sleep and never wake up”) and others happy ones (e.g. “Wow! I feel great”). The researchers found, “Regardless of whether participants were led to think increasingly depressing thoughts or increasing elated thoughts, they displayed more positive mood – and more related ‘symptoms’ characteristic of manic experience – when they had these thoughts at a faster speed.”

⁶³ ‘Manic Thinking: Independent Effects of Thought Speed and Thought Content’ – Pronin and Wegner in *Psychological Science*, Sep 2006.

The *thought speed* seem to enhance individual's mood, self-esteem, feelings of creativity, feelings of power, and energy level: "The results of the experiment suggest the intriguing possibility that even during moments when people feel stuck having depressed thoughts, interventions that accelerate the speed of such thoughts may serve to boost feelings of positive affect and energy."

So, to take stock, being in a positive mood makes us more creative and listening to music, playing video games, doing some aerobic exercise, or even just thinking fast can put us in one. But we shouldn't try to undertake tasks that require a lot of logical reasoning, stuff like numbers for instance, when we're in such good spirits or we'll probably screw up.

Listening to music improves creativity in other ways too. Music is processed in both sides of the brain and it is thought to coordinate right-brain imagery with left-brain analysis so as to help solve problems more creatively (try Erich Wolfgang Korngold's *Violin Concerto*, 1st movement). In 1993 a group of researchers at the University of Wisconsin discovered that when college students listened to 10 minutes of a sonata by Mozart, their performance in an IQ test rose by 8-10 points. What became known as the "Mozart Effect" spawned a whole industry of music CDs and DVDs for parents to play to their toddlers and even unborn infants to boost their IQs.

However, since that famous study there has been a vigorous debate about whether playing classical music has any real impact on IQ. An analysis of 188 different studies conducted over a span of 50 years led researchers at Harvard's Graduate School of Education to conclude the effect was bogus.⁶⁴ Head of research team, Lois Hetland, said that there is no evidence that playing music to unborn babies, infants or toddlers increases their IQ: "It's motivated not by education but by a desire to sell CDs. I feel sorry for parents who are duped by the hype." But, she does accept the music without doubt has some effect and it's one that does help creativity rather than IQ. The test done on the college students in the original study Wisconsin was actually a spatial task, one that required them to manipulate objects in their minds, not specifically an IQ test, which suggests that while intelligence might not be enhanced by listening to music, spatial reasoning, a key part of creativity, might be.

So keep playing those tunes. It probably won't make you or your kids any brighter but can give a creative boost.

There's A Hole in My Head

On the subject of how increasing the blood flow to the brain through exercise or video gaming, some people believe that drilling a hole in their head will increase

⁶⁴ 'Arts-to-smarts link overblown: Researchers sing a new tune for the Mozart Effect' - William J. Cromie in the University of Harvard Gazette, Oct 12, 2000.

blood flow and so creativity. We're not recommending this, by the way, just mentioning it in passing. This is called trepanation and involves making a small hole in the skull to decrease pressure on the brain to increase the volume of blood flowing through it. Trepanning is an ancient surgical practice and a trepanned skull was recently found in France that is believed to be 7,000 years old. Not surprisingly though, there aren't many people nowadays that practice it, one reason maybe being that if you practice it and don't do such a great job you'll probably wind up dead.

One person who has tried and lived to tell the tale is Peter Halvorson. In a 1998 interview⁶⁵ he described how, 26 years previously in a small room in Holland, he used an injection of anesthetic, a scalpel, four drill bits and an electric power drill controlled by his foot to make the hole. "I could hear a gurgling, and I could feel the shifting of volume in the brain water," says Halvorson when describing the moment he broke through the skull. "There was a warm feeling as my metabolism cranked up a bit." He did the trepanation for enlightenment - we might suggest a good book instead but oh well - and according to Pete the result of the procedure was more energy, more drive and more focus and returned him to the "buoyancy" he had as a child.

⁶⁵ "You Need It...Like a Whole in the Head" by Michael Colton in the *Washington Post*, May 31 1998.

The man responsible for a modern-day resurgence of popular interest (we admit *resurgence* may be overstating it somewhat) in trepanation is a Dutch librarian called Bart Hughes, who in the 1960s had trepanned himself and lived to tell the tale in his book, "Trepanation: The Cure for Psychosis." According to Hughes, gravity and age rob adults of the creativity and energy that a child possesses. While a baby's skull has a *fontanel* – the soft spot – that allows the brain to pulsate, by adulthood the skull has hardened and so the brain can no longer pulsate as it did. That, together with good old gravity saps more blood from the head. Trepanation, Hughes believes, reverses this loss of blood volume and gives the feeling you get from standing on your head for a few minutes, or from sustained aerobic activity. You know, a bit of a head rush.

Another recent trepanner was Oxford University professor Lord James Neidpath, who taught Bill Clinton when the ex US President was a Rhodes scholar at Oxford. The prof. had decided to do it because his wife had already done it and spoke very highly of the results. And, according to Paul McCartney in a 1986 interview with *Musician* magazine, John Lennon was also interested in the idea. John asked Paul and wife Linda if, "You fancy getting the trepanning done?" They never did. You can learn more at trepan.com, the website for the International Trepanation Advocacy Group (ITAG). Drills are available at most good DIY shops, bandages at your high street chemist.

Move One Space Forward to the Next Chapter...or Roll the Dice

So, creativity involves thinking more broadly than the more sensible, analytical parts of our brains allow us to do, and can be influenced by all sorts of things. In the next few chapters there are some fun techniques for coming up with ideas, all of which help tap into the side of our brains that does the diverse thinking. You'll be pleased to know that hardly any of them involve the need for sharp instruments.

BOARD GAME: DRIVEN TO DISTRACTION



Board design: 12 distractions written on a wheel with a bottle at the centre that is spun to randomly pick a distracting activity to go and do.

How it works: When we have a clear creative challenge and after spending some time thinking through a problem, the brain often needs a rest from concentrated thought so it can wander explore and make less obvious connections. But more than just giving it a rest, if we task the brain with something distracting we

actually help it solve the creative challenge we set out by allowing to do its work unencumbered by stumbling blocks like logic and analysis.

How to play: Players spend some time framing the creative problem they're trying to solve and then they do something absorbing and totally unrelated to the problem by spinning the *Wheel of Distractions*.

Distractions:

- Go on a bus ride (the number 142 is always a pleasant trip)
- Do some high-energy exercise (up to you what of course, but bring a towel)
- Visit an art gallery (walk around and ponder the exhibits while rubbing your, or someone else's, chin thoughtfully)
- Mend something around the house (you know, that wobbly chair or that faulty trepanning drill)
- Do a crossword puzzle (it could also be Sudoku – bless you!)
- Play a game of chess or checkers
- Do some yoga or meditate
- Listen, really listen, to some jazz or classical music (headphones on, eyes shut)
- Take a bath or, if you're trying to save water and time, take a shower (don't forget to wash behind your ears)

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

- Go for a gentle bike ride or walk (either way, wear a helmet)
- Do some cooking (we'll be round at about seven 'o' clock)
- Build something out of Lego or bits of rubbish

CHAPTER 6: BRAIN FLASH

Using visualization to come up with creative solutions.

Picture this, a boat on a river.

If picture is worth a thousand words and the pen is mightier than the sword, then surely a crayon must be a weapon of mass destruction? Or something like that. The same is true of music, you can never adequately express the ideas in music through words - you have to hear it. Ken Robinson in his book "Out of Our Minds: Learning to be Creative," gives this example: "The composer Gustav Mahler was sitting in his studio completing a new piano piece. As he was playing, one his students came into his room and listened quietly. At the end of the piece the student said, 'Maestro, that was wonderful. What is it about?' Mahler turned to him and said, 'It's about this.' And he played it again."

SIDEBAR

Bob Dylan was going through a period in the early nineties when he was a little lost and searching for inspiration. Instead of us trying to make a record, or finish words to songs (we recorded about 20 ideas), we went out and shot film instead. It was much more fun with just me filming on 8mm cine cameras and Bob wearing a 1920's top hat on his head wandering around Camden Town like the

Pied Piper (we ended up being followed by a bunch of people who could not believe what they were seeing so we got them to act in it too). This was in London in broad daylight and we had no-one with us as security, or any assistants, just the two of us and my three-year old son, Django. We were laughing and having great fun making up sequences and then shooting them on the spot. You can see where some of this footage ended up if you go on Youtube.com and type in "Bob Dylan Blood in my Eyes," as later I asked Sophie Muller to edit some of it together for a video to that song and she did a great job.

There is no point in sitting staring at the wall trying to be inspired when the whole world is outside waiting to play with you, or for you to play with it. Another time I took Bob on my houseboat with my mother, Sadie, and a few other people and we went down the canals with acoustic guitars and a tape-recorder making up stuff while my mum cooked soup. When we got off the boat I took him to Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park where people get on a soapbox and say what they want. Bob stood for a longtime listening with his hood over his head and heckling a few times. We had a great day and he later wrote a song about it, called "T.V. Talkin' Song."

The Petri Dish for Ideas

In 1966 researchers at San Francisco State College published the results of a pilot study into how psychedelic drugs might impact creativity. (Yes, they really did.) They tested the effects of LSD-25 and mescaline on 27 professionally employed males⁶⁶. Tentative findings led them to conclude that, “Psychedelic agents seem to facilitate creative problem-solving, particularly in the ‘illumination phase.’ The results also suggest that various degrees of increased creative ability may continue for at least some weeks subsequent to a psychedelic problem-solving session.” Based upon what the subjects in the study said about their experiences with the drugs, the researchers believe that certain aspects of the psychedelic experience support creativity, key among them being a heightened ability for visual imagery and fantasy. Other studies since have also looked at the relationship between drugs like LSD and creativity⁶⁷.

Language processing occurs in the sensible, analytical left half of the brain whereas visualizing is done in its more creative right-sided counterpart, so it stands to reason that creativity benefits from the use of our visual skills and when

⁶⁶ “Psychedelic Agents in Creative Problem-Solving: a Pilot Study” – Willis W. Harman, Robert H. McKim, Robert E. Mogar, James Fadiman, Myron J. Stolaroff in *Psychological Reports*, 1966, 19, 211-227. ã Southern Universities Press 1966, Monograph Supplement 2-V19

⁶⁷ We liked “A psychobiographical analysis of Brian Douglas Wilson: Creativity, drugs, and models of schizophrenic and affective disorders” – by Stefano Belli in *Personality and Individual Differences*, Volume 46, Issue 8, June 2009, Pages 809-819.

we want to put the ideas into words we can get a little help from little old leftie. Many studies, (most of which ones in fact don't even involve the use of banned substances) have shown the important role that imagery plays in creativity. One, called *Sketching and Creative Discovery*⁶⁸, tried to determine how sketching helped designers work through ideas in the very early phases of the design process. The researchers wanted to know what it is about sketching out ideas that overcomes the limitations of other mental processes, such as relying on words. People were presented with a series of visual problems involving shapes to solve and either forbidden to sketch to help solve them, or allowed to if and when they felt the urge. The researchers found that a process essential to the creative process, one that is helped by sketching, is the *restructuring* of knowledge to discover new information. For instance, if you're shown this figure:

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Afterwards, you are likely to remember it as two overlapping triangles:

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

⁶⁸ "Sketching and creative discovery" - IM Verstijnen, C van Leeuwen, G Goldschmidt, R Hamel, JM Hennessey in *Design Studies, Volume 19, Issue 4, October 1998, Pages 519-546*

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And because your mind has already seen it one way, if not allowed to sketch you will have more difficulty recognizing it as the combination of other shapes:

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

or...

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

or even...

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

To Leonardo da Vinci the ability to think was inseparable from the ability to visualize. The eye was an instrument of thought. Here's a simple and legal technique for using your visual powers to think through a problem. Find a comfortable chair in quiet space, kick off your shoes, remove your hat and loosen your tie. Take a large pad of paper and a bunch of pens and pencils and sit down. That's it, now just relax. Clear your mind of the stuff you need to do (...did you tell Bob the meeting was cancelled? Don't worry about it, he'll be fine. And that big presentation you need to write, the one for the board? Just forget about it, not doing it will save some paper...) and start to think about the creative problem you need to solve. On the left half of the page start to sketch out a picture of what things are like now, not a detailed diagram, just the basic

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

elements that convey your thoughts about the situation. You can add in some simple labels to make it clearer if you want, but this is for you not for anyone else so if they don't get it, that's their problem, they shouldn't be looking anyway.

Now on the right hand half of the page, sketch out how you want things to be. What is your vision for success? Where do you want this to end up? There need to be some big differences between what you drew on the left and what you're going to draw on the right side of the page and you can even exaggerate to make the point. If *solving the traffic congestion in LA* were the problem, for instance, to highlight the differences between what the traffic situation is now and what we'd like it be like we might draw the exact opposite of what the current of jams and snarl-ups. Perhaps we would sketch a vision in which there are absolutely no cars on the roads, or there are no roads at all, just green fields, parks a trees. Ah...that feels nice.

Don't scrimp on the picture. Take time with the details of so it as vivid as it can be. Make it so you can actually picture yourself in that boat on the river, and so you can almost taste the orangey-ness of the nearby tangerine trees and marmalade skies. Now, having sketched out the before and after, the current situation and your vision for success, ask yourself (out loud if you want): "What are the barriers between how things are and how I want them to be?" Perhaps you see one barrier as the design of your product, or maybe not enough people

know how amazing your services are, or a lack of communication between departments means initiatives don't get followed through properly?

Whatever the barriers are, find ways to represent them through your sketches and add them into the drawing in a different colored pen (yeah, that purple is a good shade, try that one). Again, it's a good idea to label what you've drawn. And finally, in another colour (not that turquoise, it'll clash horribly with the line green you used earlier), sketch ideas for ways to break down the barriers.

But first take a breather. The right side of your brain needs time to come up with ideas sparked by what you have in your sketch. Stand up. Stretch. Sponge the marker pen stain off your shirt. Touch your toes. Lick your nose. Lick someone else's nose. Give yourself a while to absorb all the information you've laid out on your big piece of paper. You see before you, in glorious Technicolor, the problem, the vision, and barriers to getting there and you'll find that as you stare at it you'll start to come up with ways to draw potential solutions to break down the barriers, ones that if you'd just tried to write it all down you'd never have seen. By not relying on words you have freed up the visual power of your brain.

Now show it to your boss or partner or neighbour. Don't say anything, just hand it over with a smug "Aren't I the clever one?" smile on your face and walk out humming to yourself. Actually, on second thoughts, don't do that, you might not

exactly get the reaction you'd hoped for. The sketch is for you and you alone. Later, if there's some good stuff in there you might want to adapt the sketch into a simple diagram - that's always a good way to explain something – but for now use it as a way to capture some ideas. Pin the sketch somewhere you can see so each time you go past you can add something or make a note on it and it can become a Petri dish for new ideas.

SIDEBAR

A method I have found very useful to create something from nothing is this. I start by taking a photograph, usually of a very interesting woman if any are available. But if not then it can be of anything - an empty room, a book cabinet - it doesn't really matter. What matters you have frozen a moment in time. Now, I look at that picture and give it a title. For instance, last week I took a photo on the staircase of an actress called Natalie Mendoza. We stared at the picture for a while, giving it possible titles like for a movie poster. I came up with "If Looks Could Kill" then we talked about what that could mean. Such as, someone could be so beautiful that it ruined their life, or it could mean literally that someone has so much pent-up anger that they can't hide the hate.

So that started a song:

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

I was looking for life's sweet caress

But to be with you was to be alone

I dove in a lake of emptiness

Felt my heart sink like a stone

I watched my face become a mask

A prisoner without a crime

If Looks Could Kill then you've got the skill

I must have died a thousand times

Then a short film script. It could be about a woman (played by Natalie) who had been so frozen that she actually forgot who she was. One day she wakes up and doesn't recognize a thing, only that she has been tied and bound inside her own mind, which we see in the film. She spends days struggling to break free and when she escapes and opens a door it's into the blinding sunlight. And as she steps outside we realize it's from a Hollywood Movie set trailer where she is met by her assistant, make-up lady and Assistant Director. They walk her to the set, which is all totally unreal to her, but slowly through the movie and the tiny bubble of the movie-making world she realizes who she really is!!!! Crazy all back to frontin other words 'Reality is an Illusion' that occurs due to a lack of scripts!!!!

And now from the same photo shoot we have a song a film treatment and from another photo I took that day Natalie we came up with name “Butterfly” as a slightly weird sexy manga character that we are now developing as an application for a mobile phone.

Another project I’ve been working on started life as a little game inside a mobile phone, this time for a very talented and gorgeous singer I found called Cindy Lopez. This is the very first time an artists has debuted inside a video game. And one of the songs in that game is called ‘Street Dancing.’ So then I started working on an idea for a film called ‘Street Dancing,’ about a boy in India who finds and plays with the game on the phone and he starts really wanting to be a dancer, though his father would like him to work in an electronics shop and he ends up entering a competition called ‘Street Dancing.’ It could also be a TV format. All of things line up, like the stars, and you realize that from this song idea inside a mobile dancing game, it can end up in feature film, in a TV show, or even as a fashion brand.

Now you are thinking: “God, what kind of job does Dave have just taking pictures of beautiful women and dreaming up ideas about how to have more fun with a song or a film or a gadget.” Well, you are absolutely right! It’s what I chose to do, but the amount of work that then goes into executing the song, or 3-D game, or

whatever it is we are doing, makes it the difference between larking about and running a creative company.

If I was running a company that made tennis balls and had a marketing meeting I would still use this method of taking a picture of a beautiful woman then staring at it and say to myself, "Now how does that picture relate to balls?" No seriously. I would give it a title relating to my business like "forty love" or "game set and match," then I'd put a web address on the photo then when people went there It would be a humorous spoof dating site all based around tennis in which the same girl in the photo invites you to join the club. Once inside there'd be a virtual world and you can chat to our girl, but just when things get steamy the screen fills up with tennis balls and you have to give your email to become a member. Blah, blah, blah. I'm not saying this is a good idea, I'm just saying how the idea can come about through visualization.

Collaging

As we said earlier many challenges are best tackled creatively by first being pulling them apart tinkering around with each piece (whether cherries, or fish bones or band members), before putting them back together again. A technique sometimes called *collaging* involves conducting a brainstorm with a mix of folks of all shapes and sizes to sketch out the different parts of a problem, and then putting the individual sketches together as a collage. The group can then use the collage as a way to spark new ideas. Here's how.

Split up the problem into as many components as there are people in the brainstorm group (somewhere between four and eight is usually a good number, but it depends on how many comfortable chairs you have available) and get them each to start doing a detailed sketch as a way to solve their bit of the problem. Take traffic congestion in LA as an example. Say there are seven people in the group, we could pretty easily split the problem into seven different smaller problems. Let's call them our seven *problemettes*:

1. Too many cars
2. People driving alone
3. No good alternative transport
4. The need to travel to get to work
5. People in LA love cars

6. Too few major roads
7. Accidents on roads causing delays

The choice of seven of them was purely random. It could have been four, five, six eight, or whatever number, and so long as we've got the main components of the problem down we're okay, you'll find that you will cut according to your cloth. To expand on the analogy (see the section on metaphors coming up), if you haven't got much cloth available you will end up with a smaller suit, perhaps with shorts rather than trousers and sleeves that only come down to your elbows. If you've got yards of the stuff, it you could make a suit where you can wear stilts and the trouser legs still reach the ground. We know that doesn't make sense, but we liked the metaphor anyway, the point being so long as you have a handful of people in the brainstorm there are ways to split up the problem so each of them has a piece of it to tackle.

Now, as an example of how this works, at random let's take one of the traffic problemettes. We're going to take number two and as a solution to the bit about people driving alone we make a sketch of lots of people sharing the same car (they'd probably be laughing, slapping one another on the backs, making rabbit ears and sharing snacks, but who knows for sure). When each of the brainstormers has done their sketch for their assigned problemette they can show it to the rest of group. The others should throw in their comments (no

heckling please) and their ideas for how to improve what's been drawn, making sure it's done in the spirit of positive collaboration. Then once the sketches are combined into a collage the resulting picture will hopefully represent some great thinking by the group, delivered in a fresh visual way and it might even trigger some wonderful new ideas.

SIDEBAR

Here is what's know as a "mind map" for Coco De Mer, the 'Erotic Emporiums' I created with Anita and Gordon Roddick's two daughters, Sam and Justine. The four of us sat down to draw it with John Kao, the innovation expert and business strategist who wrote the brilliant Harvard Business book "Jamming."

Put in Coco De Mer mind map.

It's Like a...Well, it's Like a Simile

The researchers at San Francisco State College who decades ago experimented with psychedelic agents like LSD and mescaline and their effects on creativity, found one reason subjects in the study gave for their perceived improvement was the their enhanced ability to play spontaneously with hypotheses, metaphors, paradox, transformations and relationships.

Making comparisons between concepts can help highlight their similarities and differences and spark ideas that might be of help. A product might share similar features with something from nature for instance - a camera is like an eye and an umbrella is like a canopy of leaves - or a problem might be compared to another situation that has a number of similarities even though in a completely unrelated area. The stronger the visual imagery involved in the simile, the richer the comparisons will be.

NASA was trying to design a satellite tethered to a space station by a 60-mile long length of wire⁶⁹ but found when they tried to reel it in it started swinging out in ever increasing arcs, which meant it took way too long and put a lot of stress on the wire. By seeing that the satellite tethered to a space station was similar to a person holding a yo-yo on a string, and understanding how the winding power created by the spin of the yo-yo pulls it back in they were able to come up with a better solution for pulling the satellite back in. Rather than the space station winding in the satellite, a small motor on the satellite would pull itself into the space station and so cutting out the wild swinging movements. We're convinced NASA are now practicing other yo-yo tricks, such as walking the dog, with their satellites.

⁶⁹ ⁶⁹ 'Improving the creativity of organizational work groups' by Leigh Thompson in *Academy of Management Executive*, 2003, Vol. 17, No. 1.

Or, as another example of how a simile can spark creative solution, take the invention of the tasty curvy crisps, Pringles™. These wavy wonders were developed as a result of a quest to find a way to package crisps in a more efficient way. When packed loosely in bags, regular crisps take up a lot of room but when packed in smaller bags they break up and crumble. Thinking about the similarities between crisps and leaves helped the smarty-pants at manufacturer, Procter and Gamble, to find a solution. The researchers thought about how dry leaves break apart easily, while moist ones do not. If leaves are pressed together when moist and then allowed to dry out, there are no gaps between them and so can be packed tightly together without breaking. Bingo. So that's what they tried. Organic chemist, Fredrick J. Bauer, developed a foil-lined tube with a resealable plastic lid in which to pack the Pringles and this allowed the to be packed in tightly together so they would break when moved around. Incidentally the cremated remains of Mr. Bauer, who died in 2008, are buried in a Pringles™ container.⁷⁰ Not on sale in any shop near you.

To use similes to tackle creative problems, start by phrasing the creative problem as the object of a sentence:

“Traffic congestion in LA...”

⁷⁰ It's true. This from *The Guardian* newspaper on June 2nd, 2008: “The man who designed the Pringles potato crisp packaging system was so proud of his accomplishment that a portion of his ashes has been buried in one of the tall, circular cans.”

Then add a simile to:

“Traffic congestion in LA is like a patient with clogged arteries.”⁷¹

Now we have a new way of looking at the problem, one we can visualize. And we can start to ponder what sort of cures there might be for people with heart disease, such as surgery and a healthier diet. Heart surgery involves removing blockages or putting in a new bypass, which are also solutions for the problem of traffic congestion and a healthier diet helps prevent the arteries become clogged in the first place. Which for traffic might suggest looking at ways for reducing the number of accidents that cause road blockages and reducing the number of cars on the roads.

We can also look at things that are dissimilar between a situation and the creative problem we’re trying to solve. For instance: “Traffic congestion in LA is really unlike a mountain stream.” Some of the ways traffic congestion is different from a mountain stream are that traffic is neither clean, nor fast, nor peaceful. And to make it more similar to a stream we would use cleaner cars, keep the flow

⁷¹ It reminds of us of a Monty Python sketch in which courtesans use similes to fling insults. James McNeil Whistler (John Cleese) tells the Prince of Wales (Terry Jones) “Your majesty is like a stream of bat’s piss,” and when the Prince looks insulted claims it was George Bernard Shaw (Michael Palin) who had said it originally. Shaw denies it and then tries to explain the insult by saying what he meant by it was that “you shine out like a shaft of gold when all around is dark,” which the Prince finds most charming.

of traffic moving and introduce noise dampening around the roads. Also as mountain stream flows in just one direction we might consider one-way roads as a solution.

With a powerful visual simile like this we can picture what this new situation would look like, by lighting our briar pipes and imagining sitting next to that mountain stream and how it makes us feel. Maybe we can even draw a picture of the scene or find one on Google images and then start to think through how we might capture that same feeling of peace and calm for the problem we're trying to solve? Now, put the pipe out and read on.

Metaphorically Speaking

Metaphors, like similes, when used well help us understand by conjuring up images of other things that bear some resemblance to it or the situation. And those images can then be used to spark ideas that might help solve it.

The last film Peter Sellers made, "Being There," is rife with them. Sellers plays Chance, a simple-minded gardener who has spent his whole life tending the garden of "The Old Man." Chance has had no education and apart from television and has no experience of the outside world. When The Old Man dies, Chance is told to leave the house and, after being knocked over on the street by

a car owned by a wealthy women she, fearing a lawsuit, takes him to her estate to be tended to by her private doctor. Neither she nor her powerful husband realizes that “Chauncey Gardner” (the name they thought they heard when he introduced himself as “Chance, the gardener”) is just a simpleton and instead think that he has great wisdom, a wisdom that he delivers through metaphors (“Spring-time is for planting”). Chance meets the President, who is enchanted by the insights the metaphors seem to contain. Here’s a conversation between the two:

President ‘Bobby’: “Mr. Gardner, do you agree with Ben, or do you think that we can stimulate growth through temporary incentives?”

[Long pause]

Chance the Gardener: “As long as the roots are not severed, all is well. And all will be well in the garden.”

President ‘Bobby’: “In the garden.”

Chance the Gardener: “Yes. In the garden, growth has it seasons. First comes spring and summer, but then we have fall and winter. And then we get spring and summer again.”

President ‘Bobby’: “Spring and summer.”

Chance the Gardener: “Yes.”

President ‘Bobby’: “Then fall and winter.”

Chance the Gardener: “Yes.”

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

Another character, Benjamin Rand, a confident of the President: “I think what our insightful young friend is saying is that we welcome the inevitable seasons of nature, but we're upset by the seasons of our economy.”

Chance the Gardener: “Yes! There will be growth in the spring!”

Benjamin Rand: “Hmm!”

Chance the Gardener: “Hmm!”

President ‘Bobby’: “Hm. Well, Mr. Gardner, I must admit that is one of the most refreshing and optimistic statements I've heard in a very, very long time.”

[Benjamin Rand applauds]

President ‘Bobby’: “I admire your good, solid sense. That's precisely what we lack on Capitol Hill.”

Maybe inspired by Sellers in “Being There, Alan Heeks, an ex Procter & Gamble employee, takes people to the his 70-acre Village Forest organic farm in Dorset to help them see them parallels between it and their business challenges. And we're not just talking pig shit here. His metaphors are about harvesting for future development, recycling, fertility and sustainability and the soil represents a company's staff.”⁷²

Here's technique to use metaphors in creative problem solving. First we write up the creative challenge in the form of a simple question that has a subject, an

⁷² ‘Improving the creativity of organizational work groups’ by Leigh Thompson in *Academy of Management Executive*, 2003, Vol. 17, No. 1.

action and an object. For instance, we can write our traffic congestion in LA problem as: “How can people in LA spend less time in their cars?” where the “People in LA” part is the subject of the sentence, “spend less time” is the action and “in their cars” is the object. One of the three parts of the question is what’s called an “essential element,” and is the one thing that we should keep unchanged, while the other two elements will be replaced by alternatives in order to create a metaphor. For our problem, the most essential element would seem to be “spend less time” because our main goal is to make journeys shorter (although this is based on an assumption that we will have explored before settling on a description of the problem).

Now we replace the other two elements to create metaphors that might help us see the problem in a new light. So, as an example, let’s explore *baking* as a metaphor for travel and traffic and instead of writing the problem as “How do people in LA spend less time in their cars?” write it as a metaphor like “How do bakers spend less time making bread?” Now let’s picture the baker and his bread-making endeavors. Draw a sketch of what he does and use it to spark ideas for how he might spend less time doing it. For instance, the baker might consider:

- Making bigger batches of bread
- Selling less bread
- Making bigger loaves

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

- Outsourcing the baking to someone else
- Bringing in an assistant or two
- Closing the bakery altogether

We can treat these solutions to the baking problem as metaphors to our traffic problem and see whether some of them might be of some help. The idea of making bigger batches of bread could spark a train of thought for traffic congestion in LA around encouraging people to travel in bigger groups, such as in buses or car pools. Or the idea of closing the bakery might make us think about closing some roads to force people to travel less. Perhaps they can earn their bread without going to the office so much.

SIDEBAR

Any re-working of language (what I call 'Pasta Talk' because it's the stuff idea spaghetti is made of) is good for the brain, as you have to think in parallel. A good exercise is telling a story in mechanic speak - like, "I was trying to wrench myself out of the situation before I blew a gasket," signed 'Full Throttle.'

This is not a business solution, but when you get good at it you can apply that way of thinking to solve a business problem. In other words simplify it, a bit like Chauncey Gardener did. Jazz players have a language, a kind of slang. All musicians have it. Weird things like, "don't drag the donkey." Actually I just made that up, but it's a good way of describing a situation where you've bought or hired a pony to carry your workload and now you seem to be carrying his.

Move One Space Forward to the Next Chapter...or Roll the Dice

Pictures, whether actual sketches or verbal ones - similes and metaphors - can free up our minds to think more creatively. In the next chapter we look at how to creatively collaborate with others to build our, and their, ideas.

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

BOARD GAME: BRAIN FLASH



The board: 36 squares, each containing a different visual stimulus that will spark new ideas.

The background could be of candy, possibly of pills using a picture Dave took of pills made by Damien Hirst

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How it works: Visual stimuli help in the generation of new ideas by tapping directly into the right side of the brain where creative processing takes place without being inhibited by the left side, the one that uses language to process thought. So if we take a problem and ask the brain to find connections between it and a visual stimulus we will potentially end up with some great insights and ideas that we might not have otherwise discovered.

How to play: Players decide on a problem they want to solve and then throw the dice to tell them which visual stimulus on the board they should use to spark ideas to help solve it. Player will describe their problem as simile to give them a new way of viewing it and come up with as many ideas as possible some ideas to solve it. For example, if the problem chosen by the players is to “improve customer service” and a player throws a three and a two, that square might show a picture of an acrobat. The player should now describe the problem as “customer service is like a juggling skittles because it means being quick and agile.” Then players will come up with ideas for ways to ensure staff can help customers very quickly such as giving them incentives based on speed of response. The image of the juggling skittle could have lead to a different simile, one about how “great customer service depends on having amazing co-ordination between departments,” in which case players would come up with

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

ideas to improve coordination. In each case a throw of a die will tell players how many solutions they should come up with for each version of the simile.

The pictures: some juggling skittles; a tree; the moon; sausages; a pair of frilly knickers; a telescope; a farm; a snake; a flower; a hot air balloon; a submarine; a rocking chair; a volcano; a kitchen knife; a helter skelter; a seashell; a megaphone; a penguin; a wedding cake; a rocket; a heart; a dolphin; a rope; a jewel; a gun; a candle; a gymnasium; a birdcage; a swing; book; a river; a window; a train; the desert; a waterfall.

CHAPTER 7: THE IDEA COMMUNE

Working (and playing) with others to come up with ideas.

Coming up with ideas can be a lonely occupation. Many creative geniuses are solitary figures driven by a self-belief and passion that leaves them isolated and cut off from the outside world. Many end up not washing for days, eating cat food and withdrawing from society (Dave's wife is always telling him his trousers are on back-to-front or that he has nothing on). We salute them, but move away from them on the bus, and embrace a different way of doing things. We like to share. For us trying to come up with ideas in a vacuum just won't cut it. We need the advice and support of others to encourage us when we're moving in the right direction and a bit of course-correction when we're not. We like to steal their ideas and make them better and, begrudgingly, allow them to try and improve upon our own creations.

Communes are happy places where everyone pulls together with a common goal in mind, whether it's growing vegetables or sleeping with one another. The traditional creative process can, unlike the free and easy spirit of communes, be very competitive with each person trying to hold onto and own his or her idea at the expense of any others. Where's the harmony in that? Actually a bit of healthy competition can sometimes help - people like to be recognized by their peers and rewarded for the things they create - but sometimes you just have to just chill and

get into the communal spirit of sharing and collaborating for the common good. (We shouldn't mention that Charles Manson, who with some of his followers in 1969 slaughtered seven people at the home of actress Sharon Tate, ran a commune on a Spahn Ranch. Manson, by the way, was a aspiring songwriter and according to musician Neil Young, who knew Manson, a record company executive had told Neil, "This guy, you know, he's good. He's just a little out of control."⁷³)

Here's a way to create as one big happy family. When you've clearly defined the challenge you're trying to meet creatively gather your brethren around you and ask each one to write down ideas on cards and, here's the sharing bit, put them in the middle of the table. They can write as many as they want given in the set time (but, hey who needs watches?). Then others can pull from the idea pool and add to them and build on them. The resulting ideas are a shared experience, and it's beautiful and, well, just...wow.

Here's another. Remember that game *Chinese Whispers*? (it's called *Telephone* in the U.S., probably because the quality if the lines is so crap there), a game based on old stereotype that Chinese is incomprehensible (the French version is called Arab Phone, or Le téléphone arabe, for the same reason). You whisper a phrase to the next person who whispers it to the next, and so on until it comes

⁷³ "Peace, Love and Charlie Manson" – Anthony DeCurtis in *the New York Times*, August 1, 2009.

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back to you. By the time it arrives in your ear the phrase is likely to bear no resemblance to how it started. “The girl with the red hair is wearing a custard colored dress” has become “ A large meteor has just landed on my caravan” or something. Anyway, you can do the same with ideas. Start with something and then pass it on to see where it leads. You don’t have to whisper it though, you can write it or draw it.

Try it with a small group of people. You’ll need some large pieces of paper and colored pens. Each person grabs a piece of paper and a different colored pen and spends no more than five minutes sketching an idea to solve the agreed problem. Participants should label parts of their sketch if it will help other people understand it, and then pass the finished sketch to the person to their right. They spend another few minutes adding to the sketch they have been given while you work on the one passed to you by the person on your left. And so on until the sketches come back to the people who started them. The greater the number of people in the group, the bigger and more colorful the sketches will become.

At the end of the session you’ll have a bunch of sketches that you can talk through as a group. Take one complete sketch at a time and ask the originator to explain the initial idea and others can explain how they added to it to create the final result.

SIDEBAR

It's interesting to get a group of creative people together, often from very different backgrounds when what they do isn't connected. Mahler's wife used to hold these dinners in Vienna to which she'd invite an architect, a composer and a writer and gradually Vienna became this creative capital⁷⁴. So many things come from people with completely different skills and mindsets sitting down at a table together and discussing a problem that's not connected to any of their skills and mindsets, but they're looking at it in a completely different way. I sometimes call that a "talent brothel." It's very important for people in business invite in other people in and not always be discussing in their own company where everybody is thinking in the same way and is on the same railroad track. They need to have some of these weird people with weird ideas inside the company at every meeting.

I helped create a place in London called "The Hospital Club" with my friend and Microsoft co-founder, Paul Allen, as a creative members club. We used to joke about it as we are both have slight tendencies to be hypochondriacs so we would say "uh oh now we have a whole hospital," which when Paul bought it was St.

⁷⁴ Mrs. Mahler, or Alma Schindler, as she was christened, was actually a bit of an old slapper, carrying on all sorts of affairs with the artistist community of Vienna. Before marrying Mahler she's had affairs with artist Gustav Klimt, theatre director Max Burckhard and composer Alexander von Zemlinsky. When married to Gustav tshe had an affair with architect Walter Gropius, who later became known for his Bauhaus school (they later married), and after Mahler's death with artist Oskar Kokoschka, then writer Franz Werfel (while still married to second husband Gropius), who she later married.

Paul's hospital and it was such a derelict mess. It had been abandoned for eight years but it still had the most gross and weird stuff left behind which I will spare you from reading about! It's in the heart of Covent Garden and on seven floors. It has a TV Studio, Art Gallery, Recording Studio, Screening Room and Restaurant. But, most importantly, it has about five bars and lot's of room to sit around and talk one to one or have group conversations. The whole place is run really well and has a calendar of events like Creative Currency, Dinners or...blah, blah, blah.

I often wonder why a lot of these giant corporations don't have places like this and why everything has to be so stuffy and uptight its so anti-creative atmosphere. Of course there are some companies like Pixar or Google etc. that realised work and play go good together and have basketball courts and hang out places like cool cafes etc on site and I'm sure it helps everyone exchange ideas freely as opposed to everything is a meeting with people sat around an oblong table Yuck!

Butterfly Nets

Many readers will, and just as many won't, remember from school the story of how penicillin was discovered. In 1928, while researching the flu virus, Dr.

Alexander Fleming (after who phlegm is named⁷⁵) noticed that some mold had contaminated a flu culture in one of his Petri dishes (we're talking the real deal here, not a sketch). But, instead of throwing it away, as most house-proud folks would do, he kept it to examine it more closely.

Fleming had learned the benefits of scientific breakthrough discovered by chance a few years previously when by accident he had shed a tear on a bacteria sample, only to find that the area around the teardrop became free of bacteria. This led him to discover that the tear contained an anti-biotic enzyme that could stave off mild bacterial growth. We don't know why he was crying in the first place, but that's beside the point. Anyway, the mould on the Petri dish of flu culture (did he just get someone to sneeze on the dish or something?) piqued his curiosity and through investigation he found that the mould was lethal to the potent staphylococcus bacteria in his dish. The mould came from the genus penicillin, and the rest is history (as was the bit before). He won the Nobel Prize in 1945. All because he cried like a baby in his lab one day. "But for the previous experience, I would have thrown the plate away, as many bacteriologists had done before," said the great Flemster.

The microwave was also invented by chance (not Chance the Gardener, just chance). When Percy Lebaron Spencer was working on *magnetrons*, a type of

⁷⁵ That's not true at all. It comes from the Middle-English word 'fleume.'

device designed to produce the microwave signals for use in radars, and was standing near a working machine with a bar of chocolate in his pocket (we think he was trying to impress the female researchers in the lab). And, well, it melted. And, *Ping!* the microwave oven was born

All of us come across ideas by chance and we can also create opportunities to make those chances more likely and more fruitful. Good old serendipity. You have to be ready to catch those ideas when they pop into your head. Often they'll seem unrelated to whatever projects you're working on, but you'll be surprised how often they connect at a later date. To stop them floating away you might want to carry around a butterfly net. Well, actually a notebook. Yes, just a regular old-fashioned notebook to jot down notes and ideas. Blank or lined pages, even squared if that's what floats your boat. (Moleskin, made by Modo & Modo of Italy make a lovely range of simple, black covered books just asking to be scribbled in.) Force yourself to write down any thoughts or ideas that you have in your notebook and then regularly look through to see if they spark inspiration for what you're working on.

Notebooks can be used as a means to conduct a group brainstorming over a period of weeks rather than the typical hour or two, letting ideas develop, stew and ferment into a tasty brew. To start with, the problem the group is trying to solve needs to be clearly articulated, maybe written up on the first page of

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notebook so they can refer back to it. Then over the next four weeks the group is asked to each come up with one idea a day to solve the creative problem set. Every few days or so they are given some new piece of relevant information or stimulus to help push their thinking along. At the end of their month the group of notebookers are tasked with writing down the *one* idea they developed that they consider to be the best to solve the problem, together with some suggestions for further exploration. They should also write down ideas they came up with that seem unrelated to the problem as a way to create an *idea bank* for future projects.

A more freeform way to use notebooks is to have regular *idea jams*. This is the freestyle jazz of idea creating. People, whether or not they're all working together on the same project, can gather together once a month to share the ideas they've captured in their notebooks. Put people's names in a hat (if they've got into the contemporary jazz mood a few of them will be wearing hats anyway) to see who starts. The chosen one picks an idea or interesting thought from his or her notebook and explains it to the group. Sometimes there'll be murmurs of appreciation or a smattering of applause, sometimes not. Others throw in their take on the idea and add in relevant thoughts from their books that might help build on it.

Having an idea jam in which the people involved aren't working on a specific

problem, but just capturing and discussing random ideas might seem like a waste of time for a busy business. But we beg to differ. For one, having and sharing ideas just feels good, simple as that, and, for two, idea jams train us to capture and discuss random ideas, and so are a great way to explore and hone our creative abilities. And, three, the ideas discussed might actually lead to something relevant to the business context or even lead to an idea for a valuable subsidiary business. So go with the flow, man. Chill. Oh, and four, IBM have World Jams. IBM held their first in 2001 as three-day web-based moderated group brainstorm. 2006's jam was the biggest brainstorming ever, involving 150,000 people from 104 countries and 67 companies around the world who together posted 46,000 ideas (see our chapter *Kill the Idea* on how to whittle down your ideas). And as a result, apparently, "10 new IBM businesses were launched with seed investment totaling \$100 million⁷⁶." We salute you, big blue.

⁷⁶ From the IBM Jam events page <https://www.collaborationjam.com/>

SIDEBAR

Hi Dave,

Eventually tracked down your email address. I was surprised but delighted that you invited anyone to email you with an issue and this one is probably a corker given the subject matter of my business. I sell a garden mulch called Strulch! Four years later I am trying to think of new ways to promote it. I started by recruiting 'champions' who would recommend it, it has been on garden TV and in the press and sales are growing slowly but surely. There is only me in the business on a daily basis. Any suggestions would be great.

I enjoyed doing the song and you were very different to what I knew about you. It was a great session thank you.

Kind regards

Jackie Whiteley

Strulch Limited

(Silver Award Winner Business Link Bucking The Trend Competition 2009

Yorkshire Woman of Achievement 2009)

Dar Jackie,

How about shooting time-lapse (very speeded up) two-minute film of stuff growing rapidly from nothing to beautiful greens and bright colors? Then add in a very sexy sultry female voice-over voice saying: "What you are witnessing is the magnificent effects of blah blah blah making everything grow and blossom etc..."

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Then the voice changes and says in a very giggly playful voice, “All this because I used Strulch!” You could do this for less than a few hundred pounds on video camera and edit it on a laptop. Just make sure the voice is sexy and warm and rich and recorded really well in a good studio. At the end of the little film drop a bag of Stulch into the shot and include your website info. Put this as any embedded link on every gardening blog in the UK and of course on YouTube etc. with as many tag lines as possible on the theme of sexy, gardens, tools, growth, flowers, etc. It should be sexy & funny and will get the point across with humor and get people talking about it

Cheers

Dave

Building Blocks

There's usually something positive to say about every idea. Try doing this, whenever you hear an idea, start by saying, “What I like about this idea is...” and come up with at least one thing that is good about it. The left side of the brain, the cold analytical half, is often too keen to jump in and start editing and thinking of practicalities before the right side has had a proper chance to do its mojo. So, finding positives first means the left side will have to wait a while, drumming its fingers on the table. It gives the idea a chance to breathe and also makes the person who came up with the idea feel good and willing to share ideas in future.

Ideas can be built up so the positives from each one are combined through a technique known as *successive element integration*⁷⁷, but being simpler folk we're going to call it *building with blocks*. Here's how it works. You start with a bunch of small ideas and add them together to create a more interesting, and developed, bigger idea. Take one idea and add it to a second idea to form a third idea. Then add another idea to the third idea to form a fourth, and so on. For example, to alleviate traffic congestion in LA:

Idea 1 = make all lanes car pool lanes⁷⁸

Idea 2 = build more roads

Add ideas 1 and 2 together to get a third idea:

Idea 3 = build whole roads, not just lanes, for people who car pool.

Take another idea from the bunch, such as:

Idea 4 = improve public transport

And add this one to Idea 3, to make a new idea:

Idea 5 = charge people who don't car pool and use the money to fund better public transport

⁷⁷ http://www.mycoted.com/Successive_Element_Integration

⁷⁸ Traffic lanes for vehicles carrying two or more passengers

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OK, now the stack of blocks is getting pretty high, but let's see if we can add one more from the pile before it topples over.

Idea 6 = ask businesses to incentivize employees to car pool

And add this to the previous idea:

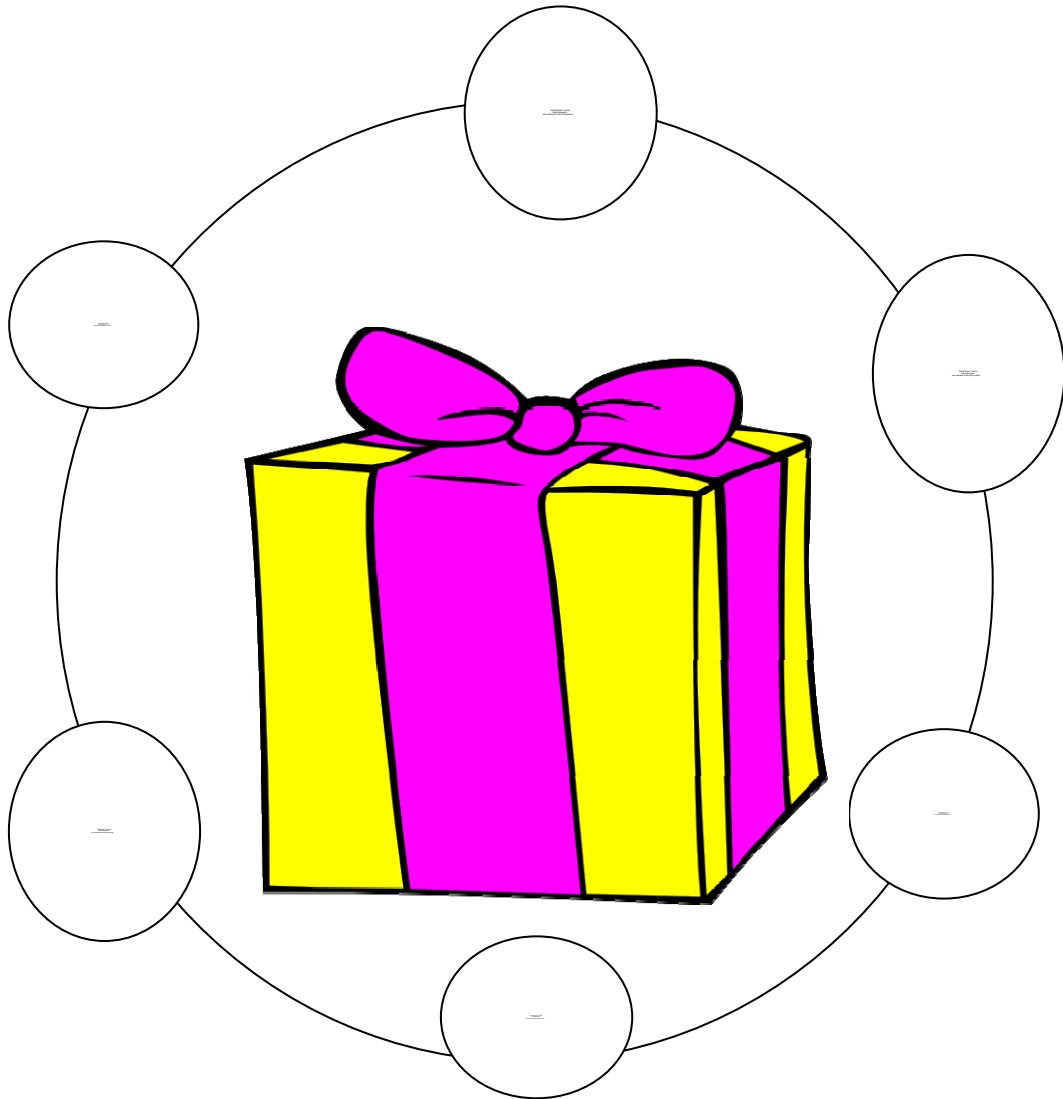
Idea 7 = suggest businesses put on luxury mini buses for employees to travel to work that have wi-fi and coffee so they can start work before they even get to the office.

This last idea ended up being an idea that combined the best bits of lots of ideas such as how to encourage carpooling and the role businesses can play. We might have got to the same solution in other ways, but by accepting that each idea plays some role it means it is a collaborative process that all participants will feel ownership in. Time for a group hug.

Move One Space Forward to the Next Chapter...or Roll the Dice

Now we've talked about the benefits of a bit of collaboration to create and build ideas, lets take a look ways to expand the possibilities of our thinking, far, far out...

BOARD GAME: ALL TOGETHER NOW



The board: A series of the characters sitting in a circle.

How it works: In the traditional British game of Pass the Parcel children sit in a circle and, while music is playing, pass a present wrapped in many layers of paper from one to the other until, when the music is stopped whoever is holding

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the parcel can remove a layer of the paper. The child who unwraps the final layer gets to keep the present. Our version is a little different in that as the parcel is passed around we add layers rather than take them away. The parcel represents a germ of an idea and each layer of paper the additions to the idea that can build it into something quite special. After all, the best big ideas are usually the result of adding to smaller ideas. The technique of adding to and building upon ideas can be used by individuals working on their own or in a group setting as part of a brainstorm.

How to play in groups: Players start by writing down on cards (see below) ideas for a pre-agreed problem and then take turns reading their ideas out to the others. Players cross out on their lists any ideas that are the same as the ones presented, and add to their list new ideas that were been triggered by hearing the other people's ideas. This goes on over three rounds until each person has presented his or her list of new ideas that no one else has mentioned.

PASS THE PARCEL	
<u>Unique ideas</u>	<u>Points</u>
Round 1	
Round 2	
Round 3	

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In round 1 players write down ideas for solutions to the problem posed. After 5 minutes they read out their lists one by one. Players get a point for every idea they have on their list that no one else has thought of.

In round 2 players use the ideas they've heard in round 1 to think of new ideas, then after 3 minutes they again read out their lists and points are awarded for every unique idea.

Finally, in round 3 players write down more ideas that have been triggered, and this time have just 2 minutes to do it with points awarded to ideas that no-one else came up with.

How to win: The player with the most number of unique ideas at the end of three rounds! The ideas that aren't unique might be useful so shouldn't be discarded, but the points system ensures that players are motivated to think of original ideas that might not be too obvious.

CHAPTER 8: FAR OUT

How the illogical can result in creative brilliance.

In Victorian parlour game *Consequences*, players each create a part of a story that on its own might be very logical and make absolute sense but when joined together is quite extraordinary. Writers, artists, musicians, and anarchists have over the years used this idea in one form or another to create something unexpected and often brilliant.

For instance, in the late 1950's and early 1960's novelist and key driver in the Beat Generation William S. Burroughs⁷⁹ developed a method of creative writing called the *cut-up technique*, in which text is cut up into smaller pieces and rearranged randomly. Burroughs said that T.S. Elliott's 434-line poem *The Waste Land* (1922) is an example of its use. David Bowie has said how in the early seventies he sometimes used Burrough's cut-up method to write some of his songs. In an article for the *Daily Mail* Bowie wrote⁸⁰ how created *Sweet Thing/Candidate/Sweet Thing*: "You write down a paragraph or two describing several different subjects creating a kind of story ingredients-list, I suppose, and then cut the sentences into four or five-word sections; mix 'em up and reconnect them. You can get some pretty interesting idea combinations like this. You can

⁷⁹ His work includes *Naked Lunch*, and Burrough's was fictionalized in Jack Kerouac's *On The Road*.

⁸⁰ "DAVID BOWIE: I went to buy some shoes - and I came back with Life On Mars+ - David Bowie in *the Daily Mail*, June 28, 2008.

use them as is or, if you have a craven need to not lose control, bounce off these ideas and write whole new sections.” Kurt Cobain experimented with the cut-up technique and Thom Yorke, of *Radiohead*, used it when writing the band's *Kid A* album, by writing single lines of lyrics, putting them in a hat and drawing them out randomly to make a song. In comic book series *Watchmen*⁸¹ ex-superhero Ozymandias watches shows on tons of TV sets at the same time to allow “subliminal glimpses of the future to leak through.”

In *Recipes for Disaster: An Anarchist Cookbook*, a 624-page manual - described by the editors as “a tactical handbook for revolutionary action⁸²” – was written collectively over three years and released in 2004. One of the 62 chapters (or “recipes”) is called *Behavioral Cut-Ups*, and involves connecting two unrelated socially-acceptable behaviors, such as public speaking and public transport, to create something new such as making a speech on a bus.

⁸¹ Created by Alan Moore, Dave Gibbons and John Higgins and published by DC Comics in 1986 and 1987. A film version, directed by Zack Snyder, was released in March 2009.

⁸² CrimethInc. Ex-Workers’s Collective on <http://www.webcitation.org/5eVytQcos>

It Was HOW Big..?!

This is without doubt the best business book ever written. It'll change your life and solve the world's problems too. Oh, and it's completely edible and nutritious and makes for a very tasty meal.

Exaggeration is a wonderful thing. No, actually, it's the best thing ever, ever, EVER. Dramatization when used as a tool to solve problems creatively can force us to think a little bigger. The thing is, we tend to have mindsets that are in proportion to the size of the problem: if it seems smallish, we'll think small, if it looks BIG, we'll think a little bigger and if a challenge has crisis proportions we'll apply all our creative energies to getting it solved.

Think of how the language around climate change shifted over time from the cutesy and benign "global warming" to the much more dramatic "climate crisis." Al Gore started using the words "climate crisis" because he was told by his advisors that the problem wouldn't be seen as particularly harmful or urgent otherwise (other polls indicated that "crisis" was too dramatic, and that "climate change" might strike the right balance and shake people out of their complacency). In the introduction to his 2006 book *An Inconvenient Truth*⁸³ he states, "The climate crisis is, indeed, extremely dangerous. In fact it is a true

⁸³ *An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and What We Can Do About It* by Al Gore

planetary emergency.” Al Gore wasn’t exaggerating, it really is a crisis, and he understood that until he could get people to understand the scale of the problem through dramatization they would be unwilling to take it seriously enough to change their behavior.

Other experts have used the term “global heating” to communicate the idea that it’s about getting hot, not just warm. Dr. Lovelock, environmental expert and author of the brilliant 2006 book *Revenge of Gaia: Earth’s Climate Crisis and the Fate of Humanity* has said⁸⁴, “Warming is something that’s kind of cozy and comfortable. You think of a nice duvet on a cold winter’s day. Heating is something you want to get away from.” Meanwhile opponents to the idea that mankind is having an adverse effect on the planet’s climate have tried to impose much milder labels. Language expert and Republican party consultant Frank Luntz wrote a memo in 2002 that advised the party to use the term “climate change,” rather than “global warming,” as a way to add to confuse the public about whether there was any consensus in the scientific community on global warming, and so postpone any pressure to something about it. He wrote: “‘Climate change’ is less frightening than ‘global warming.’ As one focus group participant noted, climate change ‘Sounds like you’re going from Pittsburgh to Fort Lauderdale.’ While global warming has catastrophic connotations attached to it, climate change suggests a more controllable and less emotional challenge.”

⁸⁴ “Global Heating, Atmosphere Cancer, Pollution Death. What’s in a Name?”
By Andrew C. Revkin on www.nytimes.com

Before the memo Bush used the term “global warming” frequently in public speeches, but subsequently hardly at all.⁸⁵ Luntz, who since conceded that global warming is real, wrote in his memo, “A compelling story, even if factually inaccurate, can be more emotionally compelling than a dry recitation of the truth.”

Similarly John F. Kennedy knew what he was doing in May 1961 when created a crisis for America by announcing to the nation they must win the space race against the Soviets or lose its place as the world’s dominant nation and, lo just over eight years later on July 20, 1969, America became the first to put men on the moon. He said in a speech to a joint session of Congress: “Recognizing the head start obtained by the Soviets with their large rocket engines, which gives them many months of lead time, and recognizing the likelihood that they will exploit this lead for some time to come in still more impressive successes, we nevertheless are required to make new efforts. For while we cannot guarantee that one day we shall be first, we can guarantee that any failure to make this effort will find us last.”

People tend to think of more innovative solutions when the given a bigger problem to solve. So, when framing a creative challenge try exaggerating the problem to extreme proportions, then come up with dramatic solutions to solve the great big challenge and scale back as needed. It stops your thinking being in

⁸⁵ “Memo exposes Bush's new green strategy” - Oliver Burkeman in *The Guardian*, March 4, 2003

small increments and allows you to dream up big ideas that are very different in nature and scale. This is similar in approach to the “ball gazing” approach used at the start of the innovation cycle to explore what might happen in the future.

With our *too much traffic congestion in LA* problem, an exaggeration of the situation (though not too much of one) would be that cars are absolutely stationary in LA. There is absolute gridlock. People can't get to work. They can't get home. Pregnant women can't get to hospitals. Michael Douglas leaves his car in the middle of the jammed street (oh, sorry that's a movie⁸⁶, but also scarily real and, anyway, you get the idea - nothing is moving.) A solution to this exaggerated scenario might be to quit using cars altogether. It might be impractical, but the notion might free up some ideas for ways to dramatically reducing the number of cars on the roads that otherwise we might not have considered.

By the way, at the other extreme, the flip side is to minimize the problem so actually it doesn't seem like much of a problem at all, and make it very, very tiny. Then the solutions would take more of a positive spin and be about ways to make the most of the situation, not try and radically alter it. Find you're spending a little tiny bit longer in the car than you'd want to? No problem, have some fun while you're there. There could be a radio station dedicated to people in LA traffic

⁸⁶ *Falling Down* (1993)

with local news and gossip, or a series of self-improvement CDs or podcasts in bite sized pieces that turn the delay into a useful experience. Rather than try to radically alter the situation we have now accepted it and made the best of it.

SIDEBAR

June 2009

Dave,

I have asked my father if he could forward you a mail after seeing your amazing performance at the conference. I found it extremely funny, informative and way ahead of its time. The lesbian grandma chocolate advert made me cry I laughed so much.

I have a cafe bar in Leeds called The Roast Café. We are situated on the river, have a good terraced area and relaxed friendly decor (Paul Smith type stripes on doors, herbs in the windows, goldfish, different types of seat covers, burgundy chesterfields and the staff wear Fred Perrys). We are open for breakfast (15% of the business), lunch (45% of the business) and dinner serving British style food (10% of the business); from great bacon butties and Chicken Caesar salads to John Dory with samphire and sundried tomatoes. I have attached our evening menu for you to have a look at. The evening side of the business could deliver us so much more profit if marketed with a difference. We also do outside catering to offices for meetings (30% of the business) and host events at the venue. Breakfast and lunch are very successful, the evenings have proved to be more

difficult despite mentions in Vogue and other good write ups. The evening food is as good as the best restaurants in Leeds.

My question is do you have any ideas how to drive our event business targeting individuals, companies (despite all their budgets being slashed) and party organisers within the Leeds area? If that requires marketing the whole venue in a different way, so that we are more well known then I will give it a go. We have very limited budgets, but would give anything a go. I am well into purple cows and any other things you could come up with. If you could help I would really appreciate it.

Cheers,

Matthew Firth

Roast Cafe

Dear Matthew,

Did you ever hear of "The House of Blues" in USA? They created something called the Gospel Brunch that was totally unique and massive success with Sunday lunchtime queues around the block.

<http://www.houseofblues.com/venues/clubvenues/gospelbrunch.php>

I think if you create a unique event that involves eating and an uplifting thing it will work. Also in USA they have a thing called "a roast" where people get together and honor one person, but they "roast" him or her, all tell stories and send him or her up. Do they do that in UK because that could be a perfect fit!

Dave

Mad World

When trying to come up with creative solutions we need to ignore the most obvious ones, or at least put them to one side with a reassuring “there, there, just wait quietly here” pat on the head. Obvious solutions are likely too similar to what the situation is already like now and won’t take you anywhere meaningful and new.

In fact it’s often a liberating and fruitful experience to think of the most outlandish ideas you possibly can and then work on ways to make them practical. You can make it into a game. Gather together a small group of people and sell them numbered cards for a pound each. Write up the problem on a board or piece of paper and give them ten minutes to write down on their cards the most unlikely solution they can think of for the problem, one idea per card.

Players then look at one another’s cards and add notes to the crazy ideas for ways to make them more practical. A crazy solution for reducing traffic congestion might be to get everyone to fly instead. Another player might add to this idea, as a way to make the original implausible idea plausible, that there

could be short shuttle flights between different local LA airports (e.g. LAX, Burbank, Santa Monica and Long Beach).

Once everyone has had a chance to add their suggestions to the ideas, they each have two votes to give to the two ideas they consider now to be the most implausible. These are the ones for which the additions didn't help bring them back to earth much. The idea with the most votes for being the most implausible wins all the money! In other words, the craziest idea is rewarded not the most practical, so forcing people to think outlandishly. But along the way the ideas that didn't win might have some real potential as practical solutions to the problem. Sneaky, huh.

Now get those obvious ideas out of the corner and send them home.

A variation on this is to split the group into two teams. Each team comes up with an unlikely solution to the problem and the other has to add some suggestions to it to make it more realistic. If a team makes the opposing team's idea more feasible then they get a point (or a doughnut, or whatever) and if not, the doughnut goes to the first team. Fat bastards.

O Superman⁸⁷

⁸⁷ *O Superman (For Massenet)* is an experimental song written by Laurie Anderson in 1981 and is part of the much larger work, *United States*. Anderson married long-time companion Lou Reed in 1981.

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

In the 1978 film, *Superman*, baddie Lex Luther gives Superman two big problems to solve, knowing full well Superman only has time to do one. The first is a nuclear missile heading full tilt to San Andreas Fault that will cause an earthquake in California, the other a missile aimed at Hackensack, New Jersey. Superman opts to save New Jersey, and in the aftershock of the earthquake caused by the California missile Lois Lane's car falls into a crevice, earth falls on top of her and she dies. Not a good Hollywood ending. So Superman will have to bring Lois back to life. What does he do? What anyone one of us would do if we were a superhero, he alters the course of history by spinning the Earth in the opposite direction from its normal course, so reversing the course of time to before when she died and allowing him to save her.

Superheroes, as we all know, have super powers - hence their name. So, what if we could apply those powers to the problem we're trying to solve? Let's get together a group of ordinary mortals and make them into superheroes. They can either pick who they want to be or can be randomly assigned their new roles. Here's our set of superheroes, but you can make up your own.

DirkDiggletron – has the power to make things VERY BIG

Porschedriver – has the power to make things very small

Madoff – has the power to make things (like large amounts of money) disappear

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

The Politician – has the power to s-t-r-e-t-c-h t-h-i-n-g-s

The Telekinesist – has the power to transport things instantly

Duploid – has the power to double things

The Bulk – has incredible strength

Mindbender – has incredible powers of hypnosis

Viagratro - has the power to make things levitate

Maybe use our characters to illustrate these?

People can even be given props to help them to get into character. Now they can apply their superpowers to the problem.

For traffic congestion in LA *The Telekinesist* might use his powers of decide to instantly take all the cars out of the city. How might we do a similar thing in real life, without resorting to superpowers? Maybe not all the cars, but at least some of them. Should we, for instance, only allow certain types of cars on the roads, such as ones with high fuel efficiency?

Duploid might double the number of cars on the road to make the traffic situation in the city so intolerable that it forces commuters to leave their cars at home and think of alternatives. In real life we could find other ways, penalties for instance, to encourage people to rely less on their cars. Or if *Duploid* was feeling more

benign he might double the number of buses so making it easier for people to use public transport and so we might then start thinking of ideas to increase the number of buses in the city.

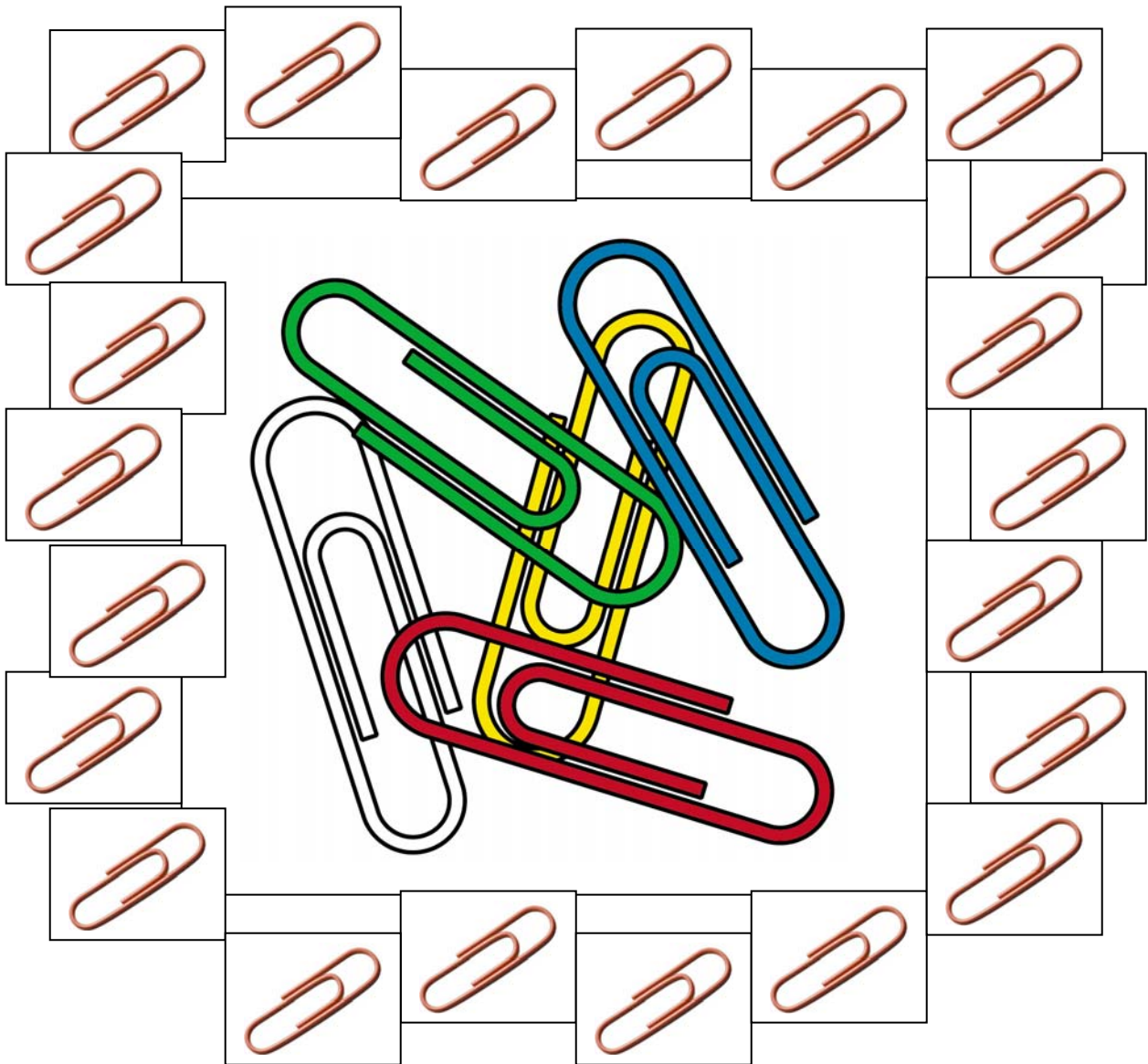
And of course the powerful *Viagratro* could use his powers of levitation to raise cars off the ground leaving those left on roads can travel around more freely. And this idea might get us thinking about how overhead rail systems do a similar thing, like literally raising people off the ground in cars (although those ones stay up for more than a couple of hours.)

Move One Space Forward to the Next Chapter...or Roll the Dice

So, thinking far out can trigger some interesting ideas. Now in the next chapter let's investigate how looking at things from people's different perspectives people, or trying on their shoes, can help.

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

BOARD GAME: FAR OUT



The board: A series of paperclips on games squares around the board.

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

How it works: To be truly useful ideas need be unique. Canadian, Kyle MacDonald, had a pretty unusual idea for how to use a paperclip. He set himself the challenge of seeing what he could get for it by trading-up and, after fourteen trades exactly one year later, he ended up with a house in Kipling, Saskatchewan (and that was *before* the housing market crashed). Kyle told us how he came up with the idea: “I was bored and I remembered a game called Bigger or Better. You start with a small object and trade it for a bigger or better object. Repeat. Usually a kids game. More knocking on doors, less Internet. The red paperclip was the first thing I saw when I thought of the idea.”

He started on July 12, 2005, by advertising the red paperclip on Craigslist.org, saying he wanted something bigger and better for it (we like his honest approach) and was offered a fish-shaped pen (this is Canada, after all). He exchanged the pen for a ceramic knob, and in turn: a camping stove, a generator, a beer keg and Budweiser sign, a snowmobile, a trip to the Canadian Rockies, a supply truck and a recording contract. Next, in April 2006, he got a year's rent in a flat in Phoenix.

Then it gets really weird. He got a lot of publicity, ended up as a bit of celebrity and was contacted by a Hollywood actor, Corbin Bernsen (from TV series *LA Law*). Kyle told us he thinks Corbin might have been bored too and the idea just appealed to him. He then traded his Phoenix flat for an afternoon with Alice

Cooper. Eh? According to Kyle's blog, "Alice Cooper is a gold mine of awesomeness and fun." And he traded that afternoon of fun for a snow globe of the band KISS. Now, it seems actor Bernsen was a collector of snow globes, so wily Kyle used the KISS orb as bait and asked readers of his blog to send more globes to Bernsen in exchange for signed photographs of him, Bernsen and the KISS globe.

Kyle ended up getting a movie role from Bernsen to barter. Publicity hungry Kipling (a town with a population of 1,140, thought to be named after Rudyard) decided that it could benefit from Kyle's quest, so bought an unoccupied house (thought to be worth about \$45,000) and offered it to him in exchange for the movie part. They planned to hold an American Idol type contest to audition for the role. According to Kyle's blog, the town's revised offer to him went something like this:

"Kyle, the Town of Kipling, Saskatchewan wants you to complete your quest for a house. The Mayor and Town Council with the support of the employees and residents of the Town of Kipling have a revised offer for you. We know you will say Yes!

1. As a new resident to our community you will receive a Community Welcome Package containing local information and promotions from local businesses.

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

2. The Kipling Chamber of Commerce will give you \$200 in Kipling Cash. This Cash can be spent at any local Chamber of Commerce business.
 3. You will be given a Key to the Town of Kipling
 4. You will become Honorary Mayor of Kipling for One Day.
 5. You will be named an Honorary Lifelong Citizen of the Town of Kipling
 6. The day we make the trade will be decreed One Red Paperclip Day by our Town Council and everyone will be encouraged to wear a red paperclip in honor of your achievements.
 7. Will build the world's largest red paperclip in dedication to you and your "one red paperclip project."
 8. Most importantly to allow you to complete your quest...We will trade to you a house. The house was built in the 1920's and has been recently renovated. It is located at 503 Main Street Kipling, SK Canada. It is approximately 1100 square feet on two floors. There are three bedrooms, one and a half bathrooms, kitchen, living room and dining room. It has white vinyl siding, a new roof and eaves troughs that have been put on in the last few years. We will be sending you pictures of the house as soon as we have had time to touch up the paint.
- Kyle MacDonald, do you accept our offer of one house in Kipling for one role in Corbin Bernsen's movie 'Donna on Demand'?"

The deal was done on July 12, 2006. The movie 'Donna in Demand' was released in 2008, featuring Kipling resident Nolan Hubbard. Oh, and on Kyle's

website <http://oneredpaperclip.blogspot.com> you can make an offer for the house in Kipling. Kyle wouldn't reveal the things he'd been offered, other than say that a few people had offered him a red paperclip! And what has the experience taught Kyle. He told us: "If you don't take the first step, you'll never go anywhere."

How to play: Kyle MacDonald thought of a quite amazing use for a paperclip – trade it for a house. In this game players create the longest chain of paperclips that they can by coming up with ideas for things to do with a paperclip. On page xxx there is a list of ideas that people given the task will typically come up and players add one paperclip to the chain – by moving a space along the board - for every idea already on the list, but two whole paperclips for every idea not included on the list.

Perhaps we can include some red paperclips in the book as counters and so readers can experiment with them

List of common suggestions for what to do with a paperclip:

- A key-ring
- For push the reset button on electronic gadgets
- Emergency toothpick
- Making snakes
- Linking them together to make a necklace or bracelet
- Voodoo paperclip dolls

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

- Hang cards from a chain of them
- Cleaning fingernails and toenails
- Cleaning ears
- Picking locks
- Magnetize them together to make sculptures
- Clean up the grout between bathroom tiles
- Pop balloons
- Prop open the mouth of baby crocodiles
- Cheese and pineapple sticks
- Tiny chopsticks
- Replacement fuse
- Hair clip
- Buying a house (see above)
- Do-it-yourself ear piercing
- Hang decorations or Christmas ornaments
- Curtain hooks
- Fake specs for stuffed animals
- Replacement zipper puller
- A bookmark
- An emergency wedding ring
- Unblocking plug holes

CHAPTER 9: SHOE SWAPPER

Looking at problems from different perspectives.

Inexpert Witnesses

On June 20th in 1913 *The New York Times* described how William Marconi, inventor of the radio, sat in court enrapt by the testimony of an expert witness in a law suit that his Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company of America had brought against the National Electric Signaling Company of Pittsburg. Marconi sat next his attractive-looking young wife and, according to The New York Times piece, “Both listened attentively to every word spoken by Frank L. Waterman, an experts in patents and regarded as an authority on matters relating to wireless telegraphy.”

A lot hung on what Waterman was saying. At issue was whether the Pittsburg dudes had infringed wireless technology patents Marconi had filed in 1896 and were making money from his ideas. Waterman, supporting Marconi’s claim that he and he alone should have claim to sole use of the patent rights, said in his testimony that Marconi had not only made wireless practicable but also made it a commercial reality. The hot Mrs. Marconi told reporters, “I think he will win, and I think he ought to. I believe that a man who obtains a patent on his ideas is the man who deserves all the credit for what those ideas have accomplished rather

than a person who improves on the patent.” She was right and Marconi won, proving Mr. Waterman’s value as an expert witness.⁸⁸

Expert witnesses like Frank Waterman are brought in to offer advice in court cases because there is a need for the specialized knowledge they possess. Their knowledge of the subject matter enlightens the judge and jury, enabling them to form a more complete and accurate opinion of a subject that is relevant to the case. We don’t know how much Frank was paid for his expertise, but nowadays good ones can make thousands of dollars for their time and knowledge. (According to one study of the matter, the average hourly rate is \$300 although, perhaps bizarrely, the less experienced experts tend to charge more than experienced ones⁸⁹.)

We are all expert witnesses to some extent. Not that we’ll be necessarily called to testify or get a high fee for our expertise. But we all have specialized knowledge in some area or another, expertise that can be a very useful in the way it helps us define the creative challenge, filter our ideas and implement the

⁸⁸ But, wrong in the long term. After years of legal battles in 1943 the U.S Supreme Court overturned most of Marconi’s patents. It should be noted that at the time the U.S. Government was involved in its own patent dispute with Marconi, leading some observers to suggest the Supreme Court ruling was biased.

⁸⁹ From ‘SEAK, Inc. National Guide to Expert Witness Fees and Billing Procedures’

ones that have the greatest chance of success. On the other hand, m'lord, expertise can also get in the way of idea generation and in fact knowing too much can positively inhibit the creative process. We know the rules, we know what's been done before, we know what works and what doesn't work and therefore we think we know what we shouldn't even bother trying.

And often we're wrong about all of the things we think we know.

A research study⁹⁰ looked at how what we think we know colours our perceptions. People in the study were randomly assigned as either *tappers* or *listeners*. The tappers had to tap out well-known songs with their knuckles, such as "Happy Birthday to You" and the "Star-Spangled Banner," while listeners had to try and identify them. The results showed that, because the tappers knew what the songs were, they assumed that the listeners would easily get them from the rhythm they were tapping out on the tabletop. They estimated that the listeners would correctly name about half of the songs. But, in fact, they only got 2.5% - or a twentieth of that number - right. The Journal of Political Economy described as "the curse of knowledge" the condition of how once you're an expert in a particular field it's difficult imagine not knowing what you know. And as co-founder of Intel, Andrew Grove, said in a 2005 interview, "When everybody

⁹⁰ 'Overconfidence in the Communication of Intent: Heard and Unheard Melodies,' an unpublished doctoral dissertation by Elizabeth Newton while at Stanford University, 1990.

knows that something is so, it means that nobody knows nothin'." He believes the best way to tackle a problem is to set aside everything you already know.⁹¹

We advocate bringing in *inexpert* witnesses to offer a fresh perspective on the creative problems we're trying to solve. Witnesses unencumbered by too much experience or too many rules, who don't know what's been tried and what hasn't. These *inexperts* could be people from within the organization who work in a different discipline and have little or no familiarity with the area being worked on, or people even further removed from the business – for instance wood workers, writers, musicians, sushi chefs or jockeys - to help look at the problem through fresh pairs of eyes and reveal a whole new perspectives you might not have previously considered.

Of course, the freshest eyes to bring in are those who are removed from business life altogether, children. A child's perspective is by definition naïve and so hasn't yet been tainted by the rules of business and marketplace. If you can find a very simple and clear way to explain your challenge it can be very worthwhile asking some kids you know for some ideas, perhaps by asking the help of a teacher and make it into a class project (what, for instance, might a class of kindergarten kids suggest as solutions to a problem such too much

⁹¹ 'Innovative Minds Don't Think Alike' by Janet Rae-Dupree in the New York Times, Dec 30, 2007.

traffic?) and use what they come up a way to look at the problem in a totally fresh way. And children don't charge hourly fees

Do You Wanna Be in My Gang?

Imagine there's a gang of kids (*Famous Five* or *Swallows and Amazons* type kids, not the mean ones from *Lord of the Flies*) who all hang out together and go on adventures. They share a mutual bond (is that a financial instrument?), but each of them has a very different personality.

Again, our characters should be used for these

Billy, the sensitive one, is very aware of his own and other people's feelings and is always thinking what somebody meant by what they said or did. He's quick to laugh and quick to tears and is always trying to restore balance and harmony in the group.

Rachel, the daydreamer, just goes with the flow and often seems to be in another world. She can often be found wandering around at the edge of the other's activities not quite a part of them. She will often say something profound and seemingly unconnected to what's going on that only later will others realize what she meant by it.

Carl, the leader, is self-assured and bossy. He likes to feel in control and will always make the final decision on what the gang should do. He acts and reacts quickly without thinking through things too much and his decisiveness means they get things done, but can also lead the gang into trouble.

Jo, the brainy one, is very fact-based and analytical. She loves to think through problems and come up with the most logical solutions based on the facts. She is loud and will challenge Carl if she thinks he's going about something the wrong way and can upset Billy by her blunt common-sense opinions.

Phil, the rebellious one, is the one most likely to get the group into scrapes because he's always pushing boundaries, but he's also the one most likely to plop them into exciting adventures. He hates accepting things because that's the way things are and is apt to go off on his own if he gets too bored with the group.

The dynamics between the gang members are interesting. They argue about things but always try and find common ground. When there are differences of opinion different members of the gang might form little allegiances. Billy and Phil might team up to passionately argue their case against Carl, Jo and Rachel or boys might be on one side and girls on another. But they always work together as one to deal with any outside enemy.

So how might Billy, Rachel, Carl, Jo and Phil approach a problem differently? Billy would be using his empathic nature to find solutions that take into account the feelings of as many of the gang members and the people they come into contact with as possible. Rachel would be thinking very broadly about the problem and the other areas it might be associated with. Carl would be focused on finding a solution quickly rather than pondering too much if it's the right one. Jo would take the opposite approach, wanting to explore every avenue before coming to a conclusion. And Phil would be hell-bent on coming up with a solution that nobody had tried before and be more interested in the unknown nature of it than the results.

All of the gang members have something to offer. Each of their perspectives and ways of doing things has some merit and imagining how they each might approach a problem can help us switch into different modes of solving it. We can try and imagine what each of them might think, and then when we have some ideas think about which would agree with each solution, what arguments might ensue and how we might reconcile them. Is there one that is radical enough for Phil, yet doesn't upset Billy's status quo? Can it fit the facts enough for Jo and still not lose Rachel's interest by being too rooted in reality? And can it be made to happen without too much dilly-dallying so Phil feels like things are actually getting done. Soon to be a major motion picture.

SIDEBAR

I was incredibly creative when I was a child, driving my parents nuts. I was full of schemes to make some pocket money, but never went about them in a regular way. I watched boys delivering newspapers and getting paid, but I could see you needed a bicycle or it was lot of work and a very heavy bag to carry. I decided that to sell newspapers was good, but to carry a heavy bag around was bad.

So I asked at the newsagent where the newspapers came from and they told me the address of the local distributor and I went down there and somehow negotiated to have a whole heap of Sunday newspapers delivered to me in a bus shelter on Kayll Rd. I'd seen that this bus shelter was very busy on Sunday Morning with men coming home from nightshift and it was on a corner surrounded by four streets of residential houses.

I had ten times more papers than anyone could carry but it didn't matter because I was just sitting on them! I would sell out in a few hours and go back to the wholesaler and pay him his amount and end up keeping five times more than if I had a paper round carrying those heavy papers in a sack every morning and I only had to do a few hours work. Then I added another element. I took my guitar and started busking to the bus queue as well, which earned me a few more

pounds on top. But the coup de grace was when I then started hiring my own paper boys to deliver locally and then asked my Dad if he could run the business as it was getting too much for me at 12-years old! This worked out for a couple of Sundays. I had my Dad running the stall, paperboys delivering the papers and I was having a lie in on a Sunday morning. Needless to say the novelty soon wore off for my Dad (who had a full time job), so I sold the business on.

This wasn't the only business idea I had as a kid. I had endless fun thinking of new ones. One of my favourites was when I bought an old electric shock machine and would charge a penny a shock, guaranteeing my classmates it would give them energy and make them more intelligent to help them pass a test.

I always liked the creative shortcut to a problem. So when I realized, at around 14-years old I could write a song, I thought OK so how do I get people to hear it? So I went to my Dad's telephone directory and looked up radio stations. I saw Radio Durham and I knew this was the university town and students might like the songs I was writing. So I called them. "Hello, Radio Durham," said a very bright sounding female.

"Hi," I said "I've written some songs and I want to play and sing them on your radio station." And before she could answer I said, "Here I'll play one now" and I

put down the receiver and started strumming and singing, completely forgetting how long this was taking.

Anyway, after about 5 minutes I picked up the phone again and said, "Did you like it?" There was silence for a while and she said, "yes it was very good, but I'm the receptionist." I said, "That's OK just tell the others and call me back" and gave her my number.

About a week later I was watching the Beverly Hillbillies on TV around 5:30p.m. and the phone rang. My Dad came in the room looking confused saying, "Radio Durham on the phone for you." I of course was completely unfazed. I'd been waiting for them to call back. I'd already visualized me doing four songs in the radio studio and doing an interview and then going on television doing the same in Newcastle.

All of this happened and I got my first cheque for 12 pounds for my radio performance, then another cheque from the TV performance! Now this a mixture of creative thinking and downright cheek or chutzpah, but it certainly cut out a few years of playing to myself in the bedroom and it was a lot of fun.

I was so into visualization when I was younger I would stand outside my house on a summer's day (at the end of a busy shopping street) wearing full skiing gear

goggles etc. standing on some homemade wooden skis. It wouldn't bother me that people were staring or kids were calling me names. It made no difference - to me I was already skiing in Austria and with my eyes closed. Six months later I was in Innsbruck in Austria coming 2nd place in the junior Olympic Slalom.

Now all of this came to an abrupt end when I turned 18-years old. I was now in London, had a record deal and a publishing deal, but I had also discovered drugs. Now, drugs can make you very creative as is well documented throughout history, but not if you take so many that it takes you all day to make a cup of tea and fry an egg. So I would say for three or four years I didn't really write a song or invent anything much, just ran around trying to get more drugs to help me come down from the other drugs. I know this meant to be a business book, but I'm now talking about one of the biggest businesses in the world and I was on the receiving end of a well-organised assault on my brain cells. There was disaster after disaster and I went through a bunch of personas...like, turning up to the studio wearing a kilt and sporran, or walking to the local shop and being reminded by the grocer as he escorted me out I was actually wearing nothing at all.

It all came to a sticky end when I ended up in hospital after being in a car crash and started having recurring lung collapses. Now, you are thinking, "Where the hell is this going? I paid good money for this book." Well, remember earlier I said

that electric shocks give you energy and make you smarter? I was about to find out the truth of this big time, because I was about to die and had the biggest electric shock you ever want to have with defibrillators and came back to life and, guess what, I've never stopped having ideas since.

Literally since leaving that hospital my whole life changed. I was the old me again. I was inventing new ways to record music, reading everything I could on art and filmmaking, even learning to cook and inventing exotic dishes for Annie and my imaginary friends to try. Actually, dying and being brought back to life was like being plugged into an electric socket that pumps creative energy into your veins! It's better than any drug on the planet and it creates infinite possibilities. We advise the electric shock treatment and Business Playground is developing one now that you can buy for your office boardroom. It will of course be reasonably priced, but the results could bring in millions to your business.

I'm a hopeless enthusiast not just for my own ventures but for everyone else's too! I've been diagnosed as manic-depressive, except without the depressive bit. I can't stop and, who cares, I'm having fun. Sometimes I think some people don't know what they know. In other words, they've put their knowledge into such a small context and imagine that is the only use for it.

For instance, I was once in a black cab in London. I always chat to the cab driver or the petrol pump attendant, or the chap filling the mini bar in the hotel room, or basically anyone who wants to chat during the day. But, this time it was the black cab driver. He was telling me that things had changed and he didn't like driving the cab anymore. I was asking him what the problem was and he said that now there were too many drunks and aggressive people, and the streets were too crowded and all the charm of being a cabbie had gone for him.

Now, these drivers have to go through very complicated and rigorous testing to get "The Knowledge" as they call it. So I said, "Hey why don't you stop and do something else?" And he said that it was impossible because it was all he knew how to do. He was thinking, "This is all I Know." I thought for a second and said, "But you know so much about London all the streets and the ups and downs of cab driving and judging people's temperament and how to stay safe etc. etc. Why don't you make it into a board game? How to get from A to B on time in rush hour and avoiding getting a ticket or picking up a drunk on a Saturday night. Write everything you know and then make a kind of 'Snakes and Ladders' or 'Monopoly'-type game out of it. Give it a name, register it and then meet with a game company.

We had a good old discussion about this and then he dropped me off at my house at Wychcombe Studios in Hampstead London. About two years later there was

knock at the door at my same house, and my wife at the time, Siobhan, answered. She came in the kitchen and said some guy was there said he was taxi driver and he had something to give me. Yep it was the game and he had a game company that had produced it for him and he was now a royalty receiving game inventor! You see sometimes “You Don’t Know What You Know.”

Move One Space Forward to the Next Chapter...or Roll the Dice

If we look at problems through the eyes of someone else, whether a child or a passenger in a cab, the fresh perspectives can lead to some great new ideas. In the next chapter we’ll show how to throw some unexpected elements in the mix.

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

BOARD GAME: SHOE SWAPPER



How it works: To get the brain thinking in new directions to solve a creative problem we need go outside what is familiar. We need to experience new things

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

and bringing diversity into the mix. In fact, we need to put ourselves into other people's shoes.

The board: 36 squares, each showing the shoes of a different person. The rows and columns are each numbered 1-6, so throwing two dice gives identifies a specific square and so pair of shoes (one die for the row number and one for the column number).

How to play: Players try to come up with creative solutions to problems by taking the perspective of, or putting themselves in the shoes of, different types of people. Shoes could be those of a type of person, such as "your mother," a profession such as "a chef" or a specific personality, like "Paris Hilton." In each of three rounds the players have one minute to write down ideas from the unique perspective of the person who's shoes they are in, with points awarded for every one that no other player has had.

Example: The agreed problem might be how to bring more customers into a restaurant. In the first round a 2 and a 6 is thrown on the die, identifying the square showing an illustration of Paris Hilton's sexy boots. Now players must come up with ideas from the perspective of Paris Hilton. Paris might, for instance, conceivably suggest that a way to drive business for the restaurant would be to "offer the clientele celebrity gift bags." This might spark an idea about making

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

customers at the restaurant feel very special, like a celebrity in fact. There could be a gift bag containing unusual toys and fake paparazzi photographer stationed at the entrance, and framed on the wall of the restaurant could be autographed photos of customers.

In the second round, a player might throw a pair of 5's on the dice, identifying a square showing the shoes of cartoon character, so players will need to generate ideas from the perspective of whatever they think a cartoon character would think. And in the third round a player might throw a 6 and a 1, leading to the square showing the shoes of a best friend at school, so players will need to come with ideas from the perspective of a friend he or she had at school.

How to win: The winner is the player with the most number of unique ideas – ones that no-one else came up with, but that still make sense - at the end of three rounds. The game can be also be played alone, with the goal being to come up with three ideas per round.

The Shoes Of: Al Gore, Madonna, Einstein, Homer Simpson, Scrooge, Willy Wonka, Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King Jr., Superman, Houdini, Paris Hilton, Donald Trump, Benjamin Franklin, Picasso, Freud, Thomas Edison, Merlin, Anthony Robbins, Gandhi, a young child, your mother, your neighbor, your grandmother, your best friend at school, a Martian, a scientist, a comedian, a

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

cartoon character, a visitor from the future, a dictator, a philosopher, a fitness fanatic, a biologist, the almighty, Dirty Harry, Nelson Mandela.

CHAPTER 10: CONNECTED

The art of putting two unconnected things together to create something completely new.

“Humor is reason gone mad” – Groucho Marx

Slipping on Banana Skins

Is it just us, or is watching someone slipping on a banana skin always funny? You can't help but laugh even though you've seen it a million times (never in real life, unfortunately) and know exactly what's going to happen each time. The reason it's funny is because it's such a dramatic shift from intention and result. The guy was trying to walk along the street but ended up flat on his bottom because, unlike us, he didn't see that damned bright yellow banana peel coming. As an idea on paper it doesn't sound like much, but see it happen and boy it's hilarious.

Humour and creativity are very closely related. In fact creative people are often very funny too. Like creativity, making people laugh often involves making connections between two seemingly unrelated ideas that results in something surprising and different. Take a man walking along the street minding his own business, especially one who is doing something self-absorbed, like reading a

newspaper (or checking his email), add an innocuous looking banana skin and you get a result that is dramatically different from what the pedestrian intended. Arse in air looking stunned (but not seriously hurt, of course – if he ended up breaking his arm, someone the humour mostly disappears). From in control to helpless and surprised in less than the time it takes to say, “What the..!!”

Slipping on banana skins is more than just funny. It can help the creative process too, especially when the ideas aren’t flowing as easily as they should. Throw in a joke or a provocative image and see how that can disrupt thinking that might be becoming stale or in a rut. It doesn’t really matter what it is so long as it serves the same function as the real banana skin does. It changes the course of what’s happening in a dramatic and sudden way. It introduces an element that is bizarre or outrageous or irreverent, and makes an odd connection between two ideas as a way to tell the brain to do the same with the problem it’s working on. It’s saying to the left side of the brain to step back for a while and let the more freewheeling right side take a shot at it. It’s a mental nudge saying it’s ok to let loose a little and bring in some more crazy thoughts.

Several studies have found that being funny and being creative are ready bedfellows. One, for instance, way back in 1965, was on the relationship between wit, sarcasm and creativity. Results showed that the “wits” among the 156 airmen being tested to be better than the less witty ones at group problem-

solving⁹². Later studies have found a positive correlation between creativity and the ability to comprehend humour (getting the joke) among undergraduates and children, as well as between humour production (making the jokes) and creativity. The researchers argued the link between humour and creativity is because the two have a common basis in the ability to find hidden connections between apparently disparate concepts.⁹³ Studies by Avner Ziv (we think his name is an anagram, but can't quite figure out for what) also support this link. In one from 1976⁹⁴, adolescents who had listened to a funny recording did significantly better on creativity tests than those who had not. In another in 1983⁹⁵, Ziv asked adolescents to write witty captions to cartoons or write witty responses to the standard Torrance Creativity Test, and in both cases he found the "humorous atmosphere" significantly increased their creativity scores.

HA + HA = AHA!

⁹² Smith, E. E., & White, H. L. (1965). Wit, creativity, and sarcasm. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 49, 131-134.

⁹³ Rouff, L. L. (1975). Creativity and sense of humor, *Psychological Reports*, 37, 1022.

⁹⁴ Ziv, Avner (1976). Facilitating Effects of Humor on Creativity
Journal. *Journal of Educational Psychology*; v68 n3 p318 22 1976

⁹⁵ Ziv, Avner (1976). The Influence of Humorous Atmosphere on Divergent Thinking, *Contemporary Educational Psychology*; v8 n1 p68 75 Jan 1983

SIDEBAR

One time the film director Paul Verhoven⁹⁶ was getting so uptight and angry in the recording studio and no-one could understand why he was so upset, but he was getting very serious and sacking people left right and center. I was looking on incredulously while people like my brilliant and trusted engineer and film music producer, Steve McClaughlin, were saying they were quitting. At the same time, to add to the tension, there was a sixty-piece orchestra sitting waiting to play the next piece of music. I went out of the studio and put on a woman's dress and earrings and burst back in the studio and insisted on dancing with Paul. At first he was in shock then he started laughing and so did everyone else and the session got going again. It's what I call breaking the plane.

The Joker

Throwing something into the mix to add freshness to thinking is always a good idea. Theatre and film director Matthew Wachus told *Business Playground* how a single word in a new way can give a scene a whole new meaning; “I was working on a Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing* right in the beginning of my career in my early twenties. There’s a speech in it where one the characters talks about the ‘career of his affections,’ and it was being acted as though the actor meant

⁹⁶ Paul Berhoven’s directing credits include *RoboCop* (1987), *Total Recall* (1990), *Basic Instinct* (1992), *Starship Troopers* (1997) and *Hollow Man* (2000).

developing progress of his affections from bachelor to married man – sort of growing up – but I looked up the word during rehearsals and found that the word “career” had one meaning at the time the play was written, and that was ‘sharp and sudden changes of direction.’ We still sometimes use it. We see a horse and cart careering across the road, or a vehicle careering out of control. I thought that was really useful because we’ve somehow taken that word and made it a really ordinary word like ‘plan’ or ‘progress of logical steps from A to B to C to D.’ But it’s the opposite: sharp and sudden unexpected changes of direction. And I think that’s really helpful. In life people are able to think about their careers or their work or the way that they think or whatever it is like that.”⁹⁷

The banana skin technique uses an outrageous joke or visual to do help people to creatively change their direction. Here’s a technique that does it by adding in a random element to spark some ideas using a set of “Joker” cards to pick from when a little push needed. On each card is a suggestion for where to find inspiration, just throw a dice to choose which one.

These can be designs in the book

⁹⁷ Dave and realized for the first time he does actually have a “career.”

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS



The cards would say:

- Look in the refrigerator. Pick up a couple of items and look at the packaging, the design, the ingredients and any instructions. Think about when you last used it and when you're planning to use it next. What does it make you feel? What's good about it? What's bad? How can you relate it to the creative problem you're working on?
- Turn on the TV. Flick through five the channels and watch each one for a minute or two. Try and make what you see relevant to what you're working on, the way it makes you feel, what the images are and what the people are saying.
- Open up a newspaper. Quickly pick two or three articles, without thinking too much which ones, and read the first few paragraphs. Think about the stories and the people involved. Think about what your story should be and how the stories you're reading are relevant to it.
- Flick through a magazine. Look at the ads and pictures. Why do they look the way they do? What are they trying to convey about themselves or

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

products? How significant is the style, the layout and the colors? What ideas do they spark about your own project?

- Go to “Stumble Upon” on the web. Stumble Upon (stumbleupon.com) is a great way to randomly discover web sites that you might otherwise never find. You can enter in the areas that interest you then hit “stumble” and it’ll take you to a randomly generated web page. Do this five or six times and you will find stumble upon something you’ll realize is relevant to your project. Guaranteed.
- Go to the library and randomly pick out three books from different sections that you wouldn’t normally look at. Take them to a seating area and spend ten or fifteen minutes with each, flicking through them and stopping to read passages that catch your eye. Take time to read about the author, think about what made him or her want to write the book in the first place and try to picture what their lives are like. Think about how they’d approach your own project. What would the title of the book be?

SIDEBAR

When Annie and I had our first hits, instead of recording in a straightforward expensive recording studio in London or NYC I would come up with crazy places to set up equipment and start making an album. These odd locations triggered different moods and helped keep our records sounding unusual and fresh.

The album 'Be Yourself Tonight', an album that included the number-one hit song 'Their Must Be An Angel Playing With My Heart' (with Stevie Wonder on harmonica) and other hits like 'Would I Lie to You' and 'Sisters Are Doing It For Themselves' (a duet with Aretha Franklin), was mostly recorded in a small room in a youth club in the suburbs of Paris! The French teenagers hanging around the club didn't believe we were making an album till the BBC turned up to interview us for a TV show. So there we were, very famous at the time and could have been recording in luxury anywhere in the world; instead we made our way to the outskirts of Paris everyday and up lots of stairs fighting our way through table tennis matches and tip-toeing through ballet lessons into a tiny room that Annie decorated from the flea market to start the days recording experiments.

On the album 'We Too Are One' we hired a suite in a legendary rock & roll hotel called the Mayflower overlooking Central Park (not as glamorous as you might think, it was at the time a very run down hotel with lots of cockroaches). We set

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

up our recording gear and started making an album in the hotel suite, every now and then going for walks down 8th Avenue or in Central Park and then back in the elevator up to our suite to record Annie's vocal or me play a guitar track. Being in the hotel is a completely different thing from being in sterile studio environment, and there are lots of things there to stimulate you - like the bar, for instance!

It was the same bar years ago where I first met Madonna and, even though she was just starting her career, I could tell she had her head screwed on. And boy does she know how to play in the Business Playground!

Chaos Theory

If creativity is about making connections between two seemingly unconnected things, then another good to throw something random into the mix is to use random words. Try this, grab a dictionary and randomly pick out a word then force a connection between it and the problem you're trying to solve. We did it to see what would happen with the *traffic congestion in LA* problem. The word we randomly picked by speedily flicking through the pages and then plopping an ink-stained finger on a page was, "Donation." Then we thought, "Um, that's a hard one, maybe we should try again and pretend we hadn't found that one," but then honesty kicked in. We realized if we did that it wouldn't be random, it would in

fact be *cheating*, so decided to go with it and force ourselves to quickly come up with solutions for the traffic congestion in LA problem that, somehow or other, relate to the idea of donation.

After a couple of minutes of pondering this what we came up with:

- Drivers could be made to donate to charity ever time they drive.
- People could be asked to donate their cars to charity and use other means of transport.
- There could be a donation drive to build a better form of transport.
- Companies could be encouraged to sponsor free bus passes to commuters.
- Employers could be asked to donate one day a week of their employees' time to work that doesn't require them to travel.

Not that any of these are amazing ideas, but what struck us about the process was this *it actually works*. Yes folks, if you get past that initial barrier of thinking there's no obvious connection between your problem and the word you've randomly picked, you can force yourself to come up with ideas, some of which might be worth pursuing. The other thing that struck us (and might have struck you too) was that in retrospect the word we randomly picked might *not have been that random after all*. Maybe subconsciously we picked "donation" by filtering out some of the other words on that page ("donkey," "door," "doodle," "dong," "doom")

to name a few) that we thought would be non-starters. It's possible, but then again maybe it doesn't really matter that the subconscious mind rather than the conscious one made the choice. The point of the exercise is to introduce stimuli that seem unrelated to the problem we're trying to solve and, even if the subconscious is pushing us in a certain direction, perhaps that's just fine.

Of course, one of the things about good ideas is that often they seem very obvious afterwards and so we are prone to discount the thinking that went into creating them. Paul Allen, co-founder of Microsoft told Business Playground: "To me it's like a moment of obviousness. While there's an obvious idea here: take a simple programming language and connect with a microprocessor, maybe that's a really great idea. It seems so obvious and then you go, 'wait a minute, has anybody else figured it out, or on the same track?' And if they're not you really have to follow-up and jump on the idea and see if you can make it happen and a lot of times it means forming a team of people, or of course in your case a rock band, around a certain musical style, and then it's a lot of hard work to make it real, to actualize it."

In fact one entrepreneur has built his whole business around the notion that in retrospect good ideas are obvious. Evan Williams is co-founder and CEO of Twitter, the social networking platform that made it big in 2008, and the company he created to develop Twitter was initially called *Obvious* for that very reason. Twitter might seem like an obvious idea now – give people a quick short way for

friends and family to tell one another what they're up to – but on paper it really wasn't. Doing is believing and when you've done it you know why it works, but trying to explain why it works to someone who hasn't tried it is difficult, to say the least. We mean, why you would another form of keeping in touch when you've already got your online profile, blogs, email, phone, IM not to mention plain old meeting face-to-face (known as F2F in the online world)?

Evan told us that he didn't even try to convince investors of the value of Twitter before it was a real product. "It would have been a tough sell," he says. He and his team of developers built a prototype of Twitter along with some other applications they'd been working on to try them out. "Once we had the prototype and were using it ourselves, then it was very clear it was interesting. It was immediately compelling to the small group of us using it." Even when they launched Twitter it didn't take off right away and Evan eventually bought the company back from the original investors, but by 2008 it was a runaway success with a valuation in the many millions.

Twitter's use has gradually changed over time from giving friends trivial updates, or "Tweets," in answer to the question "what are you doing?" to being a way for people to keep in touch with what's happening on a much broader scale. No longer just learning that your pal Joe is having a cup of joe, but also updates on politics, favorite bands and sports teams or whatever else you decide to sign up

to. "It's continually surprising," Evan says. "Even though we have had the notion for a while that Twitter has the potential to be very big, it's the way it's grown and the different uses and the reality of it becoming big in so many different ways is always surprising." Obvious, right?

SIDEBAR

Sometimes writers get what they call "writers block." It's traumatizing and a vortex as the more they worry the worse it gets. I've often helped snap them out of it by being either very humorous, crazy or taking them on an adventure. I've done this with everyone from Bryan Ferry to Katy Perry and I'm sure a few other people rhyming in "erry." Sometimes getting blind drunk helps. Or the opposite - a great picnic in the countryside with a traditional picnic basket and all the right accoutrement. Involving them in the shopping for cheese, garlic sausage etc. takes their mind off the problem with the lyrics and it's great for me because I love picnics⁹⁸.

On the Contrary

⁹⁸ Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt came out with some playing cards called *Oblique Strategies* that have cryptic remarks on them and can help break a deadlock or solve a dilemma.

If you think about it, most problems are contradictions between two opposing factors. An umbrella needs to be small and unobtrusive when it's dry, big and strong when it's raining. How can something that needs to be folded up into a small package that can be stuffed in a bag also be unfolded into a large canopy that won't break or blow away when it's windy? Taking time to understand the contradictions inherent within a problem often helps us find innovative solutions to solve it.

Take the electric car, for instance. As you might know they've been around in one form or another for decades. The first one was developed by a Thomas Davenport of New Hampshire in 1834. His ran on rails using a battery for power that couldn't be recharged. Later that century, after the rechargeable battery had been invented, electric cars became popular in Europe and then in the U.S. as smoother and quieter alternatives to cars powered by internal combustion engines. By 1897 the Electric Carriage & Wagon Company of Philadelphia had built a fleet of electric powered New York taxis, and at one point, just before the turn of the century, electric cars even outsold petrol-powered ones.

But that was then and this is now. Since, electric cars have almost disappeared because of an inherent contradiction between two factors: the weight of the battery and the performance of the car. To make longer trips than just local

journeys, especially getting up any reasonable speed, requires a great big battery. And the car has to carry that heavy battery around, so using up a lot of power. The electric car just doesn't make sense for long journeys.

One innovator has realized there might be a way to remove the contradiction if a network of battery recharging centers could be created that were close enough to one another, so a small battery would be sufficient for each section of the journey. Shai Agassi is the founder of *A Better Place*, a company based in Paolo Alto, California that aims to build a personable and scalable public transportation that ends our dependence on oil. In other words, *a better place*. Working with governments, regions and cities, *A Better Place* is building a network of recharging spots and battery replacement stations. And when people aren't using their electric car, say while they're at home or at work, they can plug it in to top up the battery charge. For longer journeys there will be places along the route to change batteries for a fully recharged one without leaving their car in less time than it takes to full up a tank with petrol.

The whole system is completely automated. The charge spots are the size of parking meters, and when a driver pulls up to one of them a computer on board the car tells it to link up to the charger and start charging the battery. At battery replacement stations a driver simply pulls up and sits back, and within three minutes a new fully-charged battery has replaced the depleted one. Drivers will

pay a subscription charge to use the system, much like they do for their mobile phones. Instead of buying minutes they'll be buying miles. A Better Place has already signed up Israel, Canada, Australia, Denmark, Hawaii and Bay Area cities in California to participate in the scheme and Renault is already building electric cars for it.

Agassi's idea shows the power of bringing together two opposing forces. Just like a banana skin and a shoe. But, how about going on step further, and forgetting batteries altogether? Instead powering electric vehicles directly from the grid. As part of a "New drive for creative thinking,"⁹⁹ South Korea is experimenting with cars that pull in power from cables beneath the road. According to the developer of the project, Korea's Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (Kaist), power from two nuclear systems would be enough to run six million cars. Sounds like one big fun Scalextric set!

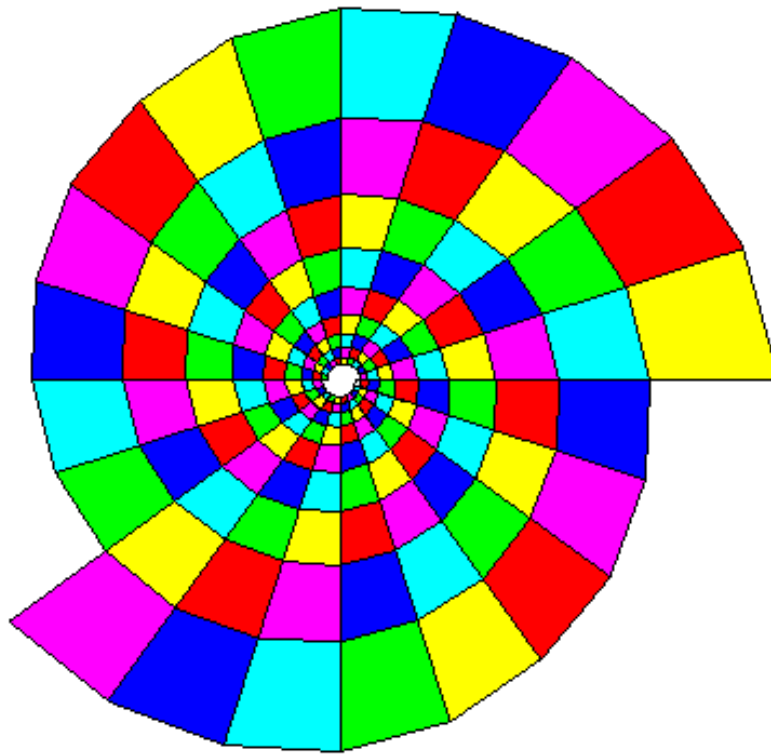
Move One Space Forward to the Next Chapter...or Roll the Dice

So now that we've tried a bunch of techniques to come up with some new ideas, we need to decide which ones to move forward with, and which ones to say a sad goodbye to.

⁹⁹ "New drive for creative thinking" – Christian Oliver, the *Financial Times*, August 13, 2009

BOARD GAME: INSPIRAL

How it works: Making connections between seemingly unrelated things is at the very heart of creativity and this game *forces* us to make those connections to come up with something entirely new!



The board: A spiral of 36 spaces winding into the center of the board, each with a theme written upon it.

The board shown has way too many spaces but shows how it would look!

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How it's played: A player roles two dice to find the first theme, then rolls them again to find the second. The number combinations of the dice identify which space to go to (e.g. throw a 4 and a 3 on the first roll means, go to the space that is 4 around the spiral and 3 in towards the center), and so which theme. Now players come up with as many ideas, sensible or crazy, as they can think of that link the two themes.

After every turn players count up the number of ideas they each came up with that are unique (meaning, distinct from one another), and move their counters to the corresponding number of spaces around the spiral of the board, moving inwards towards the enter of the spiral. So, if a player came up with three unique ideas then he or she moves three spaces around the boards towards its center.

Example: The first theme might be "sweets," and the second theme, "animals," and so players need to think of ideas that link the two – such as sweets shaped like animals, or sweets to give to animals as treats. Or maybe sweets made from chicken to give to children as a way to sneak protein into their diets. (We know, calm down...it's just an example.)

To win: The first one to reach the center of the spiral wins.

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Themes: 36 in total that are broad and open to interpretation. Candy, Animals, Sport, Travel, Fashion, Sex, Food, Friends, Transport, Drinks, Adventures, Games, Parties, Learning, Office, Health, Hunger, Fitness, Heroes, Family, Poverty, Websites, Power, Peace, Love, Nature, Entertainment, Romance, Vacations, Escape, Sleep, Phones, Space, Extreme, Home, Shopping.

CHAPTER 11: KILL THE IDEA

Choosing which ideas to focus our time, money and energy on.

There are some pretty terrible ideas out there that have somehow made it to the shelves, shopping channels and, pretty quickly afterwards, dustbins. Take, for example, the facial exerciser, a small spring device that looks like a deformed rodent skeleton you wedge into either side of your mouth and flex to work the muscles of the chin, neck and face. Apparently it gives users a more youthful appearance without the need for surgery and is “clinically proven” to be safe and effective. It also makes the user resemble The Joker from Batman. Surely this is an idea that should have been strangled at birth? Or take the pocket fishing rod. No, this is not a euphemism for something else – it really is a pocket fishing rod. It features a telescopic rod to allow you to fish whenever the mood strikes and some of the more intriguing models also double as a pen. Included in the kit are hooks, lines, bobs and weights. That’s right...hook, line and sinker.

How do we know which of our own ideas are worth keeping and which are not? If we’ve been playing hard enough, and flexed our creative muscles, we should by now have a ton of possibilities. But, we have to whittle these down to, first a shortlist of the strongest contenders, and then ultimately pick a single idea that we are prepared to focus our energies on and do whatever it takes to bring to life (although, when with practice you might be able to keep a few ideas going at

once – see our sidebar). In the idea creation phase we tried not to be too hampered by practicalities but not a dose of reality needs to come into play. This is the territory of the left side of our brains. In the playing part of the innovation process, where we generated the pool ideas, the right halves were in command and the sensible left halves had to wait it out on the sidelines. The lefts would have been warming up, jogging on the spot and doing stretching exercises while their more zany other halves were on the field in the thick of things.

Now the coach (we're not sure where this metaphor's going, but we'll carry on it to see) beckons to the left side to take off its tracksuit and come onto the field. The right half looks a bit dejected at first, but has had a good game and knows his or her energy reserves are low. It's time for some fresh blood. The two hemispheres slap hands as they pass one another, passing the metaphorical baton (a metaphor within a metaphor – now this is getting crazy), signaling "well done" from the left and "good luck" from the right. Right goes to the bench to get his or her breath back and recover. Left is already on the field running hard, getting stuck in. We could go on, but won't.

Left brain's skill is analyzing the ideas to see which ones are practical and have a chance of succeeding and has a few tricks up its sleeve to help. The simplest method is to categorize the ideas as ones that are feasible now, those that have potential and ones that are just too weird. But even with these weirdoes, it's

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

important not to discard them outright, however oddball they might be - they should be noted down for future reference, maybe for another project, while the ideas that seem feasible right now and those that have potential can be worked on a little further (...the right half of the brain looks up hopefully from the bench realizing he might be called on to play a bit more).

Another technique of choosing the idea we want to implement also involves categorizing the ideas into three main buckets. But these are slightly different types of bucket. To get ourselves into the frame of mind of considering how an idea could be implemented, we write it up as: "What I see myself doing is..." For instance, *What I see myself doing is... finding companies to sponsor kitted-out minibuses as an alternative form of transportation to people driving to and from work.* Now we write up three things we think are great about our idea, three potential spin-offs from the idea, and three concerns we have about it.

IDEA 1: What I see myself doing is...			
This is great because!	1	2	3
It could also lead to	1	2	3
It worries me that	1	2	3

So, for example...

IDEA 1: What I see myself doing is...

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

<i>Finding companies to sponsor kitted-out minibuses as an alternative form of transportation to people driving to and from work</i>			
This is great because!	<i>People can leave their cars at home so reduce their greenhouse gas emissions</i>	<i>They can do work on the way so can spend less time in the office</i>	<i>They can connect with new people and swap ideas</i>
It could also lead to	<i>Additional revenue streams through corporate sponsorships and from selling coffee and snacks on board the bus</i>	<i>People can get rid of one of their cars and use the money to pay for a holiday for the family</i>	<i>As on a school bus, there will be a feeling of community spirit with commuters getting to know people in their neighbourhoods</i>
It worries me that	<i>The logistics of finding good pick-up and drop-off points will make the service difficult to operate</i>	<i>Everyone starts and finishes work at different times so there'd have to be multiple services throughout the day</i>	<i>People are so wedded to driving their own cars it'll take a huge change in attitude to make it work</i>

Doing this exercise like this one will do more than help us edit down the ideas to the strongest few, it will also enable us to improve upon those suckers. We can

begin to think through how we'd build enthusiasm for the idea, what resources we'd need to implement it and maybe how we'd test it.

Also, importantly, we would ask ourselves, *What would other stakeholders think about it?* We might want to do a role-playing exercise to help think about who are key stakeholders that will have an influence on whether the idea is likely to happen. Stakeholders could be a local official, a consumer advocate group, a regulatory body, a venture capitalist, a bank, a finance director, a CEO, your husband, wife, the dog etc. In all likelihood there'll be a bunch of them who can make or break what we're trying to do, the movers and shakers who can make the difference between the idea failing or, hopefully, succeeding.

Now put yourself into their shoes. For each one of them ask, *What's in it for them? Why would they be interested in helping you do this, or at least not standing in your way? What is it about the idea that they'll see as a negative? Does it conflict with other things they are trying to do? Will it make their life more difficult in any respect?* Unfortunately it's far easier for people to say "no" to new ideas and to leave things as they are rather than change things (see the section on the *Pyramid of the Powerless* in chapter one), however much sense change would seem to make - at least to us innovators. Empathizing with the key stakeholders can help us understand how they'll look at our ideas and allows us to find ways to eradicate any problems before they are even exposed to it.

We're not talking "eradicate" as in "wipe out" Mafia style, but after all other avenues have been explored, do consider good old bribes and blackmail as a last resort.

SIDEBAR

People shouldn't be afraid of having many ideas going at the same time. You have an idea, and that might spark another idea but you don't drop the first idea to do the new one, you keep it spinning like a plate then you go to the other idea. And the new one might make you think of yet another idea, so now you have here or four. They might all be connected a little bit but they've become their own thing, and then you notice this idea – the fifth one along – is going much faster than the other ones so you say, that's ok, I'll follow this fifth one but I'll keep the others just spinning along. And then when you see one going really, really wonky and about to fall off you look at it and maybe think, well that's alright, I've got these 32 other ideas and they're going just fine.

What I find is wandering between the different ideas and projects is very inspirational because I haven't been obsessed with the same thing for three months I can come in completely fresh to each one. At the end of the time I feel quite worn out but happy I haven't been stuck in the same problem over and over again. In many businesses they have one thing that they do. There's always go

to be at least one person in the company who is not satisfied with the way things are right now. Up until 1991 Nokia were working with rubber goods, and making rubber boots, and they decided they wanted to be a communications company. Now they're the largest cellphone company in the world. So it's interesting to be constantly looking at your business as an ever-evolving thing, If you don't do that in this day and age where everything changes every 24 hours, you'll be dead.

Can You Feel It?

Picking out the one great idea from the pool of good ones you've been working on is not always easy. First, it's difficult to be objective. You've been so involved in creating them that you might find it hard to separate the wheat from the chaff, the men from the boys, the pandas from the squirrels. Second, you're now emotionally invested in the ideas. If they've made it this far, there's something about them you like and it's difficult to let go. But, let go you must, even if it takes cold hard cash. Merck, the research and pharmaceutical giant, has developed a system to kill ideas it's working on if they look like they're not going anywhere. They offer "kill fees," by handing out options as a reward to scientists who bail out on losing projects.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ "Creativity and the Role of the Leader" - Teresa M. Amabile and Mukti Khaire in Harvard Business Review, October 2008

Getting feedback from others, whether consumers or colleagues or lovers, is one way to decide on the one winner. They are more likely to be objective than you. But, buyer beware, we can't rely too heavily on the opinions of others. Their judgment will be only as good as the materials they're given to judge, and in many cases we can't adequately communicate our idea without actually going and doing it. We'll come back to that. Meanwhile let's not ignore the power of gut. Even if we can't always put into words why we think one idea is better than another, for some reason the right one often just *feels* right.

Freddie DeMann, a veteran music producer, who in an amazing career spanning over three decades managed both Michael Jackson and Madonna, told Business Playground about his gut instinct and how we knows that a song has the potential to be a huge hit. "You just know it," said. "It's like when somebody plays a song for you and you hear eight bars you know it's a smash." But, often the artists themselves don't know which of their work is just good and which is so great that will take the charts by storm. "It takes someone else to say THIS, this is the smash, and not this. I've had a lot of experience with that. It's happened quite a lot."

Freddie gives an example: "I was managing The Jacksons way back in 1978 and at that time they had left Motown and gone to Epic and they weren't hot, they were kind of cold - they were ice cold - and they were also in disarray and they

were fighting amongst themselves. They weren't talking to the record company. They were going to record an album. Anyway, cut to the chase, the record was done and everyone wanted to put out a song called 'Blame It On The Boogie' and I thought it was a mid-chart. And I didn't want to. But I was new at this game and, even though I came from the record business and I knew my stuff, we put out 'Blame It On The Boogie' and it was a great record, and a good song, but it stopped about 35 or something on the charts¹⁰¹. And then everyone wanted to put out another song. I told them, 'I'm sorry I'm not getting it in my head.' And I said 'you guys are all wrong' – the group, the record company, the producers – 'there's one hit on this album and that's what we're putting out. And here it is. It's called 'Shake Your Body Down To The Ground.' And I was right, it sold two million singles and caused the album to go platinum¹⁰² and that was the rebirth of The Jacksons, which led to Quincy Jones producing Michael and having those two incredible albums, 'Off The Wall' and 'Thriller.'"

Business Playground asked how he manages to immediately recognize the commercial potential of a piece of music from just hearing a few bars. "But that's the key," he said. "You have to immediately get it. You know I'd like to say there's

¹⁰¹ It didn't actually feature in the main US charts, but reached number 3 on the U.S. R&B charts and number 8 in the UK charts. Another version of the song was released at the same time by another artist, Mick Jackson, who was no relation to The Jacksons, leading the media to describe the rivalry for airplay between the two singles as the "Battle of the Boogie."

¹⁰² Actually, it had double-platinum status from the Recording Industry Association on America

a little bit of an artist in me. When I a kid I took drum lessons and I took tap dance and when I was about twenty I took acting lessons. I kind of thought I wanted to be an artist, but was wise enough to realize I didn't have 'the stuff.' I'm not in this business by accident, I'm in this business called 'show business' – but it's the arts. And I like being close to artists, I like being close to the creative process. It's what gets my rocks off. It's what gets me up every morning with enthusiasm. When I was a manager I told people I was the bridge between art and commerce. And thank god I have a pretty good business mind. But I always have an artistic mind. And I think that gives me some special credentials. And I love what I do so much. God gave me a good ear to recognize hit song and, by extension a hit song is a hit script, is a book, is a play, is a show."

We asked Freddie if he had a process or technique for recognizing the winning ideas, the ones that would be hits. He said, "I hate to disappoint you, but I don't know the answer to that. I know that when you talk to me about 'The Hole In The Wall' (a song Dave had written) and then played for it for me I knew that it was an absolute – absolute – broad-based monster smash. Very often I do have a myriad of thoughts that are kind of rushing through and it's very distracting. But if something is really, really good and it grabs you by the throat, those thoughts stay away and you're completely engulfed in what you're hearing." He adds, "When you were playing 'Hole In The Wall' I was already thinking what theater it should open in New York. I was already thinking who I'm going to get on the

production team, who should augmenting what you've done. So yes, I do tend to race ahead when I'm enthusiastic about something."

The role of gut instinct in picking the winner is confirmed by Evan Williams, co-founder and CEO of online social networking tool Twitter. Prior to launching Twitter, Evan had launched a blog publishing system called Blogger, which had been developed by him and his team as a by-product to another project. Evan told Business Playground, "It wasn't at all what our company was planning to do, it was very much just an idea on the side which seemed like a very small idea compared to what we were working on." His co-developers on the project wanted to focus on the project management application and not waste time on Blogger, but Evan had less discipline and couldn't let it go. "I just couldn't get rid of the Blogger idea, it kept nagging me." As had been the case with Twitter, to those who were closest to it, it didn't seem like a big idea at the time. One of the people who wrote a key part of the code thought Blogger was "just too trivial to be a product." But, Evan pursued it and it became a huge success, with Pyra being sold to Google in 2003.

Christian Audigier, creative genius behind clothing labels Von Dutch and Ed Hardy, also talks about "just knowing" through gut instinct when an idea has the potential to be huge. In 2000 he had been brought in as the head designer for *Von Dutch*, the clothing label named after car and motorbike "pinstriper" (the

application of very thin lines of paint), Kenneth Graeme Howard, who often signed his work 'Von Dutch.' Christian told Business Playground, "Von Dutch was the Pope of the pinstripe." Christian wanted to create a lifestyle brand that conjured up images of garages, custom cars and bikes. He has had no training in branding or marketing, but has a great instinct for what will work. "It was a tee shirt that you could make you feel like someone else, and I created all this vibe around that." And as soon as he saw the iconic *Von Dutch* signature he thought: "If I do that big I'm going to be the new Abercrombie and Fitch. So the idea was to put the name on a tee shirt and to give them to celebrities."

He told Business Playground that he managed to persuade Britney Spears, at the peak of her fame, to wear Von Dutch clothing. Although it wasn't easy at first: "In the beginning when you try to see Britney Spears you are a stupid 45-year old man talking to a 16 year old girl and you don't even know any of her songs." He managed to charm her with his ideas and his French accent and both she and boyfriend at the time, Justin Timberlake, agreed to wear Von Dutch clothing. A week later the couple split up and pictures of them were splashed across the cover of *People* magazine, both wearing Von Dutch trucker caps. The brand took off overnight and the craze for trucker caps was born.

Christian left Von Dutch a little while later to start his own clothing line, *Ed Hardy*. Like Von Dutch, *Ed Hardy* is inspired by the work of an artist, this time American

tattoo artist Don Ed Hardy. In 2004, Christian acquired the rights to produce a high-end clothing line based on Hardy's imagery, line based on tattoos had never been done before, but that didn't deter Christian who, again through gut instinct, was convinced it was a winning idea. He wanted to create the vibe of being a motorbike gang member. But, initially, given his strong French accent, he had problems getting retailers to understand the name let alone the concept (it sounds like "Edardee" when Christian says it), so he explained the idea as, "the godfather of tattoo." And he now sells the line in retailers around the world and has a string of Ed Hardy shops in major cities, with sales approaching a billion dollars a year a year. His gut paid off.

SIDEBAR

So now you have a plate full of ideas a knife and fork and a fresh pot of coffee. Which ideas look the most appetising and which ones just look like a mess of spaghetti? Or, if you have no clue dig in and see which one hangs on to your fork! It's fairly easy to dig away and spot the no hoppers and throw them in the trash, but when it gets down to the last pieces of linguini you may have three or four that stick right on that plate or twist around your fork and it's very difficult to then just choose the one to play with.

What I do is write down two or three words on each idea like: fit 'n' green. This

idea is about turning fitness centres into generators that give the members rewards based on the amount electricity they generate. This would lead to home applications on fitness bikes and a brand that can make anything from fitness games to walking phone chargers etc. I don't need to write all that the stuff describing it, I just write "fit 'n' green" and if I can't remember what it's all about in a week's time then it can't have been that good so I kill it.

Killing ideas is very painful and sometimes they come back to haunt you. You think fit 'n ' green is dead in the water then you walk passed a new gym on your way back from Starbucks and you see lots of attractive women in leotards through the window peddling furiously alongside a few heavy weight middle-aged men fast-walking, frantically clutching onto the side rails. You look up and see it called "The Powerhouse" and it says that it's the first green energy producing gym franchise, and you choke on your doughnut.

Ideas come back to haunt you in other ways. You thought you killed the idea about the cartoon character called Mr. Macaroni and Noodles (his dog), but in the middle of the night you wake up singing his theme song and can't help seeing him happy as Larry in his junkyard on Nickelodeon! This is when it becomes impossible to kill the idea but it keeps popping up in your head wherever you look. You are at dinner and you look over your vodka martini and you see the maitre d' and he looks very like Mr. Macaroni. By your second Martini you are

scribbling Macaroni notes on the tablecloth and offering to pay for damages.

So in the end I had to let Mr. Macaroni live and I put him back in the spaghetti bowl. Now Paul Pethick, a brilliant animator and writer, and I have partnered on it and we have a wonderful animated presentation, as well as booklets and Macaroni inventions of old musical shoes other products based on Mr. Macaroni and pooch. In fact it became an idea chosen by Nickelodeon to be developed, along with two other ideas, as a series they might potentially launch. Alas, they mistakenly chose Mr. Meaty¹⁰³ over our brilliant work, but Macaroni still lives on and, because this idea has survived both my attempt at murder and the cruel treatment of Nickelodeon, he and Noodles are well prepared for survival. They are now just playing around the junkyard, biding their time, waiting to see if we are part of a bouquet of kids shows in a subscription world on mobile phones or whether we will just 'Club Penguin'¹⁰⁴ them into superstardom!

Move One Space Forward to the Next Chapter...or Roll the Dice

So a mix of logic and gut instinct has led us to a decision on which ideas are worth the time and effort to bring to life. Left and right halves have both done their bits and are now *firm* bosom buddies. Now, in the last chapter let's add

¹⁰³ Oddly-shaped puppets working at the fast-food *Mr. Meaty* restaurant.

¹⁰⁴ www.clubpenguin.com is a very successful online virtual world for kids that's raking in the fish...er, we mean cash.

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

some rocket fuel and find out what it takes in an organization to put ideas like into orbit!

BOARD GAME: KILL THE IDEA



The board: A felt dartboard and dart with a Velcro tip.

How it works: Sometimes we instinctively know when an idea is worth keeping and when another isn't, but we need a little pushing to make that difficult choice. Being made to choose helps us realize which one of them really matters.

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

How to play: The player writes down 20 of his or her strongest ideas for the problem he or she is trying to solve, and numbers each from 1 to 20. The player then throws a dart straight up in air above the dartboard and the number where it lands determines which one of the ideas will be killed. But, don't despair quite yet: players have three "saves" to give an idea that has been killed the chance to live again. By forcing players to murder their ideas, but with a chance to give them a stay of execution, they'll soon realize which one feels like the one idea worth fighting for. The three saves can be used on only two different ideas and so the winning idea is the one on which two of the three saves have been used.

For Example: Say you are working on ideas for getting publicity for your new venture and three of the 20 ideas you've come up with include: get the CEO to "do a Branson" and appear in public just in underpants; donate time and services to people who need help in the community and tell the local paper; or get a celebrity to use one of your products and hope they'll be photographed doing so. If having thrown the dart the *Branson idea* comes up you might decide it's worth saving and use a life on. But, then only two lives left. Then the community work idea comes up - is it worth saving or not, knowing that if you do save it, because the saves can only be used on two different ideas, you cannot save any of the others? You decide, nah, it isn't worth saving - kill it! The needy can fend for themselves. After a few more arrow tosses and some deaths (we're taking the ideas we've killed here, not the needy) the celebrity photo op idea comes up and

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

you decide it's worth saving. Two lives used up and now it's decision time. As you spin the needle, ideas will be dropping like flies until you decide to use that last life and save one idea. Will it be Branson? Will it be celeb photo? Will it one of the others? Your gut will decide.

CHAPTER 12: BLAST OFF!

Creating environments that put creativity into practice.

“Vision without action is hallucination” – Benjamin Franklin.

An idea that isn't brought to life remains just a notion. Following through with ideas is as important as having them in the first place so they don't just become conversation fodder for cocktail parties (“I had this great idea once. You should have seen the size of it. Huh...wonder whatever happened to it...?”) Most great ideas only saw the light of day as a result of the tireless perseverance of an individual or group of dedicated people, each of who had battled against all odds. In fact, it takes blood, sweat and tears (and luckily there are washing powders that will get rid of even the toughest of stains). Inventor James Dyson built 5,127 prototypes of his bagless vacuum cleaner, the Dual Cyclone™, before he perfected his design, yet all the major vacuum cleaner manufacturers who were making too much money selling vacuum cleaner bags rejected it. Europe Vice President of Hoover, Mike Ruter, of Hoover later said on national television, "I do regret that Hoover as a company did not take the product technology off Dyson; it would have lain on the shelf and not been used."

Having conviction in the idea is vital. Even if it's not perfect yet, belief in it will have an effect on others who might realize it's unstoppable train that they should

get on, on by lose out. Sometimes you just need to take a deep breath, look supremely confident, and go for it. Henry Ford said, “If you think you can, or if you think you can’t, you’re right.” Burt Rutan who ran the team that developed the Voyager spacecraft said, “Confidence in nonsense is required.”¹⁰⁵ And it’s said by people who have worked with Apple co-founder, Steve Jobs, that he has what they call, “A reality distortion field,” a spell that he casts on those around him convincing them of a success of an idea. Not that any of what Steve Jobs does is nonsense; it’s just that he just has an amazing knack for selling the ideas he likes.

Christian Audigier, who runs his own billion dollar clothing empire, says in his a strong French accent that, “You need to insist to exist. If you don’t insist, you’re not going to exist. You can close a door – this one doesn’t want you - you can come back a month later. One day this door’s going to open for you, you know.” His success with *Von Dutch* gave him his moment in the spotlight, his fifteen minutes of fame, but he still had to work incredibly hard to make inroads with his own venture¹⁰⁶, *Ed Hardy*. He had to prove to the retailers that he could deliver. To launch the brand to them he put on his own trade show in Las Vegas that competed head-on with MAGIC, traditionally the largest gathering of men’s fashion-buyers in the U.S. His show was called “When I Move, You Move.” It was

¹⁰⁵ “The Weird Rules of Creativity” – by Robert Sutton, professor of science and engineering at Stanford University, in *Harvard Business Review*, Sep 2001

¹⁰⁶ He was head designer of Von Dutch, but it was owned by Tony Sorensen

an expensive and audacious ploy that got the attention of the whole fashion industry - something that just having a booth at MAGIC would never have done. The next year the organizers of MAGIC came to Christian asking him to collaborate with them. He moved and they moved.

Despite, or maybe because of, the success of *Ed Hardy*, Christian Audigier is developing more and more fashion projects that break the mold, including high-end casual wear label *Crystal Rock* with his daughter and with co-author Dave Stewart, *Rock Fabulous*, a brand that aims to redefine the rock and roll lifestyle through music and fashion. Recently when Business playground had lunch with Christian, he had been in conversations with Madonna about creating a fashion empire based around her brand. Again he had to “insist” to get even the initial conversation with her going. “Today I’m working on a new project with Madonna,” he says. “Madonna wants absolutely to work with me. The agent said ‘don’t go with him. You don’t need that, you can buy another brand.’ I talked to Guy Oseary, who is her manager – a great guy actually - and he told me ‘you know what, for months I was telling Madonna to do nothing with you, but she told me she just wanted to do it with Christian.’”

And the reason why she wanted to do it with Christian rather than anyone else? Because he knows how to do it big. “I proposed to him, I said ‘Madonna, ok, what does she want to do in her life?’ ‘She wants to build an empire.’ I said ‘that’s

great, ok.' She has an asset, she has her name, she has a lot of pictures of her – she did a lot of stuff – she reinvented herself every two years – Kabala, Material girl, porno girl – so what I proposed to them, and they were blown away, is to be sure if I'm doing to do something with her I'm going to get the three tiers of the business. The three tiers are Neiman Marcus, you have Bloomingdales and you have Target.¹⁰⁷ So this girl he can be merchandized everywhere. The idea is to separate her life story. One brand is going to be *Erotica* – that's going to be for the upper tiers like Neiman Marcus. We're going to have *Like A Virgin* for little girls and we're going to go to Target. And we're going to have *True Blue*, which is an album of hers, in Bloomingdales. And I believe we can go to all those tiers at the same time. If you want to build an empire you need to arrive with your army at the same time." Insist to exist.

"I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work" - Thomas Edison

¹⁰⁷ Large US chains of shops. Neiman Marcus is high end, Bloomingdales is more affordable and Target is all about value,

Accidents Will Happen (It's Always Hit and Run)

“You can't just give someone a creativity injection. You have to create an environment for curiosity and a way to encourage people and get the best out of them.”¹⁰⁸ – Sir Ken Robinson, education and creativity expert.

Here's a conundrum. Can a business be both efficient and creative? Can it have processes in place that enable it to deliver goods or services at a profit, and still allow enough leeway to take the risks and make the mistakes that being innovative requires? This is something many businesses struggle with. 3-M is known as an innovation powerhouse, but its invention of the Post-it® Note is a long way in the past¹⁰⁹. 3-M CEO, George Buckley, in trying to recreate the culture of innovation that existed in the company's heyday, recognizes that efficiency programs might need to take a back seat. "Invention is by its very nature a disorderly process," he says¹¹⁰. “You can't put a Six Sigma process into that area and say, well, I'm getting behind on invention, so I'm going to schedule myself for three good ideas on Wednesday and two on Friday. That's not how

¹⁰⁸ Sir Ken Robinson, quoted in “Reading, Writing, and Creativity: Education guru Sir Ken Robinson talks about the importance of nurturing innovative solutions in the classroom -- indeed, in every aspect of modern life” from *Business Week* online, February 23 2006

¹⁰⁹ Art Fry and Spencer Silver developed it over a number of years during the 1970s and it finally went into full production in 1980.

¹¹⁰ ‘At 3M, A Struggle Between Efficiency And Creativity: How CEO George Buckley is managing the yin and yang of discipline and imagination’ – Brian Hindo in *Business Week*, June 11 2007.

creativity works." He's referring to Six Sigma, a business management strategy originally developed by Motorola to identify and remove the causes of errors and defects in manufacturing and business processes. Specially trained experts in the disciplines of Six Sigma are called "Black Belts," and boy, are they tough. Hi-yah!

In the 3-M of old, much like the Google of today, employees were actively encouraged to develop their own independent pet projects and apply for funding for them from sources within the company. Risk and failure were accepted as part of the "3-M way." Art Fry, inventor of the Post-it® Note, questions whether his innovation would have ever seen the light of day in an environment that embraces efficiency over experimentation. His view is that, "Innovation is a numbers game. You have to go through 5,000 to 6,000 raw ideas to find one successful business." Six Sigma, on the other hand, tries to avoid errors – and it's making errors that makes innovation possible. Marva Collins, a U.S. educator who worked tirelessly to help impoverished students in an around Chicago to get a decent education, said, "If you can't make a mistake, you can't make anything."

Sir Ken Robinson says that creating a culture of innovation and creativity in companies is more than just "setting up a cool room with creative toys and a whiteboard." Pixar, the Disney-owned animation studio, is a good example of how to do it right: "The company has something called Pixar University, that runs

classes, events, workshops and stuff throughout the day. Every employee is entitled to spend four hours a week at Pixar University, and they are encouraged to not take anything job-related. That keeps peoples' minds alive."

W.L Gore and Associates is a developer and manufacturer of innovative materials and is most famous for its waterproof and breathable Gore-Tex fabric. The company encourages its employees to play with new ideas to see what they come up with. For instance, while Gore has nothing to do with the music business, it now has a third of the guitar string market through its non-breakable guitar strings, Elixir. Elixir was developed by a Gore engineer playing with the cables on his mountain bike to see how he could improve them, which got him thinking about guitar strings, and then led him to team up with another Gore engineer who worked on the non-breakable dental floss, Glide. Lots more playing around and three years later Elixir was born (cautionary note: never floss your teeth or play the guitar while mountain biking).

A study by London Business School researchers¹¹¹ investigates how companies like Google, 3-M, Pixar and Gore use play in the work place to stimulate creativity and make possible breakthrough ideas that keep them ahead of the competition. The authors of the study propose that businesses encourage play in three ways,

¹¹¹ "Ideas are Born in Fields of Play: Towards a Theory of Play and Creativity in Organizational Settings" - Charalampos Mainemelis, Sarah Ronson, in *Research in Organizational Behavior*, Volume 27, 2006, Pages 81-131

by: creating a playful environment; allowing employees the freedom, time and resources to make play a part of their work; and giving them the safety to experiment in areas that aren't necessarily a part of the company's core businesses.

Introducing a sense of play in the workplace is not without its challenges. Samsung, the Korean electronics giant, so as to maintain its position as Asia's most valuable technology company has been trying to implement a more creative culture. Apparently it's not always easy in a culture like Samsung's where hard work traditionally looks like, well, hard work. In their "value innovation program" center a little south of Seoul, "The engineers immediately start tidying up and stacking all the magazines in date order, the R&D people only want to talk with Americans, and the designers just stand there and don't say anything," says¹¹² Chung Sue-young, one of the center coordinators. It seems to be working though. At the innovation center they came up with the wine glass shaped, "Bordeaux" flat screen TV, the first Samsung TV to sell over one million units.

Tero Ojanpera, executive vice president at Nokia, told Business Playground: "You need to break the traditional linear way of thinking. You need to break the existing departments. You need to bring in new people. You need to figure out the new ways of putting different types of people together." But he knows that it

¹¹² "Samsung sows for the future with its garden of delights" by Anna Fifield in the *Financial Times*, January 2 2008.

isn't always easy. "For companies it's really a challenge to put together the different types of people, because very often the like-minded people gravitate together. Engineers talk to engineers. Artists will talk to artists. How can we break that mold? How can we force people who think differently together?" The Nokia *Ideas Camp* is an attempt to help. Tero says, "Our *Ideas Camp* is a step in that direction. We invite really different types of people together with an agenda that gets formed on the spot."

Robert Sutton, professor of science and engineering at Stanford University, supports the notion that creative businesses can make people who are used to more traditional ways of working feel uncomfortable. "After studying creative companies and teams for more than a decade," he says¹¹³, "I've found them to be remarkably inefficient and often terribly annoying places to work, where 'managing by getting out of the way' is often the best approach of all." He continues, "Managing for creativity, I've discovered, means taking most of what we know about management and standing it on its head. It means placing bets on ideas without much heed to the projected ROI. It means ignoring what has worked before. It means taking perfectly happy people and goading them into fights among themselves. Good creativity management means hiring the candidate you have a gut feeling against. And as for those people who stick their

¹¹³ "The Weird Rules of Creativity" – by Robert Sutton, professor of science and engineering at Stanford University, in *Harvard Business Review*, Sep 2001

fingers in their ears and chant, 'I'm not listening, I'm not listening,' when customers are making suggestions? It means praising and promoting them."

The energy you feel around most truly creative people is palpable, and it spills over into their studios and offices. Christian Audigier employs 350 people in his Culver City, California, offices. He tries to create a pleasant working environment to bring out the best in them and his approach to hiring is simple: "If people can give me something more clever than my ideas I take that. I love to drink all this stuff." He often hires them, not based upon experience, but on their willingness to try new things. And rather than try to teach them how to be creative, he leads by example: "I don't teach people. I believe I have enough energy to make myself understandable."

Professor Sutton is a strong believer in hiring people for innovative businesses that are slow at learning the ways things "should be done." Instead of fitting in too easily, they should question and rebel and create waves. He tells the story of the guy who invented the laser printer at Xerox, Gary Starkweather. Over many months he pushed and pushed for the use of lasers rather than white light to "paint" images for document copying, despite repeated objections by researchers and bosses convinced it wasn't the way to go. Eventually, when the department he was working with could stand his persistence no longer, he was transferred to a new research facility. When the Xerox laser printer he helped develop was

finally launched it became one of company's best-selling products. If Mr. Starkweather had just "fitted in," and followed instructions to drop his pursuit of lasers the Xerox laser printer would never have come about.

A recent IBM/Economist report entitled "The Enterprise Of The Future"¹¹⁴ says that for businesses to successfully meet the challenges of what in the future will be certain change, there need to be: "visionary challengers - people who question assumptions and suggest radical, and what some might initially consider, impractical alternatives."

Hiring people from different backgrounds and with different perspectives and skills helps keep things fresh. But it's not just the variety of people that matters. An individual might have multiple social identities that provide new points of view. Research by Jeffrey Sanchez Burks, a professor at the University of Michigan, his Michigan colleague Fiona Lee, and Chi-Ying Cheng of Columbia University, focuses on people who have "multiple social identities," such as people who are both Asian and American, or who are both women and engineers. They found that individuals with multiple social identities like these show higher levels of creativity for problems that make use of the knowledge that comes from their different perspectives. An environment in which female engineers aren't forced to suppress their femininity by dressing like men, for instance, should make them

¹¹⁴ "The Enterprise of the Future: Global CEO Study" conducted by IBM and The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2008

more comfortable with their different social identities and so be more creative. (Neither should male engineers be pressured into dressing like women, but what they do at the weekend is totally up to them).

SIDEBAR

I live in Los Angeles and when I'm at home rather than off traveling somewhere, I go to work everyday around 11 a.m. to my offices and the studio I share with my great friend, Glen Ballard. My offices are on the 5th floor and have been described as a cross between Willy Wonker's Factory and Andy Warhol's Factory.¹¹⁵ My factory is an ideas factory called "Weapons of Mass Entertainment" (WME). There are no real office rules or guidelines, we just have ideas and either make them work quickly or put them aside (we never throw them away, although sometimes I give them away, either wittingly or unwittingly!) There is no regular day and the staff know that at any moment I could arrive with anyone from John Williams (producer of the film "Shrek," among others), to Marvin Jarrett (the editor of "Nylon" magazine), or Colbie Caillait (a young singer songwriter)...or perhaps the CEO of a technology company.

¹¹⁵ Andy Warhol's New York studio was called *The Factory*. The original one – later ones were also known as The Factory – that he had from 1962-68 was on fifth floor of 231 East 47th Street, in Manhattan, and attracted a mix of musicians, artists and filmmakers.

THE BUSINESS PLAYGROUND: STEWART/SIMMONS

In fact, during the day there is an endless stream of creative people in and out of the offices, and many topics are discussed, from animated feature films, to online transparent payment systems, to song choruses. At all times staff will wander in and out and join in on the conversations, or just carry on working with headphones on and eyes glued to computer screens. My company is a creative company and, hey, guess what, I employ creative people. They include Kori Bundi, a young film maker and editor; Dave Harris, a scriptwriter and researcher; Ned Douglas, an amazing music programmer, writer and engineer; Tony Quinn, who can literally do anything you ask him (and was kick boxing champion of the world); Julie Warford, was an executive producer at a Washington ad agency; Angela Vicari, who spins 12 plates doing things like schedules for "Ghost" musical workshops and film company meetings, setting up events, and even creating the posters; our receptionist Piper Hinson is also a singer songwriter and a classically trained musician.

As well as inventing and managing projects, we also manage some upcoming new artists such as "NADIRAH X" "CINDY GOMEZ" and "I AM VIOLIN." What's amazing about our office is that everyone can join in the discussions, even though it may not be their field of expertise. In fact, often the artists we manage join in on the discussions on other projects we are doing at WME, even work on the projects, or do research for us, and have been known to act as chauffeurs driving me to meetings or answering the phones! Basically it's a madhouse. If

anyone thought "the lunatics have taken over the asylum," then this is the place where it rings true. But, we do have a real martini bar in the office, so we can't be that crazy.

Upstairs on the sixth floor are the studios and edit suites that I share with Glen Ballard. At first glance this looks a lot more calm and serene. But, don't be fooled, this also is a madhouse with Glen and I working on at least 10 music projects together at the same time, as well as on our own separate projects. Glen is as methodical as I am impetuous, so we make a great team. As well as Glen being a genius songwriter and producer he is also a perfect collaborative partner who always listens to ideas and digests them before forming an opinion. He also knows how important it is let "Idea Spaghetti" tumble out of my head and not to stop the flow. Glen and I will never run out of things to write songs about or have nothing going on in the studio because we are two "radiators." You see there are "drains" and "radiators" in this world and if you are in a business that needs creative input (which is ALL businesses) it's best to hire "radiators" rather than "drains" and something we call "FPP's" (Fast Positive People).

A good example of how Glen and I work together was on a children's film called "Charlotte's Web," based on the Pulitzer Prize winning book. We were asked to write the title song for the film and readily accepted as it's a great book and Dakota Fanning was playing the lead. Plus Burt Berman, a great movie music

man, was steering the ship and last time I worked with Burt, Mick Jagger and I won a Golden Globe for best song in a movie¹¹⁶. Glen and I met with Burt and the director and discussed the book and how it was going to be interpreted for the big screen.

When we left the meeting we both knew that writing a song about a pig and a spider was not going to be easy, but were pretty confident we would come up with something. The day Glen and I were meant to go see a first rough cut, Glen was sick with the flu bug so I went on our behalf and, halfway through the screening, I sent a text message to Glen saying song should be called "Ordinary Miracle." Before I got back to the studio Glen sent me an audio file with the first verse melody and singing lyrics, and it was sounding perfect. I sent a message back saying, "great don't change a thing" - you see he had already cracked the code and, as his teammate, I was cheering him on and excited to join in.

Once we had made a template or blueprint of the whole song, with me singing the demo, and after it had been "analyzed" by the film studio (which is a bit like being on trial for armed robbery), we got the song green-lit. We both really wanted Sarah McClaughlin to sing it so we sent her a rough version, and she liked it, so we hopped on a plane to Vancouver with Sam Schwartz, our film agent, Burt Berman and the legendary Randy Spendlove to record Sarah in her

¹¹⁶ "Old Habits Die Hard" was a song for the 2004 film, *Alfie*, and won the 2005 Golden Globe for Best Original Song.

beautiful home studio in the woods. I wanted a video with Dakota Fanning miming the words sitting at the piano with Sarah's voice coming out of her mouth. I thought that would be odd and get people's attention, especially children around the world. But, they made a straightforward video of Sarah at the piano intercut with the movie.

Now when you write a song and it's finished and exists, it becomes a business in itself - a kind of "song brand" - and in fact a huge business would be to manage these "song brands" properly. For instance, "Sweet Dreams" as a song is known in every country around the world. It's much better known than Annie or Myself. If I walked up to most strangers in any country and sang, "Sweet Dreams are Made of This," they would say "I know that song," but would not necessarily know Eurythmics or Annie Lennox or Dave Stewart. This song "Ordinary Miracle" became a phenomena on the web and if you type it in Youtube.com you will see thousands of people making their own video to it, of their child being born, or of beautiful landscapes, or of a school choir singing it. It also became the theme song on a commercial for the CVS pharmacy chain in U.S., making me and Glen a handsome sum of money. And I'm sure it will be used in the future in TV shows, movies or in other commercials, bringing in revenues for years to come. Annie and I have at least two requests a week for "Sweet Dreams" to be used on TV, films or stage musicals.

Songs as “Intellectual Property” (IP) are not unlike software or other trademarked inventions that get licensed for a fee or a royalty, and the creative process that goes into writing a song is pretty similar to the creative process that goes into solving many problems. It’s like a jigsaw puzzle or a code that needs to be cracked, the only difference being that songwriting usually includes personal emotional storytelling as part of the puzzle.

The Leader of the Pack

Most people work in businesses in teams in one form or another and, according to the authors of one study on creativity in the workplace, “Of all of the forces that impinge on people’s daily experience of the work environment in these organizations, one of the most immediate and potent is likely to be the leadership of these teams—those ‘local leaders’ who direct and evaluate their work, facilitate or impede their access to resources and information, and in a myriad of other ways touch their engagement with tasks and with other people.”¹¹⁷ To be effective, people running teams of people who are tasked with using creativity to solve problems need certain skills - they need to be good communicators. They should be able to keep tabs on the progress of project and use their interpersonal networks to gather information relevant to it. And they should be open to others’

¹¹⁷ “Leader behaviors and the work environment for creativity: Perceived leader support” - Teresa M. Amabile, Elizabeth A. Schatzel, Giovanni B. Moneta, Steven J. Kramer in *The Leadership Quarterly* 15 (2004) 5-32

ideas and empathetic to the team member's feelings.

OK, so duh. It might seem pretty obvious that how the boss behaves is going to have an impact on our work. But, there's more to it than that. Using a questionnaire sent out daily to hundreds of employees across three different industries, the researchers found that *negative behaviors had a more extreme effect than positive ones*. In other words, a bad boss is more *bad* than a good boss is good, and cutting out destructive behaviors is at least as important than exhibiting positive ones. The dangerous boss behaviours are these: giving out assignments without understanding has the capabilities needed to do them, or not considering other responsibilities they might have; micromanaging employees work; and not dealing properly with technical or interpersonal problems. Sound familiar?

The researchers conclude after their exhaustive study, "At the broadest level, our study suggests that leaders who wish to support high-level performance must pay careful attention to the details of their own everyday—and seemingly mundane—behavior toward subordinates. What this study has demonstrated, we believe, is the power of ordinary practices." It's not just a case of making jokes and giving employees a pat on the back (or hug around the neck or a kiss upon the lips), good leaders of creative teams need to help individuals move forward

with their work and treat them decently as human beings.¹¹⁸

According to the conclusions¹¹⁹ of a two-day colloquium at Harvard Business School with the leaders of companies whose success depends on creativity (we think that's pretty much every company, by the way), good leaders don't attempt to manage creativity, they manage *for* creativity, by providing a working environment and culture that allows creativity to flourish. Leaders should not think of themselves as wellsprings of ideas that employees execute, but as the champions of others' ideas. In fact it's a mistake to assume creativity will flow from one source: founders of Google, Sergey Brin and Larry Page, tracked the progress of ideas that came from them and those that came from others within the organization and discovered that a greater success came rate from the ideas that came elsewhere from the organization and not from the two founders.

Leaders in businesses need to decrease the fear of failure, which means celebrating it as much as celebrating success. Creating a culture where happy, or serendipitous, accidents can happen is vital for innovation to thrive. In fact, former Time Warner chairman, Steve Ross, thought that people who didn't make

¹¹⁸ "Inner Work Life: Understanding the Subtext of Business Performance" - by Teresa M. Amabile and Steven J. Kramer in *Harvard Business Review*, May 2007

¹¹⁹ "Creativity and the Role of the Leader" - Teresa M. Amabile and Mukti Khaire in *Harvard Business Review*, October 2008

enough mistakes shouldn't be rewarded for not screwing up, they should be fired for not taking enough risks!

Matthew Warchus, the film and theatre director, talked to Business Playground about how when directing a production he tries to create an environment where the fear of failure is reduced: "I've learnt there are two kinds of bad rehearsal rooms," he says. "One is with too much thinking, and one is with too much play and because the strange thing about my job and putting a show together is that it requires an equal amount of play and thought and one can't move forward without the other stepping in. What you have to do is zigzag between thought and play. In a conventional rehearsal room, for a week or two people would be sitting around a table discussing and then you'd reach the inevitable point when you'd have to stand up and start staging some of these things. That's a point that causes a lot of anxiety for people crossing that threshold, a lot of tension.

"People get too secure with the idea of just talking and thinking, and not with the idea of playing. But, instead, I always make sure that we stand up on the first day. So we'll talk for maybe two or three hours about working on the script and the ideas for it, but before that day is finished we've stood up and just played with one of the scenes, or an idea or a song or something like that, because it removes the threat of that moment. The longer you put it off, the more daunting it gets. But also it puts fluidity into the rehearsal room, it puts mercury in. You get

flow, an energy. Obviously you can do that by just people standing around and laughing, but you get a much more important thing which is people just feeling a freedom to get things wrong, to make a fool of themselves, to just go off at a tangent. It becomes a chaotic space, which is much more creative than a formal space.”

Matthew described to *Business Playground* how he keeps the process moving when large numbers of people are involved. “There are a lot of things that I do at the beginning of rehearsals that could be done by anybody in any situation. The thing about talking to lots of people, it’s a difficult thing. If I’m doing an opera, or a musical or a movie, there’ll be occasions when I turn up and I need to speak to 200 people at the same time and get them to do something, and at times like that you can’t allow a democratic thing to take place. Whereas when there are three people in a room each of them can come up with 10 ideas in the space of the meeting if there are 200 people involved in making a movie, by the time they’d all said their one idea you’ve run out of time to make the movie. I try to make sure I’ve expressed whatever my vision is about that scene or about the thing we’re trying to do, the scene change or whatever it is. I get on a microphone and talk to everybody as if I was just talking to one person to say: ‘inside my head, this is what I see, and hopefully this will explain why I’m asking you to try this. But, if this doesn’t work I’ll ask you to try something else in order to try and get the same thing in my head.’ So I’ve found that when people know what production

they're in, when they know what the vision is for the thing, they're happy. It bonds them together."

Money, That's What I Want

How important is money and other extrinsic rewards, such as job title and recognition, in motivating individuals to want to produce creative work? Glad you asked. Evidence from various studies suggests that when people think they are going to be rewarded for creativity, they are in fact more creative. In the words of "Bobbi Fleckman, the hostess with the mostess!" in Rob Reiner's film *This is Spinal Tap*, the "money walks and bullshit talks." The data backs this up. A review of existing studies by one researcher showed that, "The expectation that creativity will be rewarded causes individuals to define the task as requiring creativity, to become immersed in it, and to search for novel ways of carrying it out."¹²⁰ And in contrast, if people think a reward depends on them performing without using creativity, that's what they'll do, be less creative.

Of course, as you might expect, it's not quite that simple. While extrinsic rewards, such as cold hard cash, play a very important role, the *intrinsic* rewards – things like intellectual curiosity or seeing a creative task as a personal challenge - are

¹²⁰ "Rewards, Intrinsic Motivation, and Creativity: A Case Study of Conceptual and Methodological Isolation" – Eisenberger and Shanock in *Creativity Research Journal*, 2003.

also big drivers of creativity. One research paper looked at the relationship between the number of patents filed – an indication of creative output - and the individual motivations of the workers who created the innovations that spurred the patents. Data was from more than 11,000 U.S. research and development (R&D) employees in manufacturing and service companies who had been surveyed by the National Science Foundation. The analysis showed that the R&D folk involved in more early-stage types of research (more R than D) were more productive if motivated by the intellectual challenge of the task, and for them a degree of independence was more important than it was for workers involved in later stages of the process (those doing more D than R).

Another study this time using diary entries from thousands of workers similarly highlighted the role of intrinsic motivation in creative work, concluding, ahem: “Our study participants were more creative in their individual work on the days when they were more highly intrinsically motivated. What’s more, the projects distinguished by the greatest levels of creativity overall were the ones in which team members displayed the highest intrinsic motivation in their day-to-day work.”¹²¹

So, yes Bobbi, while money does indeed talk, if people aren’t into what they’re

¹²¹ “Inner Work Life: Understanding the Subtext of Business Performance” - by Teresa M. Amabile and Steven J. Kramer in *Harvard Business Review*, May 2007

doing, the bullshit walks.

Don't Worry, Be Happy

In general, if you're in a good mood at work you're more creative and when in a bad mood, less so. In an extensive study looking at over 12,000 diary entries from 238 professionals in different work teams, researchers Teresa M. Amabile and Steven J. Kramer concluded, "Across all 26 teams, people were over 50% more likely to have creative ideas on the days they reported the most positive moods than they were on other days. This finding is based, not on people's self-ratings of creativity but on evidence in the diary narrative that they actually did creative thinking that day. There was even a surprising carry-over effect. The more positive a person's mood on a given day, the more creative thinking he or she did the next day—and, to some extent, the day after that—even taking into account the person's mood on those later days."¹²²

What's more, how people perceived their work environments had an effect on their creativity. When they saw the work place in a positive light – you know, good bosses, collaborative spirit, focused on a creative vision, being rewarded for creativity – they were more likely to be creative. And when things were

¹²² "Inner Work Life: Understanding the Subtext of Business Performance" - by Teresa M. Amabile and Steven J. Kramer in *Harvard Business Review*, May 2007

screwed up – infighting, an aversion to new ideas and taking risks – their creative juices would sort of dry up. The biggest differentiator between their happiest days and most miserable days at work wasn't, as you might suspect, the temperature of the coffee, but a sense of making progress in their work.

The Business Playground Creativity Quotient (BPCQ) Test

As there is IQ, or Intelligence Quotient, as a measure of how intelligent (whatever that means) people are, it stands to reason there should be a CQ, or Creativity Quotient, as a measure of how creative they are. Of course creativity already has an obvious measure; the creative output that a person creates. Lots of amazing piano concertos, suggests creativity. Piles of great canvases, creative too. Shelves, of wonderful novels, yup, creative. But just looking out creative output isn't enough for a couple of reasons. First, whose to say whether any of the things created are actually any good (as we said at the start of the book, they have to be both unique and useful) rather than just notes on a staff, blobs on a canvas, or words on a page? And, second, while all ideas should have some manifestation (a thing that comes as a result of it) unless you're an artist, creative output is rarely so clear cut as simple as an object that expresses an idea or set of ideas. In business, the things that our creative talents contribute to might be a system, or a business model, or a way of thinking about something and almost always involves collaboration between many, many people.

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There are tests that specifically try to measure creativity, *The Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking* developed by psychologist Paul Torrance being one notable example, but we felt the world could do with one more. *The Business Playground Creative Quotient* (we couldn't get a really snappy acronym from those letters so for now we're calling it BuPCreaQ) is designed not to tell people how creative they are being, but to tell them how creative they can be if they open their minds to the possibilities.

Please take our test and see what your BuPCreaQ score is:

1. Being distracted by something unrelated to a problem can help you solve the problem. So imagine you are getting on a bus to take a short journey, one that will let your body and mind wander. Do you:
 - a. Head towards the bench seat at the back?
 - b. Sit near the driver so you can see the people getting on and off?
 - c. Get your biscuits out of your bag before sitting down?
 - d. Change your mind and get onto a different bus going on another route?
 - e. Talk to the woman in the green hat?

(Answer: it doesn't matter so long as you leave your problem behind for a few hours.)

2. Half the battle is deciding what is the question you're trying to answer through creativity. If you are a baker trying to make more money, which questions help your thinking:

- a. How can I create bread that is even better than sliced bread?
- b. How can I increase sales of my bread?
- c. How can I increase the profit margins for my bread?
- d. What else can I sell that will make me some bread?
- e. Are there any job openings as a candlestick maker in the area?

(Answer: a, b, c & d are all good questions and worth exploring, but each is a very different take on the bigger problem of making more money and demand different creative solutions so pick one at a time. Being a candlestick maker is a possibility, but might require some retraining.)

3. Corporate environments are rarely very conducive ones for identifying and executing big ideas. You find yourself in the lift with the CEO and want to tell her your idea you've been trying to get through the bureaucracy below her for months. Would you:

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- a. Jam your finger on the emergency stop button and make your pitch at your leisure?
- b. Blurt it out as quickly as you can, not knowing how long before he or she gets out or others get in?
- c. Make a friendly comment about the stock price and then say nothing else?
- d. Ask her for 10 minutes of her time at another date?
- e. Do none of these things then kick yourself metaphorically and in reality when you leave the lift?

(Answer: We don't know, it's a tough one. Option d sounds like the most sensible, options a and b only happen in cheesy movies and options c and e are what most people do, and who can blame them given the way most corporations focus on efficiency at the expense of creativity?)

4. Quantity of novel ideas generated is more important than quality, at least in the early stages of the creative process. We call this *Idea Spaghetti*. If the problem is *finding creative uses for a household brick* how many ideas can you come up for it in two minutes, starting now:
- a. 21-40?
 - b. 9-19?
 - c. 40+?

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- d. Less than 2?
- e. 21 exactly?

(Answer: either a or c would be good, b is so-so and c would just be weird!)

5. Drawing diagrams and pictures can help us think through problems creatively by tapping into a different part of the brains, one that relies less on our abilities to process language. Is it best to:

- a. Take a furry pencil case with you wherever you go, one that is full of brightly coloured pens and pencils?
- b. Hire a professional sketch artist to sit in during brainstorming sessions to capture comments and ideas?
- c. Take time to sit and think with a piece of paper to sketch your thoughts on?
- d. Draw caricatures of your work colleagues while they're talking?
- e. Add doodles to important documents?

(Answer: de and e if you want to get fired quickly. Option b sometimes works if the sketch artists are good and you know how to use what they've done. Option c for sure. Creating isn't always while just sitting staring at a computer screen, and in fact sitting at a computer screen can distract us from genuine thinking, so get a pad and start sketching out what's on your mind.)

6. Humour and creativity are closely linked as jokes and ideas are both ways of looking at the world in unexpected ways. Pick two or more of the following to create a joke that connects them:

- a. A nun
- b. A penguin
- c. A fish
- d. A prostitute
- e. A pair of knickers

(Answer: If you laughed merely at the thought of combining some of these ideas then you see what we mean, it's funny!)

7. Doing certain activities before being creative can boost our performance.

Which ones of these have been shown to work:

- a. Aerobic exercise?
- b. Playing certain videogames?
- c. Listening to music?
- d. Thinking fast?
- e. Having sex?

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(Answer: Options a, b, c & d for sure, either by increasing blood flow to our brains or improving our mood or some cases both. Having sex must work too, but we couldn't find any scientific studies that tested it.)

8. Coming up with ideas in groups in the form brainstorm is sometimes counterproductive, with the number and quality of ideas produced less than when people work individually. Which of these techniques helps make brainstorming sessions more productive:

- a. Setting the goals very high?
- b. Using donuts as a way to increase the blood sugar levels?
- c. Ridiculing any suggestions other than one's own either with a verbal put-down or just a snort of contempt?
- d. Making the mix of people less homogenous by including people from varying backgrounds, skills and identities?
- e. All being naked with the lights off?

(Answer: Definitely a and c, but we suspect option e might work too.)

9. Creating the right environment to the creative juices involves more than how creative the space you're working in looks. Which one of these things is the odd one out because it doesn't help bring out our creative abilities:

- a. Being paid cold hard cash as an incentive?

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- b. The boss giving clear goals for what is expected from a project?
- c. Feeling good about the work you're doing?
- d. A positive collaborative environment?
- e. Being allowed to wear big clown shoes to the office.

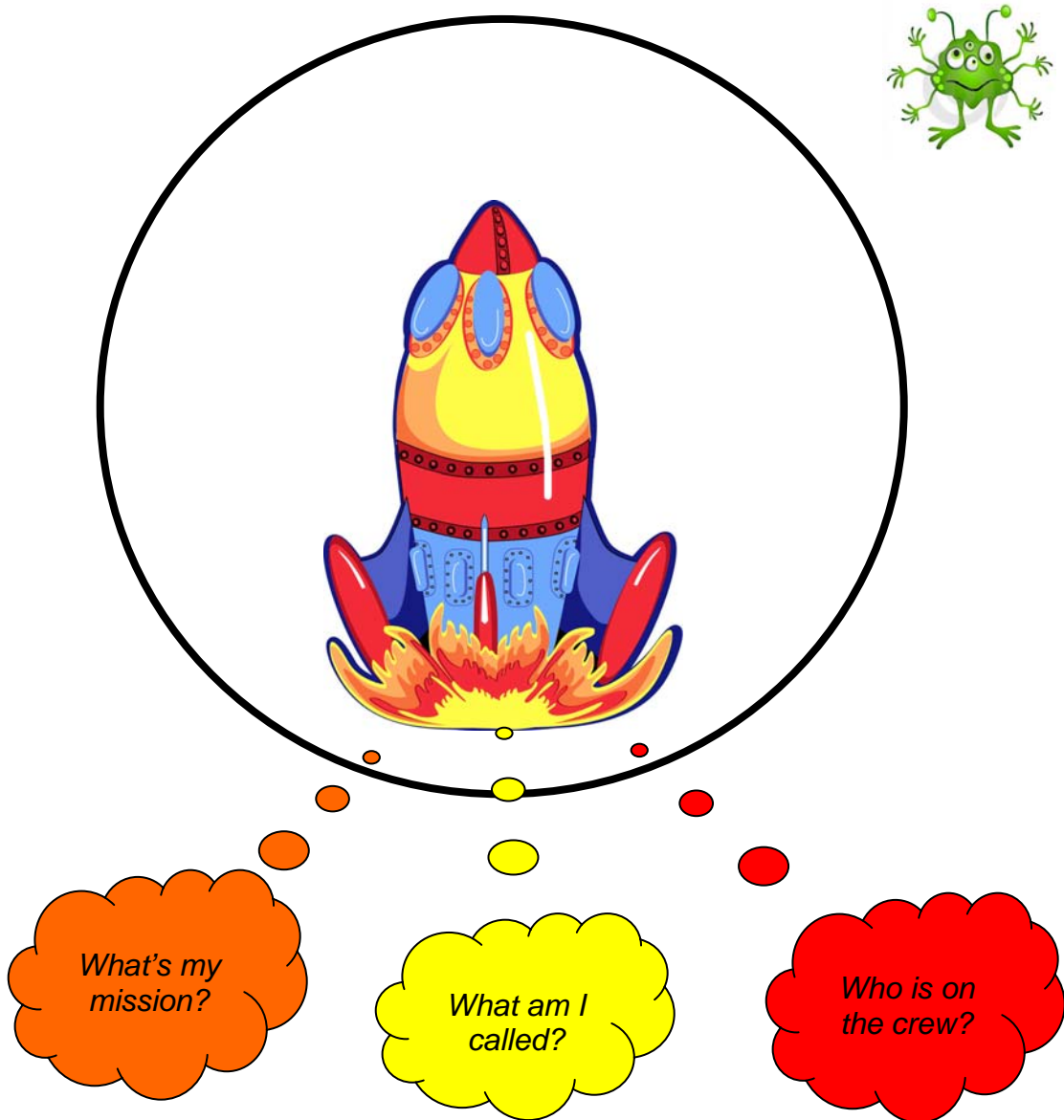
(Answer: you guessed it, b. Sorry, we meant e.)

10. What's the best idea you've ever heard, either old or new, yours or someone else's? Write it down and answer the following questions about it:

- a. What is the fundamental human need it solves?
- b. What two existing elements did it connect in a new way?
- c. What do you think the barriers were/are to making it happen?
- d. What combination of factors made it/might make it possible?
- e. Knowing what you know, how would you have done/do it differently?

(Great! If it's a new idea that nobody's done yet, send it our way.)

BOARD GAME: BLAST OFF!



How it works: Launching your idea is as important as coming up with it in the first place! So without much further ado, let's start the count down and get it into orbit. Commencing countdown, engines on.

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Ten...nine...eight...

In this game players have to quickly choose just one from a bunch of ideas, make sure all the pieces are in place and then launch it into the market.

Seven...Six...Five...

You won't know if it's exactly the right idea, but the time is ripe for a bit of exploration into the unknown.

Four...Three...Two...One.

Blast off!

How to play: When in 1948 *Albert* became the first monkey in space in space he was charting unknown territory. Unfortunately he died of suffocation during the flight. But, that aside, he was a pioneer! And shade under eleven years and a few dozen monkeys later *Able* and *Miss Baker*, a rhesus monkey and a squirrel monkey, became the first living creatures to go into space and successfully return to Earth. In the next few years, a collection of chimps, mice, guinea pigs, frogs, rats, cats, a few insects, a tortoise and some dogs followed them up. In

fact, by the time Yuri Gagarin, a Russian and a human, went into space in 1961 pretty much the whole animal world had taken a look. So here's a nod of acknowledgement to little *Albert* and his bravery in going for it. We raise a banana to you.

Now it's your turn to go into the unknown, this time without the suffocation we hope. The game involves quickly choosing one of your ideas and doing some of the things you'd need to do if you were going to launch it for real, by giving your idea a clear mission, a story and a crew who can help make it happen.

From ideas they've already generated players choose quickly just one, based on gut instinct or even just randomly (the Idea Killer game is a good way to hone in on one). The decision has to be made quickly, the countdown has begun. Now we're going to bring it to life by deciding what to call it, how to pitch it and who to involve to make it work. And all within 20 minutes.

Who Am I? To take your idea from words on a scrap of paper we need to give it an identity. A name, however gimmicky, and a sketch or diagram of what it might look like, however scrappy, will make your idea into something that is tangible, one that *you can imagine actually happening*. Come up with a name that communicate the main characteristics of the idea (e.g. *Super Glue*) or convey a sense of its purpose (e.g. Nike was the Greek goddess of strength, speed and

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victory). Think about who it's aimed at, what it will make them feel and how it's better or different from the competition. The sketch can be as simple as a crude line drawing that suggests your idea's form (whether a product, a service or experience).

What's the mission? All ideas have to have a practical application with real goals a clear plan and criteria for success. Write up the idea as a short news story with a punchy headline and the key details about what the idea is about, what the point of it is and who it's aimed at.

Who Is On the Crew? It's almost impossible to do it alone, we need to partner with others who buy into our mission and are willing to help us accomplish it. Make a list of the people (or monkeys) in your organization and from the outside who you can collaborate with to launch your idea.

How to win: Create a full launch plan within 30 minutes.

Now let's go and launch an idea for real!

"Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from

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the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover” -

Mark Twain