

Title:

7 Ways To Be Unreasonable

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Summary:

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Article Body:

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When most people think about what they are committed to, they consider where they can build a bridge to from where they already are. What would happen if you chose where you wanted to go without considering your current circumstances and then worried about how to build that bridge?

There is nothing wrong with being reasonable, except that "what is reasonable" is a poor guide to action when designing actions to push the future. Being reasonable will help you feel safe in the sense of knowing that your actions will turn out pretty much the way you expect them to. But it is dangerous in that same sense of producing predictable results; what is predictable has, by definition, been done before. And what has been done before is unlikely to make much of a difference in the future.

Paul Lemberg

Seven ways to be unreasonable.

"The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adopt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man." - George Bernard Shaw

"Insanity is doing the same thing over and over expecting different results." - Rita Mae Brown

"So what else is new?" - Paul Lemberg

Being reasonable

My dictionary defines being reasonable as being rational. Rational, it says, means being reasonable. A vicious circle: I know I'm in trouble already. Going further, reasonable also means being governed by reason; which in turn means explanations, justifications, underlying facts, good judgment, normalcy, plus the capacity for logic and analytic thought. Further, being reasonable means being within the bounds of common sense, as in arriving home at a reasonable hour, and lastly it means not excessive or extreme.

I'm all for logic and analytic thought, but does following the dictum "be reasonable" sound like a good way to build a breakthrough business?

The very idea of "being reasonable," prescribes something restrictive. It exhorts us to remain "within the box," to do what sensible people would do: not to over commit ourselves, to be cautious, to avoid risks, to hold our trump cards.

What is the alternative?

To be unreasonable, of course. Being unreasonable, like it's more cautious cousin, suggests multiple meanings. Here are seven applications of being unreasonable.

1. Think beyond what is normal, proper, and appropriate.

Typically, one of the first things prospective clients say to me is, "But you're not from our industry. How can you understand our problems, much less provide solutions?" My response is always the same: "That's the last thing you need. You

already have plenty of people thinking similarly and use over-used ideas." What you need is thinking un-bounded by the traditional logic of your industry; ideas that can bring an un-reasoning perspective.

2. Eliminate the reasons why.

There are reasons why we have to do things a certain way. There are reasons why certain approaches to business are going to work and others will not. There are reasons why things should be the way they are and not some other way. Challenge the reasons why and ask people to set them aside. Ask, "Well, what if we did. What would happen then? Would that work? What would work better? What would really rock you?"

3. No more excuses.

When someone in your company doesn't produce the desired results--results to which they have committed, perhaps promised themselves and their departments--they usually have a reason why not. Looking at it this way, you always have one or the other: desired results or reasons why you don't. People act as if those reasons are almost as good as the results. How do I know this? Because they always say something like, "Well, it didn't work, but here's why not," or "We didn't get 'it' done, because..." Or, worse still, " We didn't even try because..."

Remove people's option to resort to reasons why not. Take away their option to resort to excuses. I think the entire working world would shift if there was no recourse to the "excuse" option--if all you could do was produce the desired result, or try another way to get the desired result, or try another way, and so on.

4. Set unreasonable expectations.

Ask people to go beyond what they think is reasonable or normal, Ask them to go beyond cautious commitments that hedge their bets, to make risky pronouncements that exhilarate them but might threaten the natural order of things.

Place big giant stakes in the ground--then figure out how to deliver. Figure out how to turn those unreasonable expectations into reality. Taking this approach will dramatically increase effectiveness and productivity--and ultimately cash flow, if it works nicely--in any business. Why should you settle--why should your customers settle--for what is reasonable and predictable? Why accept the norm, the average, the median? Apply unreasonable thinking. Set unreasonable expectations.

5. Make unreasonable requests.

This approach will aid every executive when working with vendors, contractors and employees. Remember "Just say no?" Try "Just ask for more." Keep asking for more, better, sooner. Up the ante. Ask people to perform beyond their best.

This is not a negotiating tactic. It is not "nibbling." It is asking people to perform beyond their own sense of what is reasonable. Sometimes people will fail to meet these unreasonable commitments--don't beat them up for it. Sometimes you will get stellar results you wouldn't have dreamed of previously.

6. Make unreasonable plans.

Does this sound like an oxymoron? Most companies plan to achieve reasonable results relative to past successes and failures, or even worse, relative to questionable industry lore. Instead of setting these kind of goals, begin with a more profound question: what would make a really big difference? What would cause a breakthrough for the company? What would dramatically increase shareholder value or profits? What would be "worth doing?" The answers may not be reasonable; they may instead take you down a path towards huge success.

7. Forecast unreasonable futures.

Most businesses forecast their results--revenues, growth rates and so on, based on prior year's results. They call this reasonable, and similarly they assume industry norms and consider them reasonable. But in the twenty-first century, driven by the incredible rate of change in all aspects of our: culture, industry, customer's businesses, our workforce, available technology--to think that anything dating from last year remains the same in this one--this isn't just not reasonable, it might be totally ridiculous.

Take into account all the factors--bring everything you know about the situation up-to-date, add to it all the future changes you predict--and use that to forecast unreasonable results and make unreasonable plans.

So what to do?

Should you give up all pretense of rationality and logic? Should you step outside the norms and ignore the accumulated wisdom of your industry? "That would be great if it works out," you say, "but if it doesn't, my job is on the line." Right? Well, yes, but...

Unreasonable thinking does not mean un-thinking. Unreasonable thinking is about

exploring. Pushing the envelope. Cross pollinating. Intuitive inventing. It may be that the line separating unreasonable ideas from ridiculous ideas lies where thinking is left behind. Or perhaps the line lies only in hindsight.

I think the fear of failing, the fear of jeopardizing your future, is the biggest obstacle to creating great results. Yet the only way to create big giant breakthrough results is to take the road less traveled--to create ideas and programs that are unreasonable--and going for it. If you fail people will--with perfect hindsight--call your idea ridiculous. But if you succeed... wow!